

LIFE'S DAILY STRUGGLES

2005

**The 31st Annual Lectureship
East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions**

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East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions
Knoxville, Tennessee

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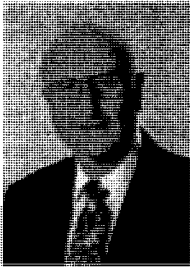
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East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions

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DEDICATION



During the years 1953-55, I preached two Sundays per month for the Antioch Church of Christ in Graves County, Kentucky. Brother Cotham's parents were members at Antioch, and it was during this time that I came to know him.

He was born of Christian parents in Murray, Kentucky, and began preaching in 1929. In full-time evangelistic work since 1972, he is now in his 75th year of preaching the gospel of Christ. He has done local work with churches in Oklahoma and Texas and has preached in all the states of America and all the inhabited continents of the world, including seventy nations. Brother Cotham graduated from Freed-Hardeman College and then earned his B.A. degree from Murray State College.

He has authored sixteen tracts, which he has freely distributed by the thousands through the world. He has engaged in a number of public debates and has authored three public debate books. He has distributed thousand of Bibles in all the countries where he has preached. Brother Cotham has spoken on our lectures for the past three years. Following the 2004 Lectures, he traveled to Australia where he preached the gospel for a month. He plans to do mission work as long as he lives.

Brother Cotham is now 92 years of age, but his mind is still clear and his voice strong. He has a gentle manner, a friendly attitude, and a love for the souls of men.

The 2005 Lectureship book, is therefore, gratefully dedicated to this great servant of God. We pray that God may grant him the health and strength to preach many more years.

James Meadows
Director

PREFACE

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet. 1:3-5).

These verses clearly reveal that God's word is able to meet our needs and help us in all situations we face in life. Believing this to be true, the Thirty-First Annual Lectureship of the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions will discuss *Life's Daily Struggles*.

Each speaker has been asked to deal with a specific struggle of life and show how the word of God helps one to deal with the struggle. We pray that each Christian will be strengthened and encouraged by this study.

The lectures will feature forty different speakers. Perry Cotham is 92 years of age and has been preaching over 70 years. He will give us insight into how he has dealt with "My Life's Struggles." Gary McDade will close the Sunday session with "The Bible: Trusting God's Promises."

Clarence DeLoach will discuss "Job and His Struggles" in three lessons. Tom Holland will present insight into how the early church dealt with problems. Marlin Connelly will bring practical lessons from the book of Revelation. Hugh Fulford, the first full-time preacher at Karns, will enlighten us regarding "Resentment and Bitterness." Robert Taylor, Jr., will discuss "Preachers Working With Elders," a greatly needed lesson.

There will be special classes for the ladies taught by Suzanne Brockenborough, Sara Jones, Irene Taylor, Teresa Hampton, Alinda Gadson, and Kathy Pollard. All of these ladies are well qualified to bring some valuable and needed lessons.

Special thanks to Amparo Henderson, who has spent many hours getting the book camera-ready. Nell Rich, our dedicated secretary, did a splendid job in coordinating some of the material. Charles Brown did his usually great job in proofreading all of the manuscripts. Our special thanks to Wallace Alexander (and his staff) at the Gospel Light Publishing Company for the excellent job in printing the book.

We sincerely hope these lessons on life's struggles will be helpful to all. If the truth presented herein helps you, then share it with others.

James Meadows, Director
31st Annual ETSPM Lectures

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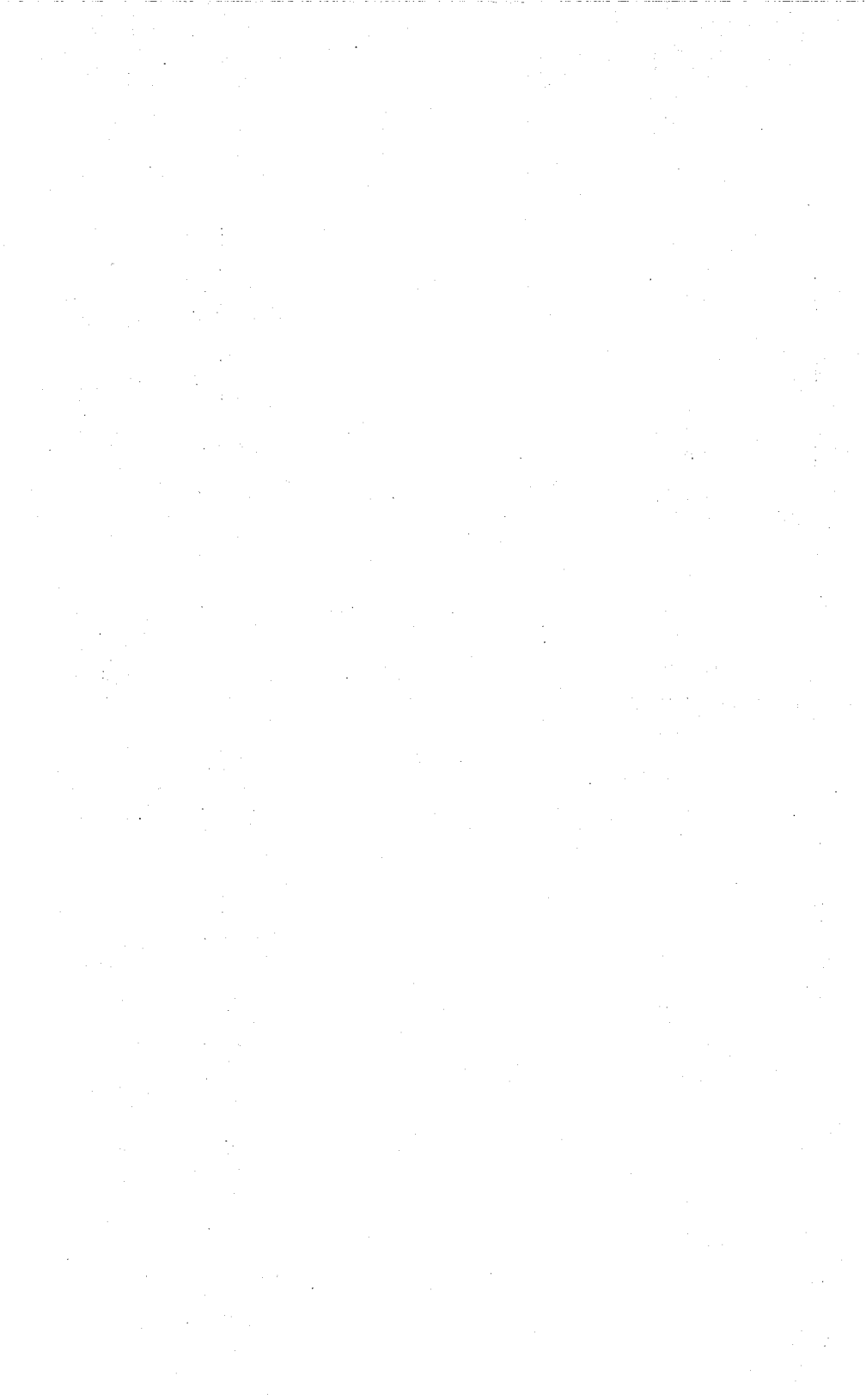
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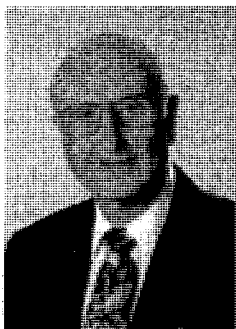
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SECTION I
GENERAL LESSONS



DEALING WITH MY LIFE'S STRUGGLES

PERRY B. COTHAM



Perry Cotham was born of Christian parents in Murray, KY. He began preaching in 1929. He graduated from Freed-Hardeman College and then Murray State College where he received his B. A. degree. Full-time local work with churches in OK and TX. Full-time world-wide evangelistic work since 1972, preaching in all states of America and in all the inhabited continents of the world, including over 70 nations. Authored sixteen tracts and three public debate books. He contributes many thousands of tracts and Bibles each year. He and his wife Teresa (deceased) have three children.

James, the Lord's brother in the flesh, in his short general epistle to Christians spoke at the beginning of his letter about one's attitude toward trials in his life:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing...Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love him (Jas. 1:2-4, 12, NASB).¹

James in saying this wanted to encourage those early Christians to whom he wrote, to endure patiently their trials. He said that trials will help develop mature Christian character. As Christians today, we need to recognize this. If we will patiently endure our trials and afflictions and remain faithful to the Lord, He will lead us finally to a crown of life in heaven.

The methodology planned in this study is to note some of our trials today, even as gospel preachers, and how we may be able to overcome them. There were many and various kinds of trials in the early days of the church, and there are trials at the present time for all of us, preachers included.

TRIALS TODAY

James said that our trials should be reckoned as an occasion of "all joy." The King James Version uses the word "temptation" in this verse, but the original word in the Greek often means "outward trial," as used in the New American Standard Bible. For example, God tested or tried Abraham: "God did tempt Abraham" (Gen. 22: 1, KJV; prove, ASV; "tested" NKJV and NASB), by asking him to offer his son Isaac in sacrifice. James realized that these to whom the letter was addressed, his beloved brethren, were experiencing great hardships and severe trials in their efforts to live the Christian life. So, he encouraged them to hold on to Christ and remain faithful, and in so doing that would produce patience, or steadfastness, in their lives.

Paul and Barnabus, on their first missionary journey, likewise said the same to those early Christians whom they had helped to teach and baptize by "encouraging them to continue in the faith" and saying, "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22, NASB). Then with these words they bade these new disciples farewell.

The Apostle Peter, in writing his first general epistle, said the same thing also to the followers of Christ regarding their trials:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you, but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief: or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel

ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God (1 Pet. 4:12-16, NASB).

What the severe trials were that awaited those Christians we do not know, but history does record that some terrible trials did come to them by the Roman rulers soon after the letter was written. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, said:

Blessed [or "happy," as some translate the word; See The Living Oracles, p.6] are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in Heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matt. 5:11-12, NASB.)²

And the Apostle John, in Revelation, wrote that Christ said to the church in Smyrna: "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life...He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death" (Rev. 2: 10-11, NASB). Though you may have to die as a martyr, go ahead and remain faithful; do not give up. Again, John wrote concerning those who die in Christ: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on! Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them" (Rev. 14: 13, NASB). No one can die "in the Lord" until he first comes "into Christ" by baptism (Rom 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27); and then he must remain faithful until death.

Historians have often recorded that many of the early martyrs went to the stake to be burned to death with a song of joy on their lips. They were willing to die for Christ, and they knew that the ultimate triumph of righteousness was sure. Of course, no Christian should ever be ashamed of his suffering. A Christian should never be ashamed of doing and teaching that which is right, whatever the consequences may be. This certainly was the spirit of many of the early Christian martyrs. Paul, while in prison at Rome under the wicked ruler Nero, realized that just any day he might be put to death; but he wrote to his beloved friends at Phillipi "that to depart and be with Christ...is very far better" (Phil. 1:23). So he could say, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (vs. 21, NASB). And at the end of his life's journey, his famous parting words were: "I have fought a good fight, I have

finished my course. I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day" (2 Tim. 4:7-8, KJV). The value of endurance is that it will mean heaven for us.

THE APOSTLES' ATTITUDE

Soon after the church was established in Jerusalem, Luke records that Peter and John and the other apostles were brought before the Jewish council for preaching the gospel. Before being dismissed they were "beaten" and "commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and then they were let go." But, "they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:40-42, KJV).

This was the first time scourging was experienced by the apostles. However, it did not cause anyone of them to stop preaching and teaching. J. W. McGarvey said in his fine commentary on Acts: "In this they gave an example to the ministry of all ages, which is well worthy of imitation."³ Although the right thing is often difficult to do it is clear that one must always do it. One must do right regardless of the cost.

The physical torture of beating with thirty-nine stripes left the apostles with lashes, bleeding, but they continued to obey God. All of the Lord's followers should bear up under any and all of life's difficulties that they may be called upon to bear. Certainly this is true of all faithful gospel preachers. This is the type of evangelism we need today, to continue preaching and teaching the gospel publicly and from house to house. These passages of Scripture we have just noticed have always been of great encouragement to me as a preacher over the years.

WHY SOME STOP PREACHING

Why do some preachers today stop preaching? The reasons are various. Some stop because their wives are not willing to endure the hardships and trials that often come as a result of their husbands' preaching faithfully the Word of God. A wife can be of great help, or she can be of a great hindrance to a preacher and his work. The woman that the preacher marries

most likely will be the person of the greatest influence to help or to hinder him in this great work of the Lord. Therefore, preachers need to think seriously of this in selecting a woman for a future life's companion. We know of instances where young preachers have been hindered from preaching because of their wives, and they have stopped preaching. This is sad indeed.

Too, some have become discouraged and have stopped preaching because of an inadequate salary, or not knowing how to properly manage their finances and to live within their income. As a rule, brethren have always been good in their support for good, faithful, hard working preachers, and preachers need to try to live within their income.

Others may have quit preaching because some unhappy member said some unkind and discouraging remarks about their preaching and/or conduct. The preacher should ignore this and keep on with his good work in living a good Christian life.

Others, too, have stopped their preaching because of the sinful conduct on the part of one or more of their children. Teenage pregnancy is one example; unfaithful attendance of the worship services is another one. Or the preacher himself may have become involved in sinful conduct or in teaching false doctrine. If this happens, then the elders should dismiss him, unless he truly repents. We have known of young preachers who have gotten involved in the charismatic movement and begun teaching miracles today, tongue speaking, and the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit in addition to the inspired Word of God. After talking with one young man about this, the elders did right in dismissing him as a preacher. One preacher, who had read my tracts and debate books, e-mailed me and said, "First Corinthians 12-14 is still in the Bible." I thought of replying, "so is 'kill a lamb and sprinkle the blood on the door post,' but I knew it would not do any good. So I did not answer his message. I could give other examples of preachers deciding not to preach any longer. We should always remember that preachers need to be well taught in the Scriptures, and older preachers are always willing to try to help good, sincere young preachers to better understand God's inspired Word. I know that they have helped me.

BETTER CONDITIONS TODAY

Financial conditions are very much better now than they were years ago when I began preaching. In my younger days of preaching, times were hard financially. I received very little pay for my work, usually some "pocket change." However, I kept on going and preaching, when invited, and took what the brethren gave me. I realize that they did the best they could. I have always wanted to preach.

Often, I would exchange meetings with some preacher friend of mine. I would travel on an old bus, full of cigarette and cigar smoke, or on a train, to his place. I would stay with him and his family, conduct the gospel meeting and then come back home. He, later in turn, would come to my place of preaching in local work and do the same. In that way, both congregations would have a gospel meeting. Usually, the time was about one and one-half weeks in length, and many souls would be saved and the church would be edified.

Almost all the churches were small in membership in those days, having come from the digressive movement that introduced instruments of music in the worship of the church. However, the church was growing rapidly in those days, and many faithful gospel preachers had to endure financial and physical hardships to continue to preach, to baptize the converts and build up the church.

Too, the places of worship were sometimes a rented building, or if a house of their own, it had no air-conditioning, electricity, or running water. The windows were raised if the weather was hot, and the people used hand fans, and listened in spite of the heat. Often a bucket of water drawn from a nearby well, or cistern, with a common dipper was placed at the corner of the pulpit stand, and children and others could come and get a drink. If babies became fretful, there was no nursery for mothers to take them to for relief. We went to a nearby stock pond, or to a small creek, to baptize the converts. Then, we would change our clothes in some house or barn close by. Garden vegetables, fried chicken, hickory-smoked ham, or bacon comprised most of the meals offered preachers, but we always enjoyed good Christian fellowship.

The people loved the Lord and the Word of God; they loved gospel preachers, and they attended the meetings and gave what little money they had. In the late 1920's and early 1930's, church membership grew rapidly. I was happy to have a part in preaching the gospel, and I helped to baptize hundreds of people.

My father bought me a Ford coupe that I often used in my travels as a young preacher. However, sometimes, since the roads were not paved or even had gravel on them, I would get stuck in the mud or slip into a ditch and had to get help to get pushed out and start going again. Were those hard times? No, I did not think so. I wanted to preach so I did what was necessary and what I have continued to do for the past seventy-five years. This is what I plan to do as long as I live and am able to go and preach. Many times in foreign countries, by drinking impure water or by eating improperly cooked food, I have become terribly sick. At times, I have thought in the last few years that I was going to die. I know what it means to have a severe heart attack. But the Lord has blessed me richly, and I intend to keep on preaching the Word as long as I am physically able to do it. Too, I want to encourage others to preach; the need is great for more gospel preachers today. Still, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few" (Matt. 9:32; cf. John 4:35, KJV).

SOME TRIALS

I have had my trials, and I have been in dangerous situations. Once I was in India and I got sick from drinking impure water. While preaching, I fainted and fell backwards. Some brethren immediately caught me, or my head would have hit the concrete steps, probably cracked my skull and I could have died. Once, I was flying over the Pacific Ocean, and one of the engines on the plane went out. The pilots turned the big plane around and went back to Los Angeles to land. After some repair work, all the passengers boarded the plane again, and we finally arrived in Hawaii. During the Gulf War, the plane I was on stopped by the Caspian Sea to refuel and take on more passengers. As we were ready to leave, word came to the pilots to remove the baggage and examine the plane. All passengers had to get off the plane again. After a few hours, we again boarded and flew into India. A couple of bags were not put back on the plane. I have often wondered what would have happened over the sea if the plane

had not been searched. Perhaps I would not be here today speaking to you. At times, I know that I have been in great danger, but the Lord has been with me, and I have survived.

"I HAVE LEARNED"

In his old age, being a prisoner in Rome, Paul said to his beloved brethren at Philippi:

I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me (Phil. 4:11-13, NASB).

According to tradition, a few years later, 68 A. D., Paul was beheaded in Rome by the Emperor Nero, who later committed suicide that same year. The burning of Rome took place in 64 A. D. Nathan Hale (1755-1776), who was executed by the British said: "I regret that I have but one life to give to my country." Paul, on his death block, could also have said: "I regret that I have but one life to give to my Lord and Savior for the preaching of the gospel." In closing, I believe the following two quotes from Charles Spurgeon and Reinhold Neibuhr summarize the attitude that preachers and any Christian should have regarding trials and worries.

Cry for grace from God to be able to see God's hand in every trial, and then for grace...to submit at once to it. Not only to submit, but to acquiesce, and to rejoice in it... I think there is generally an end to troubles when we get to that.⁴

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things that cannot be changed. Grant me the courage to change the things that ought to be changed. Grant me the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other. Amen.⁵

ENDNOTES

1. Some Scripture citations (as noted) are from the New American Standard Bible, printed by the Lockman Foundation, 1973, La Habra, CA. Other quotations are from the King James Version (unless noted).

2. The Living Oracles was translated from the Greek by three scholars: George Campbell, James MacKnight and Philip Doddridge. Alexander Campbell liked the translation so well that he had it printed with several added pages of comments as an appendix. (Seventh edition, Cincinnati, Franklin and Rice, 1878); the book has also been reprinted and is still available for sale from the Gospel Advocate Company, Nashville, TN.

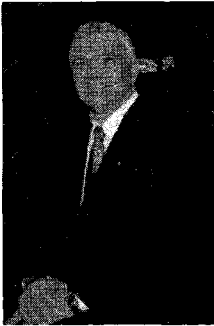
3. McGarvey, 1. W., Original Commentary on Acts. Nashville, TN., Gospel Advocate Company, reprint, eighth edition, 1983, p. 74.

4. Spurgeon, Charles. Power in Praise. Merlin Carothers, Plainfield, NJ. Logos International, 1971, God's Treasury of Virtues. Honor Books, Inc., Tulsa, OK., p. 419.

5. Niebuhr, Reinhold, 20 Centuries of Great Preaching. Volume X, p. 348-349, Word Publishers, Waco, TX, 1971.

GOD'S HELP IN OUR STRUGGLES

SAM BARTRUG



Sam Bartrug was born and raised in Hundred, WV. He obeyed the gospel on May 20, 1963. He preached his first sermon at his home congregation about one year later and has been involved in full-time pulpit work since the fall of 1973. He has done located work in WV, OH, and VA and is in his fifth year as the pulpit minister for the church in Woodsfield, OH. He has held over 200 Gospel Meetings and spoken on a variety of lectureships. Sam has been married to the former Martha Jeanne Yost of Racine, OH. They are the parents of three children and two grandsons. Sam is a graduate of Hundred High School and holds an Associates Degree in Liberal Arts and a Bachelors Degree in Bible from OVC.

INTRODUCTION

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling (Psalm 46:1-3).¹

We all face troubles and struggles in life. In one of his conversations with Job, Eliphaz observes: "Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). While we would rightly dismiss much of what Eliphaz had to say to Job (Job 42:7-8); it is hard to argue with this particular observation.

There is no one who can rightfully expect to live a life void of struggle. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, averred:

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall (Matt. 7:24-27).

Despite the obvious differences between the two hearers in Jesus' illustration, there is one significant similarity in that both obeyed the words of Jesus and the oneS who disregarded those same words suffered rains, winds and floods that beat upon their respective houses. Evil people sometimes face struggles in their lives, but so do good people! In fact, all people will confront struggles in their lives from time to time. It is the firm belief of this writer that although all people, good and bad, will deal with struggles in life; those who belong to God have a resource available to them in the midst of such struggles that others may lack.

It will be the goal of this lesson to answer three questions regarding God's help in our struggles: (1) Do we who are Christians face the struggles of life alone?; (2) Will God help us when we are struggling?; (3) How does God provide help when His children struggle?

DO WE WHO ARE CHRISTIANS STRUGGLE ALONE?

One of the saddest verses in the entire Bible is as follows: "For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter; and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel" (2 Kings 14:26). What a terrible situation to find oneself facing. What can be worse than facing trials and struggles only to have no one to stand by us or to help us cope with them?

Perhaps all of us have felt, at times in our lives, like Israel as described in the above passage. Struggling, suffering, striving

to survive hardship or misfortune in life we may be wondering if anyone cares. David onetime lamented, "Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul" (Psalm 142:4). The Psalm from which this verse is taken is a companion to Psalm 57. The latter Psalm portrays David, while fleeing from Saul and entering into a cave for safety, as being somewhat optimistic and bold in his assurance of deliverance. The former seems to depict a much more sullen and uncertain David in that same cave. Kidner writes concerning these two Psalms:

The title in the text makes this a companion piece to Psalm 57 by the note, 'when he was in the cave'; and together the two psalms give us some idea of the fluctuating state of David's emotions in the ordeal. Psalm 57 is bold and animated, almost enjoying the situation for the certainty of its triumphant outcome. In the present Psalm (i.e. Psalm 142) the strain of being hated and hunted is almost too much, and faith is at full stretch...verse 4 reveals the friendless state of David, whom no one cares to know-or so he feels..."²

Even Jesus was not totally immune to questions regarding a helper when it came to dealing with struggles. On the cross He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46).

Is it possible that we are doomed to deal with the struggles of life all by ourselves? Do we, as children of God, have any reason to expect help when troubled times arrive? One only has to look a little closer at the three occasions mentioned in the previous paragraph to see that God was not far from Israel, David or Jesus in the midst of their struggles. 2 Kings 14:27 informs us that God raised up Jeroboam II as a deliverer of Israel when they seemed to have no helper. Psalm 142:5-7 portrays David's eventual realization that someone did indeed care for his soul after all and that he would allow God to be his refuge. Luke 23:46 finds Jesus seeing through the loneliness brought on by God's apparent absence and thus being able to commit His soul into the Father's hands. As alone as each of these seemed to be at one point in their struggles, it becomes obvious that they were neither

alone nor without a helper because God was not far from any of them!

WILL GOD HELP US WHEN WE ARE STRUGGLING?

Just as surely as God's help was available and near to Israel, David, and Jesus, we can expect with confidence that His help will be near to us as well. Psalm 28:6-7 confidently proclaims, "Blessed be the Lord, because He has heard the voice of my supplications! The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him."

The author of Hebrews reaffirms to his Christian audience the assurance God had given to Joshua when he reminds them that God will never "leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). Paul recounted his ability to survive the struggles that followed his conversion when in Acts 26:22 he affirmed that it was due to "help from God." Peter was so confident of God's abiding help for us in times of struggle that he encourages his Christian audience to cast their cares upon God for, "He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Since it is obvious that God's faithful people never had to deal with their struggles all by themselves but could be confident of God's help in getting through them, we who serve God today can cling to the same confidence and assurance. We can look forward to the same comfort Paul felt when he wrote to Timothy, "At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me..." (2 Tim. 4:16-17).

HOW DOES GOD PROVIDE HELP WHEN HIS PEOPLE STRUGGLE?

In the final section of this lesson, I would like to suggest some ways in which God has seen fit to supply help for His people in times of struggle. While this discussion will not be all-inclusive, hopefully it will offer enough insight to provide a measure of confidence to each reader when he or she feels the need for God's help most intensely.

God, at times, has helped His people through miraculous means. Miracles, as defined by Vine, are: "works of a supernatural origin and character, such as could not be produced by natural agents and means."³ The Bible contains numerous examples of this and we will notice one from each age of God's dealing with mankind. In the Patriarchal Age, God opened the waters of the Red Sea so that the beleaguered and frightened people of Israel might be able to escape the oncoming army of Egypt. He then caused the waters to close in on the pursuing army and destroy it (Ex. 14). In the Mosaic Age, God caused the sun to stand still at Joshua's request for nearly an entire day to facilitate a victory for Israel's army over a coalition of kings from Southern Canaan (Josh. 10:12-14). In the Christian Age, God sent an angel to secure the release of Peter who had been imprisoned following the murder of the apostle James by Herod Agrippa 1. Peter's release involved the miraculous loosing of chains that bound him to two soldiers and allowed him to pass through a series of guard posts undetected and through an iron gate that opened on its own to allow him passage (Acts 12:5-17). It must be noted, however, that Paul wrote of miraculous activities coming to an end (1 Cor. 13:8-10) and that the only known means by which the ability to perform miracles (i.e. the laying on of the apostles' hands – Acts 8:14-19) could be transferred to humanity vanished with the death of the last apostle.

Does this mean that God can no longer help His people in the midst of their struggles? The answer to this is an emphatic "NO!" If the only way God had ever helped His people was through miraculous means, then we might have reason for concern, but God was not limited to the miraculous when it came to helping His people. In fact, God utilized what we often call providence far more frequently and consistently than He did the miraculous.

The concept of providence is summarized quite well by McGarvey as he writes in a sermon he delivered on the story of Joseph:

So then, this long story is told as an illustration of the providence of God, by which He can bring about His purposes without the intervention of miraculous power except here and there; for in all this long chain of causes God touched the links

only twice, directly: once, when He gave power to Joseph to interpret the dreams of the butler and the baker, and once again when He gave him power to interpret the dream of Pharaoh. Just those two instances in which the finger of God touched the chain; all the rest were the most natural things in the world, and they brought about God's design just as effectively as though He had wrought one great miracle to translate Jacob and his children through the air, and plant them on the soil of Egypt.⁴

While God obviously used miraculous means to facilitate the fall of Jericho, the means by which He allowed Israel to conquer Ai was through sound military tactics (Joshua 6-8). God was no less involved in the fall of Ai than He was in the fall of Jericho, and His use of providential means at Ai was every bit as effective as His use of the miraculous was at Jericho. One can see the providence of God at work in the story of Esther, and this is even suggested by Mordecai (Esther 4:13-14) in his plea for Esther's help in saving the Jews in exile. God used the vile persecution that Saul of Tarsus led against the church to force the spread of the gospel beyond the walls of Jerusalem (Acts 8). It is of great comfort that Paul promises those who "love God and are called according to His purpose" that God will make all things that happened to them work together for good (Rom. 8:28). Although we no longer live in an age of miracles, God will be no less present in our lives and no less helpful in our struggles; because He is constantly weaving His will through natural events, laws and decisions made. McGarvey continues his discussion of providence as follows:

The man who studies the story of Joseph and does not see this in it, has failed to see one of its great purposes. And what is true in bringing about this result in the family of Joseph, may be true - I venture to say, it is true - in regard to every family of any importance in this world; and it extends down to the modes by which God overrules our own acts, both good and bad, and those of our friends, and brings us out at the end of our lives shaped and molded as he desires we shall be.⁵

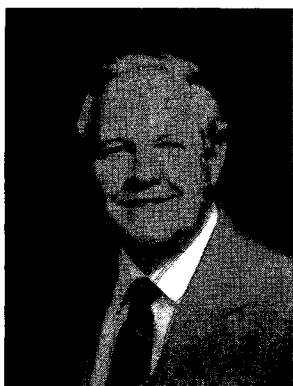
Three of the means by which God may accomplish His providential help in our times of struggles are: 1) the direction, strength and wisdom we can gain through the reading and study of His Word. In David's grand tribute to the Word of God in Psalm 119, he recognizes the ability of the Word to assist him in times of struggle (119:25, 28, 50, 92, 105, 143, 161, and 165). Many of us have experienced firsthand the ability of a few moments spent with an open Bible to make a load seem lighter, or a problem seem less intimidating; 2) the encouragement and fellowship of brethren. There is no other epistle in the New Testament so focused on the struggles of brethren than that of Hebrews. Consistently, the author of that epistle encourages its readers to draw strength from one another (Heb. 3:13; 6:11-12; 10:24-25; 12:12; and 13:1-3). Among any fellowship of believers is the wisdom of older Christians, the knowledge of life-long Bible students, the comfort and companionship of compassionate brethren, the example of faithful men and women of God, and a host of other qualities that are at our beck and call when the struggles of life are dragging us down; 3) the blessing of prayer. It would be difficult to find any Christian blessing more promoted and lauded in the New Testament than that of prayer. It is able to provide some of the essential factors in being able to battle through difficulties and come out spiritually stronger. Although there are many passages that encourage us to pray, perhaps the quintessential passage is Philippians 4:6-7 where Paul writes: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." We do not have to worry that God will grow tired of our coming to Him in prayer (James 1:5), nor do we need to be timid about coming into His presence through prayer (Heb. 4:14-16). In fact, Paul encourages us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

CONCLUSION

It is unrealistic to think that we will live our lives free from struggle. It is comforting to believe with confidence that we belong to a God who will be there to help us in the midst of whatever struggles we might encounter. He has always been there for His people, sometimes miraculously; and at other times working behind the scenes providentially caring for and delivering them.

LESSON 1: TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR STRUGGLES

CLARENCE DELOACH



Clarence DeLoach was born in Dickson County, TN, in 1936. He and Eddie (Lowe) are the parents of four and grandparents of seven. Fifty years of preaching were celebrated in Aug. '01. He graduated from FHC and DLC and has conducted over 400 gospel meetings. He has 33 years of radio preaching and 15 years of TV preaching. He has conducted campaigns in South America and Europe, has authored three books and produced two video series. He retired as pulpit minister for Walnut Street church in Dickson and serves on the Advisory Boards of FHU and the American Heart Association. He is Lieutenant Governor of the Kiwanis Clubs in Middle TN.

INTRODUCTION

James said, "You have heard of the patience of Job" (James 5:11). It is true that many have **heard** of Job's problems and endurance, but not many have really studied the book in detail. Perhaps very few have understood what God was seeking in allowing Job to suffer. It is a challenging study. Many who have experienced the furnace of suffering have found the message of the book of Job to take on special meaning.

When one prepares to study any Old Testament book, he should ask three questions; (1) what did it mean then? i.e., put it in its historical context; (2) what does it mean now? i.e., make the transition from yesterday to today; and (3) what does it mean personally? i.e., how does it relate to me? What can I learn?

The book of Job has been praised through the years. It has been one of our favorite Bible stories even from youth.

He will be with us as well, and has equipped us with the guidance and comfort of the Scriptures, the fellowship and encouragement of a church family, and the outlet of prayer. God is truly "my helper; I will not fear: What can man do to me" (Hebrews 13:6).

ENDNOTES

1. All quotes are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.
2. Kidner, Derek, Psalms 73-150 A Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), pp. 472-473.
3. Vine, W.E., An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), p. 747.
4. McGarvey, J.W., McGarvey's Sermons (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 221-222.
5. Ibid, p.222.

Perhaps one reason for its popularity is the fact that man generally can identify with Job's confusion, anger and struggles. We all can relate to his "whys," because of the trials we experience as Christians.

The book of Job has been praised for its literary excellence. It belongs to that section of Old Testament writings designated as "wisdom literature." It demonstrates the truth that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10). It is a book about faith in God, and one man's trust in God, though he did not understand what was happening. It demonstrates the truth that when man cannot understand the purposes of God, he can rely on the promises of God.

Renowned men of literature have praised the book of Job. Victor Hugo said, "Tomorrow, if all literature was to be destroyed and it was left for me to retain one work only, I should save Job." Alfred Tennyson, who at 84 wrote "Crossing the Bar," said of Job, "It is the greatest poem, whether of ancient or modern literature." Daniel Webster wrote, "taken as a mere work of literary genius, it is one of the most wonderful productions of any age or of any language."

To the believer it has been a source of comfort, support and blessing in our struggles. The prophet Ezekiel referred to Job, along with Noah and Daniel as three men who were righteous and were delivered by God because of it (Ezek. 14:14-20). Ezekiel's illustration was to encourage Judah to faithfulness, "because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live" (Ezek. 18:22). James encouraged suffering saints to endure using the perseverance of Job, and "the end intended by the Lord" (James 5:11).

Two things I hope we can accomplish in these studies of Job. First, let us learn how to cope with our own struggles. No one is exempt from trials. The best Christian man or woman will experience them. The storms of life will come to all. We are all the subjects of temptations (1 Cor. 10:13; James 1:13-15). Job exclaimed in 14:1, "Man who is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble" There are problems that are **physical**—health, jobs, finances, etc. There are troubles that are **emotional**—coping with feelings of anger, bitterness, etc. Problems relate to **domestic relationships**—spouses, children, parents and family.

Some struggles are **relational**—people, neighbors, bosses, etc. Others are **spiritual**—spiritual growth, maturity, prayer, etc.

Christians can, through Christ and his Word, avoid certain kinds of problems. The Christian youth, who is committed to Christ, can avoid problems associated with immorality. Staying away from drugs, alcohol and promiscuity, thus “avoiding the appearance of evil” will safe guard you from many storms. God promises Israel that if they followed his Word, he would not bring upon them the diseases that plagued Egypt.

There is a correlation between doing right and feeling good. On the other hand, there are some problems one may encounter simply because he is a Christian (2 Tim. 3:12).

Second, let us learn how to minister to others who are hurting. Everywhere you look, there are hurting people. They need your help and encouragement. Unfortunately, Job’s closest friends turned out to be “miserable comforters,” physicians with no cure. Paul called God, “the Father of all mercies and God of all comfort” who comforts us in all our tribulation, that **we may be able** to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Cor. 1:3,4). Receiving God’s grace should make us gracious, receiving mercy makes us merciful, and having been comforted, our consolation should abound in Christ (2 Cor. 1:5). Showing mercy is a spiritual gift (Rom. 12:8).

Unfortunately, many have seen the Bible only as a book that teaches us how to be saved. It is that all right, but it is more—it teaches the saved how to live. How to overcome our problems! How to live in victory, not defeat! God does not want us to live as victims, but as victors! The Psalmist wrote, “I will walk at liberty, for I seek your precepts” (Psa. 119:45).

THEME

We are calling our theme in these studies, “Trusting God With Our Struggles.” Job 13:15 sets the tone for our studies, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” We will look each day at the following:

- Trusting God When Submerged in Suffering
- Trusting God When Forsaken by Friends

- Trusting God When Dismayed by Darkness

TRUSTING GOD WHEN SUBMERGED IN SUFFERING

We all know that God is necessary. If God were to withhold the air we breathe, the food we eat, and other necessary things we would not exist very long. But, the greatest question is—"Is God enough?" We all know that God blesses, but God also allows trouble. Can God be trusted with your trouble?

The book of Job opens with a description of the patriarch of Uz, named Job, who was in character "blameless and upright." Religiously, he "feared God." Morally, he shunned evil. Domestically, he was blessed with a wife, three daughters and seven sons. In terms of possessions, he was the greatest of all the people of the East. He directed his family in worship and sanctified them with the proper offerings to God. Spiritually, financially, and domestically Job seemed to have it all!

SATAN ENTERS THE SCENE

Satan is called "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10). The word means "adversary"—one who opposes. The writer allows us a visit to a place and time "when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also." Because the stage is set, we can know two things; (1) who caused the destruction, and (2) why he was allowed to do it. Now, remember Job had not read the book of Job. He was in the dark as to what was happening, but we can know why it happened because God set the stage for us. Incidentally, we are blessed because in the Word of God, we have case history after case history of Satan's devices. When we are ignorant of his devices, he will take advantage of us (2 Cor. 2:11). We can know what Satan is up to—we have a Bible that tells us.

Satan is active "going to and fro in the earth" (2:2). Peter said, "He walketh about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). When God brought up the subject of Job, my servant—Satan did what is his nature to do—to blame, to accuse, to slander.

Satan accuses anyone who serves God with an ulterior motive. He challenged God and his servant. He was suspicious of

Job and his motives. He made the charge—he serves you because you have been so good to him. You have bribed him! You have built a hedge about him, you have blessed the work of his hands and his substance has increased.

Then Satan hurled this challenge into the face of God, “Put forth your hand and touch all he has, and he will curse you to your face” (2:5). Basically, Satan’s charge was—God, Job does not really love you—he does not really care for YOU—he is not really trusting you—you have bought him off! He does not know what trouble is—you have built a wall around him! Let me give him some real trouble, let me hurt him, put him in darkness with real misery and pain and you will see how much he really loves you—he will spit in your face!

God permitted it with one exception—only do not lay a hand on his person (v.12). Let us learn from this that (1) God is sovereign in all things. Satan is subject to the control of God. We must remember in our struggles that God is on the throne, and all things are subject to him. (2) Let us also learn that God found no fault in his servant, but Satan did. Satan is suspicious and envious of all of God’s faithful. Satan continues to **oppose** and accuse the faithful (Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10). Satan’s charge against Job, was a slander to God. It said in essence—You have to pay people to honor you. The whole drama is a court scene with God’s verdict “not guilty,” but Satan’s was “guilty.” (3) We learn, too, that when God permits Satan to touch his people, it is for our good and His glory. We may never know in this life why certain things happen, but let us learn that when we cannot fathom the purposes of God, we can trust the promises of God. (Rom. 8:28).

WHEN TROUBLE CAME

And did it come! When it rained, it poured! In the midst of Job’s perplexity, he said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15). The message of Job is, God is not only necessary, but God is enough. You can love and trust him in the midst of your troubles.

JOB’S LOSSES

Job suffered incredible loss. Chapter 1:13-17 lists them.

First, he lost his **finances**. The richest man of the East suddenly lost his flocks, herds. It came like a bolt of lightning—his oxen are taken by raiders who destroyed his servants, then came the news that his sheep were consumed by fire, and the servants who kept them were also burned. Then he was informed that the Chaldeans had taken away his camels and killed the servants who watched them. That is one thing—mere material possessions! But, imagine how he felt when immediately told that his sons and daughters were destroyed in a storm.

Second, he lost **family**. Not one of them, but all of them! In his agony, he fell to the ground and worshipped. The text says he blessed the name of God, and did not blame God. First, his fortune, then his family!

Third, he lost his **fitness**. Satan continued his tirade against Job. “Stretch out your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh and he will surely curse you to your face” (2:5). So, poor Job is covered from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet with ulcers and painful boils. His body is consumed with infection. His only ease is on a heap of ashes with a broken piece of pottery scrapping away the substance that oozed from his sores. In the midst of his misery, Job cursed the day of his birth, and the time of his conception (3:1-2). He raised the question that mankind has asked from the beginning—why? Why was I born? Why was I conceived? Why is light given to him who is in misery? Why is light given to him whose way is hidden? In Job’s condition he longed for darkness. We often ask why? And it is all right to ask why as long as we do not get the idea that God owes us an answer. Even Jesus asked, “Why have You forsaken me” (Matt. 27:46). Remember, when we cannot understand God’s purposes, rely on his promises. We live on promises, not explanations! Why is God’s question, **how**, i.e., how will I react is my question.

Job’s physical affliction was horrific. We are told the symptoms—(1) severe itching (2:8); (2) insomnia (3:4); running sores and scabs (2:5); nightmares (3:13,14); bad breath (19:17); chills and fever (21:6); diarrhea (30:27); blackened skin (30:30). His physical appearance was so distorted that even his friends did not recognize him (2:12). How sad! The city’s leading citizen fled society, finding a place where the garbage was deposited and burned, where the city’s rejects lived, where the scavenger

dogs fought over anything found to eat. What a change in environment! From joy, laughter, worship, plenty, and ease to sudden misery, pain and a sense of worthlessness.

Fourth, Job lost **face**. His friends came—three of them, and sat seven days without saying a word. Eliphaz, Zophar and Bildad came to console, but ended up adding to his pain. What began in simple discussion, progressed to disputation and angered debate. Job called them “miserable comforters.” Eliphaz accused him of some presumptuous sin. “Who ever perished being innocent?” (4:7) He insinuated—you are in trouble because you have sown trouble (4:8). Eliphaz had a rigid theology that had no room for the grace of God. Bildad was a legalist. He said, “God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will He help evildoers” (8:20). Zophar was dogmatic and unfeeling and told Job that God was giving him far less than what he deserved for his sins (11:6).

So, Job loses face—reputation. He is accused of secret sin. What if you had done nothing wrong, but everybody thought you had! You would lose reputation—that is tough! We have televangelists whose message to the uninformed is—if you are right with God you are going to be healthy, and wealthy—cash, comfort, and Cadillac’s, and by the way, send me money. Eliphaz’s message is still being preached—the only reason you suffer is because you have done wrong—just get right with God and you will have all you want. Just one thing is wrong with that philosophy—it is not so!

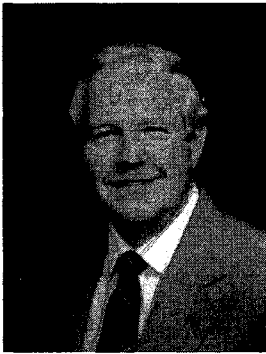
Here is Job! He has lost it all! Submerged in suffering, bankrupt, his children dead, his body totally infected, and his friends wondering what he had done wrong. Yet, in the midst of it he praised and glorified God. Can you trust God when you are submerged in suffering? If you can, you can shut the Devil’s slanderous mouth! Faith is not the way to get out of suffering; it is the way to endure suffering. Hebrews 11:32 states, “By faith some endured, by faith others escaped, and by faith some died.” Faith is not receiving from God what we want, faith is accepting from God what He gives.

CONCLUSION

We are encouraged by Job to serve God in the rain as well as in the sunshine. We learn that triumph can emerge from tragedy (2 Cor. 2:14). Job won over suffering through preparation. He had nourished his faith before it was tested. The time to prepare for the storms of life is before they come. Your house is no stronger than its foundation (1 Cor. 3:11). Job triumphed in suffering because he had captured a vision of the Almighty. The God we serve is "great and awesome" (Neh. 4:14). Job trusted God, and his suffering refined his character and made it stronger, "like gold" (Job 23:10). Let Job's suffering inspire us to live in hope (Job 14:14).

LESSON 2: TRUSTING GOD WHEN FORSAKEN BY FRIENDS

CLARENCE DELOACH



Clarence DeLoach was born in Dickson County, TN, in 1936. He and Eddie (Lowe) are the parents of four and grandparents of seven. Fifty years of preaching were celebrated in Aug. '01. He graduated from FHC and DLC and has conducted over 400 gospel meetings. He has 33 years of radio preaching and 15 years of TV preaching. He has conducted campaigns in South America and Europe, has authored three books and produced two video series. He retired as pulpit minister for Walnut Street church in Dickson and serves on the Advisory Boards of FHU and the American Heart Association. He is Lieutenant Governor of the Kiwanis Clubs in Middle TN.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of human suffering has plagued man since the fall. Many have chosen to cope with suffering through various human philosophies that have no basis in faith in the supernatural. Some view suffering from a purely **mechanical** view. Their view of fatalistic determinism can be expressed "What is to be, will be." Life is viewed as empty and meaningless. Ernest Hemingway expressed such a view when he said, "Life is just a dirty trick, a short journey from nothingness to nothingness. There is no remedy for anything in life. Man's destiny in the universe is like a colony of ants on a burning log."

The evolutionist would view suffering as something from which mortals may grow and learn, but only as a link in the evolutionary chain to man's ultimate development.

The Marxist views suffering through economic spectacles as the consequence of prejudice and oppression in society by

class division. In his view a classless society would bring the ultimate utopia and thus destroy suffering.

The Freudian concept views suffering as frustration caused by sexual oppression and manipulation. Suffering results, according to this view, by disabling obsessions. Some see suffering as a result of environment; change the environment and suffering can be erased.

Frederich Nietzsche, the German philosopher, weaved together various threads of these human philosophies and suggested how man should cope with suffering. His thinking influenced the likes of Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini, called by some the "three devils of the 20th Century." Perhaps no three in history forced more suffering upon mankind than these.

The fact is—human philosophy only brings futility and hopelessness when dealing with the problem of human suffering. Voltaire expressed it well when he said, "I am a puny part of a great whole—the whole world in every member groans—all born for torment and mutual death. Man is a stranger to his own research. He knows not whence he comes, nor where he goes. Tormented atoms in a bed of mud, devoured by death, a mockery of fate."

The book of Job, to the contrary, enables us to see suffering through the spectacles of faith. It begins with a declaration of faith in the Almighty, and ends with the same. Can you trust God with your struggles? Job did! "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." While Job lamented, was angered, frustrated—he trusted God. Some of his words, in the midst of pain and agony in heart, were stout against God. He said God was his adversary who had turned him over to ruffians, who had shaken him to pieces and shattered him. God permits his children to be angry with Him when in the deepest agony of their souls they cannot understand what is happening. Job could not find any explanation to his predicament, but in his distress he chose to trust God.

WHY SUFFERING?

I believe that God, in His infinite wisdom and providence, had several purposes in mind when He inspired the writing of the book of Job.

1. **It was written to prove that a man will serve God for nothing.** The Devil taught then and now that the only reason one would serve God is for what he can get out of it. Satan believes that man is self-serving and has an ulterior motive. He cannot conceive of anyone loving God and serving because of who God is. But Job proved the Devil wrong! Job became God's trophy! What an encouragement to us!
2. **It was written to refute the commonly held view that all suffering is retribution for sin.** It was necessary for God to disprove a false doctrine, so commonly held, that even Job believed it.
3. **It was written to show that simplistic answers do not exist for our questions, but we can still trust God.** People have asked "Why?" on so many occasions. When the events of 9-11 occurred, **why** was the most often asked question. Many asked, "Where was God?" Job shows us that while we do not understand the perplexities of life, we can still trust God.
4. **It was written to make us aware that God sees and God cares.** God was there, though Job thought he was hidden.
5. **It was written to provide light (though not a pat answer) to the problem of human suffering.** It does not give a capsule answer as to why the righteous suffer. Job's three friends, and later Elihu, gave all the answers that human wisdom could muster, but God said they were wrong. The book shows us that there are many things more important than "why."

God is in control—He is sovereign! He knows the path we take, and the road we are on! We can trust Him! Indeed, all things work together for good to those who love God (Rom. 8:28). As W. T. Hamilton observed, "If we know the who, we can stand the what, no matter why."

JOB'S FRIENDS

As Job sat upon an ash heap, in misery, pain, frustration and perplexed by what had happened, his friends came to see him. They sat in silence for seven days. They met and agreed to go and sympathize and comfort him. When they saw him they could hardly recognize him. So grotesque was Job's appearance that he sought escape from society and went outside the city and sat on a mound of ashes. This was the place where the city's garbage was dumped and burned. It was the place where society's rejects lived, and where dogs fought over something to eat. And now the city's leading citizen lived there in pain, shame, and poverty.

Job's disease is not named, but it is described. His friends did not recognize him because his person had been so distorted by his physical ailments. Satan, having destroyed his material possessions, and his children, wanted more. He asked for permission to bodily afflict Job, and the request was given with one stipulation—his life was to be spared. His disease was described by boils (2:7), itching (2:8), physical distortion (2:12), difficulty in eating (3:24), mental depression (3:25), worms and running sores (7:5), shortness of breath (9:18), darkness of eyes (16:16), bad breath (19:17), loss of weight (19:20), corroding bones (30:17), and blackened skin and fever (30:30). While we do not know exactly how long these conditions prevailed, we get the impression from the text that it drew on for some months (7:3).

The very heart of the book of Job presents the speeches of Eliphaz, Zophar and Bildad with Elihu's appearance in Chapter 32. The text indicates that the three were older than Job (32:6; 15:10). Gathered from their speeches, we could characterize Eliphaz as the traditionalist who saw God as an inflexible lawgiver. He asked, "Who ever perished, being innocent?" (4:7). His was a rigid theologian with no room for grace. Bildad was a legalist, whose theology was summed up in the text, "Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will He help the evildoers" (8:20). He was sure that Job's children died as a result of their sins (8:4). He had no compassion for the hurting. Zophar was the dogmatist. "Know this" was his unfeeling approach (11:6; 20:4). His text was, "Do you not know this of old, since man was

placed on earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment" (20:4,5).

What can be said of Job's friends? Some positive things: (1) They came to him from a distance; (2) Their intentions were good—they came to mourn with him and comfort him; (3) They wept when they saw him and tore their garments and sprinkled their heads with ashes; (4) They sat with him on the ground for seven days; (5) They were silent for seven days and deeply grieved.

What negative things can be said? Why did Job wish that they had remained silent? Why did they prove to be of no help to him (6:21)? Why did Job describe them as "forgers of lies," "physicians of no value" and, "deceitful defenders of God" (13:4, 12)?

1. They did not encourage him.
2. They showed no sympathy. Job longed for a sympathetic ear, but they called him a wind bag (8:2).
3. Job appealed for understanding. They critiqued and criticized. They argued with his words, but did not empathize with the pain in his heart.
4. His friends came back with words—hurting, piercing like arrows. They had verbosity without comfort; logic without love. They answered the words from Job's lips, but not the pain in his heart (Eph. 4:15).
5. Their view of God was too narrow. Their theology was not vibrant, but rigid. Their view of God was so small it could be explained and understood. One has said, "There's nothing you can't prove if your outlook is only sufficiently limited." Eliphaz, Zophar and Bildad have their followers in people who feel compelled to explain everything with a pat answer and a fixed formula for every problem.

The book contains three rounds of speeches from Job's friends with Job's reply. With some variation, his friends agree on one matter, i.e., Job had sinned exceedingly and he needed to acknowledge and confess it to God, and God would remove the suffering.

At last, Elihu entered the discussion angered because Job justified himself rather than God (32:2). He was also angered that his friends had not refuted Job, yet condemned him (32:2). His approach differed from the three friends who argued that Job suffered because of presumptuous sin. Elihu contended that his sin resulted from his suffering, in his attitude, and pride in questioning the ways of God.

CAN YOU TRUST GOD WHEN FORSAKEN BY FRIENDS

Henry Ford once said, "My best friend is the one who brings out the best in me." Job's friends antagonized and brought out the worst in him. It is one thing to suffer, it is something else to suffer alone. Job said, "My relatives and my close friends have failed and forgotten me" (19:13-19).

Has this happened to you? Your husband forsakes you! He comes in one day and announces he's leaving—he does not love you anymore. A wife tells you she is leaving! Have you been abandoned by your children? A trusted friend has turned on you!

Job's wife said, "Curse God and die." Get it over with! His servants would not even answer him. The children who once looked up to him, despised him. His close friends loathed him. His brothers stayed away from him. He was an alien and a stranger.

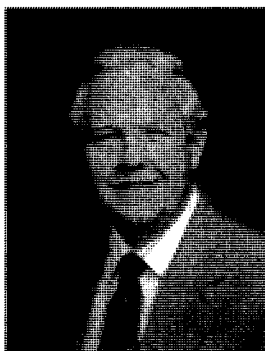
There is no greater hurt than to have your friends turn on you. Psalm 41:9 contains a prophecy about Judas' betrayal, "Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me." This can happen to you, young people, when you take a stand for righteousness. Some of your friends will turn on you. Mr. Christian businessman, you take a stand for honesty and truth, and your partner may abhor you.

CONCLUSION

Job said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). Can you say that when submerged in suffering? Can you say and mean that, when forsaken by your friends? If you can, you can become a trophy of God like Job, and silence the slanderous mouth of the Devil.

LESSON 3: TRUSTING GOD WHEN DISMAYED BY DARKNESS

CLARENCE DELOACH



Clarence DeLoach was born in Dickson County, TN, in 1936. He and Eddie (Lowe) are the parents of four and grandparents of seven. Fifty years of preaching were celebrated in Aug. '01. He graduated from FHC and DLC and has conducted over 400 gospel meetings. He has 33 years of radio preaching and 15 years of TV preaching. He has conducted campaigns in South America and Europe, has authored three books and produced two video series. He retired as pulpit minister for Walnut Street church in Dickson and serves on the Advisory Boards of FHU and the American Heart Association. He is Lieutenant Governor of the Kiwanis Clubs in Middle TN.

INTRODUCTION

When we read the dramatic story that unfolds in the book of Job, we can see what is happening. We have read the first chapter and we are informed that a contest is going on. Satan had slandered the character of God and the integrity of His servant Job.

There are two kinds of trials. James describes them in James, chapter one. Some tests in life, i.e., like you would test an automobile or some machine. These are sent of God to perfect and mature us. These cause us to stand! But, there is a solicitation to do evil. James said that God does not tempt man to do evil. Satan solicits man to do evil. His design is to bring misery and cause man to stumble. While God does not cause both kinds, he allows it. Thus, God permitted Satan "to touch Job."

Job was in the dark! He did not know about the scene "when the sons of God came to present themselves before the

Lord, and Satan also came among them” (1:6). He did not know about the conversation between God and Satan. He did not know that he was the subject of that conversation. Job was in the dark because he had not read the book of Job. Many of God’s saints have experienced the dark night of the soul. It is like, if tomorrow morning you wake up and suddenly you are bankrupt, all your children have died, you’ve come down with a terrible disease, and everybody is pointing a finger and asking what has this man done. All your friends forsake you, and your wife says, “Curse God and die.”

JOB SEARCHES FOR ANSWERS

Though Job maintained his innocence, he was on the defensive throughout the book until at last vindicated by God. The drama that unfolds uses the language of a court scene as Job requests the opportunity to meet God in court. He wants to hear from God to tell him face-to-face what charges he has against him (10:1-3).

OTHERS WHO EXPERIENCE THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

The prophet Habakkuk could not understand what God was doing. The book of Habakkuk has a unique approach. Instead of taking God’s message directly to the people, Habakkuk takes the complaint of the people to God. The sins of Judah and the rising power of Babylon presented a problem with the prophet’s faith. His cry to Jehovah over the wickedness, injustice, and disregard for the law in Judah was met with God’s response. He was raising up the Chaldean power as his instrument to chastise Judah for her disobedience. This sent the prophet into a season of perplexity, the dark night of the soul. It was, as he saw it, a moral problem. How could God use a nation more wicked than Judah as an agent of judgment? He, like Job and others, could not understand what God was doing. But, God assured Habakkuk that the just will live by his faith, and they must in faith patiently wait for Jehovah. Ultimately, the prophet could see that even God’s judgments were for the salvation of His people. His perplexity, doubt and darkness were transformed into one of the greatest expressions. The prophet learned and announced to the world how God can permit and use tyranny to accomplish His purpose, but ultimately all tyranny must be punished. The great

principle he announced, "the just shall live by faith" is fulfilled in the New Testament gospel (Rom. 1:16,17).

David has his bout with the dark night of the soul. Psalm 42 describes a period of distress and despondency. He describes a time when he was hunted by his enemies, being chased over hills and mountains, consumed with thirst. He had come to feel like God had forsaken him, "I will say to God my Rock, why have you forgotten me?" (Psa. 42:9). Not only was there spiritual dryness, there was emotional depression. He cried a lot. "My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, 'where is your God?'" (42:3). Here is a man with many problems. His son Absalom rebelled against him and stole the Kingdom. David is fleeing for his life from his own son. David's throne is in jeopardy, and his power and prestige gone. Later, Absalom was killed, and that broke his heart. Everything was bleak! His little baby died, both his wife and daughter were assaulted, and another son was murdered. The kingdom is in turmoil and shame. David's soul was "cast down." The "waves and billows" had gone over him. He experienced the dark night of the soul.

Even Moses, that giant of a man, once became so depressed he asked God to take his life. Elijah, the great prophet of God became so weary and depressed that he sat down under a juniper tree and requested to die. Jeremiah came to the place where he wept day and night. The great giant of faith, Paul, came to a time when he was cast down and "despaired for his life." And John the Baptist, got so down when he was in prison, that doubt and despair filled his heart as he wondered whether Jesus was really the Christ.

All these experienced the dark night of the soul. Some of the greatest leaders were men who had their bouts with depression. The great Winston Churchill whose voice gave stability and strength to Great Britain during World War II, and the man who said, "Never, never, never give up" was often smitten with depression. He called it "a black dog that followed him around."

Martin Luther, the strong and courageous leader of the reformation, became so depressed that he went to his room and would not come out. His wife, Cathy, tried to coax him out, but he

refused. She put on a black dress, black veil, and black gloves and went in his room dressed for a funeral. He asked, "Cathy, who has died?" She said, "Martin, God is dead." He was shocked. "Cathy, that is blasphemy!" "Yes," she said, "and it is blasphemy for you to be living as though He is dead." That is what it took to get him up and out and living like God is alive. Afterwards, he wrote the great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."

Walter Scott, Racoon John Smith, and Moses Lard were given to seasons of moodiness and depression. And here is Job, suffering, not only physically, but mentally and emotionally. His greatest suffering was in the agony of the depths of his soul.

Look at some of the statements that express the darkness in his soul.

- "Oh, that my grief were fully weighed and my calamity laid with it on the scales! For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea" HEAVY GRIEF! (6:2,3).
- "What strength do I have, that I should hope?" HOPELESSNESS! (6:11).
- "For now you are nothing. You see terror and are afraid." FEAR! (6:21).
- "So I have been allotted months of futility and wearisome nights have been appointed to me" WEARISOME FUTILITY! (7:3).
- "I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul" ANGUISH AND BITTERNESS! (7:11).

In the midst of perplexity and darkness he wanted answers, but he had no one to represent him. He understood that God is not a man that he should answer Him, so he longed for a mediator "who could lay his hand on us both" (9:32,33). In 23:3,4, Job expressed his longing. "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat! I would present my case before Him." Later in the same chapter, he expressed his futility in finding Him. "Look, I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; when He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; when He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him" (23:8,9).

All of Job's desires and longings we have experienced in our Lord Jesus Christ. One of the most beautiful statements of

faith came in the midst of Job's searching. "But He knows the way I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold" (23:10,11). Job did not know, but he knew that God did! That is real faith! When you cannot understand what is happening, God does! Oh, the importance of "waiting on God!"

Job experienced the dark night of the soul. But, his trust in God brought him through. There was light at the end of the tunnel. God vindicated his servant.

CONCLUSION

Can you trust God when submerged in suffering, when forsaken by your friends, and when dismayed by darkness? If you can, you can with Job, shut the slanderous mouth of your accuser, the Devil.

Satan's insinuation at the beginning was that no man has a high and noble motive in serving God. In the Devil's mind, no one would truly want the fellowship of the Creator. He alleged that Jehovah is unworthy of man's devotion, and must "sweeten the pot" with bribes to get men to worship Him. But, Job became a model—a trophy that a man would serve God for who God is—and that the worst human calamity would not cause him to abandon his faith and trust—"though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

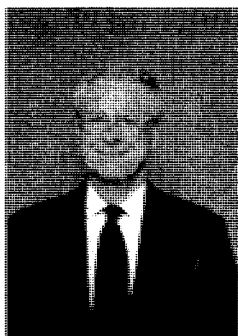
Though Job was human and weakened at times, said some things he would later regret, yet in all of it he kept his integrity and clung to his faith, thus demonstrated to all the sons of man, that God is worthy to be praised (Psa. 18:3).

GREAT SOURCES ON JOB

1. Freed-Hardeman University, 2003 Lectures
2. The Book of Job, Wayne Jackson, Quality Publications, P. O. Box 1060, Abilene, Texas 79604
3. Job, James Burton Coffman Commentaries, ACU Press
4. Be Patient, Warren Wiersbe, Victor Books
5. Walking With Those Who Weep, Don and Ron Williams, Sain Publications
6. The Gospel According To Job, Mike Mason, Crossway Books

CHURCH PROBLEMS – OPPOSITION FROM WITHOUT

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A study of some problems the early church faced should give us much encouragement. The church today has problems. Problems are not new to the Lord's people. Sometimes we might get discouraged in dealing with problems, but if we remember the church under the guidance of Holy Spirit baptized apostles had problems, we may find encouragement.

A potential blessing in studying the problems the early church faced is that we may find information that will help us in coping with problems. Another possible blessing is hope. The church survived problems in the first century, and it will survive problems that we currently face, be they problems a congregation faces or the problem of a brotherhood nature.

In this presentation we will observe: (1) resentment of the message; (2) efforts to stop the message; (3) the determination to obey the Lord and therefore to heed the Great Commission.

THE MESSAGE RESENTED

The first problem that the church in Jerusalem encountered was opposition to the message being proclaimed by the Lord's people. The inspired historian, Luke, wrote: "Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducee came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead."(Acts 4:1, 2, NKJV).

We observe a contrast to the reception given to the message on the day of Pentecost when "those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them"(Acts 2:41). The contrast is seen in the words "gladly received" and "greatly disturbed." The same message was received by some and rejected by others.

Many today reject the gospel message. Jesus predicted that many would reject the truth. In the parable of the sower, the Lord said that some would hear the word, but the devil would come and take the word out of their hearts (Luke 8:12). The devil knows the power of God's word to produce faith. He may use prejudice or a pre-occupation with other things to take the word out of the heart.

In the first century, there were people who resented and rejected the gospel of Christ. The apostle Paul declared: "But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:23).

The Holy Spirit predicted that some would "according to their own desires, heap to themselves teachers, and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned to fables" (2 Tim. 4:3, 4). There are people now who do not want the word of God. There are some in the church who evidently do not want the word of God preached.

When men do not want the word of God preached, we have two options: (1) we can follow the lead of the

denominational world and compromise with the world/culture; (2) we can have conviction from a realization of the responsibility we have to the Lord to preach the gospel (Mark 16:16), and knowing that what the world does not want it really needs, the truth to make it free (John 8:32); the word of God to save the souls (Jas. 1:21).

It is not difficult to observe what is happening in the religious world. Some prominent denominational leaders are decrying the indifference toward and/or the rejection of Biblical preaching. John F. MacArthur, Jr. wrote:

The contemporary church [denominationalism, TH] is undergoing a revolution in worship styles unprecedented since the Protestant Reformation...If you must have a sermon, keep it brief and amusing. Don't be preachy or authoritative. Above all, keep everyone entertained...Some churches now offer their largest services on Friday or Saturday night instead of Sunday morning. These services are usually heavy on music and entertainment...Many of these services offer no preaching whatsoever.¹

In some so-called churches of Christ there does not seem to be too much excitement for biblical preaching. The ancient use of drama is popular in some churches. Drama was introduced in worship centuries ago. Philip Schaff in his History of the Christian Church wrote:

An important aid to popular religion was furnished by the sacred drama which was fostered by the clergy and at first performed in churches, or the church precincts. It was in some measure a mediaeval substitute for the sermon and the Sunday -school...By the end of the thirteenth century, the plays were no longer acted in the churches, but were transferred to the public squares and other open spaces.²

"Sermons" are presented with little or no scripture. Men who support the points of a sermon with the Word of God are sometimes accused of "proof-texting." However, faithful gospel

preachers know that the Bible still declares: "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:1). This inspired charge follows the affirmation that the Scripture is God-breathed, or, inspired of God. (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

EFFORTS TO STOP THE MESSAGE

The first effort to stop the preaching of the gospel was intimidation. Peter and John were put in jail, and the next day they were brought before that august body, the Sanhedrin. But the apostles were not to be intimidated. Peter told the Jewish leaders that the "Jesus of Nazareth, whom you crucified, God raised from the dead...Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:10,12).

Then, threat was employed to stop the message of Christ. Peter and John were not frightened by the threats of the religious leaders. They prayed for courage. They prayed to God "who made heaven and earth and the sea..." They prayed, "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word" (Acts 4:29).

When the intimidation and the threats did not succeed in stopping the preaching of God's word, the religious leaders used physical abuse. The apostles were beaten (Acts 5:40). But the beating did not stop the apostles from preaching the word. In fact, "daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42).

The intimidation today may come from some who have obtained educational degrees. In some countries the possibility of physical harm may be real. God's faithful servants will continue to faithfully proclaim the gospel of Christ because they know that the gospel was and is the power of God to save people from sin (Rom. 1:16,17; 1 Cor. 15:1-3).

DETERMINED TO PREACH THE WORD

The opposition to the Lord's church became so intense that Stephen was killed by those whose law plainly declared: "Thou shall not kill" (Exodus 20:13; Deut. 5:17). Then, a religious radical by the name of Saul led a persecution against the church that scattered the church "throughout the regions of Judaea and

Samaria" (Acts 8:1). But the persecution did not destroy the Lord's church, nor did it stop the preaching of the gospel. "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

Opposition did not stop the spread of true Christianity. The gospel will prevail. The real enemy in our day to the preaching of the gospel is indifference. Zeal, enthusiasm, excitement, dedication are vital to the spread of the gospel. Zeal in the Lord's work is an enemy of indifference. Indifference is the subtle enemy that takes the heart out of preaching.

The indifference may be in the heart of the preacher. The indifference may be born of a lack of conviction. The conviction that inspires zeal is a firm persuasion that people in the world are lost in sin (Eph. 2:1-4; 2:11, 12); a conviction that God's power to save people from sin is in the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16, 17). Furthermore, faithful preachers know that they must be dedicated to the Lord, to His church, to His word, and to the proclamation of that word.

Preachers may get so involved in making a living for their family that they lose sight of the priorities in preaching: "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt.6:33). Preachers may get so excited about recreation that they place too much emphasis on sports. Indifference will manifest itself in the life of the preacher when he does not make adequate preparation to preach Biblical sermons. The indifference may be seen in his spending too much time in the office and not enough time in personal evangelism.

However, the indifference relative to preaching may be seen in a congregation. People prefer sports or entertainment to hearing the word of God, especially on Sunday nights.

The Lord's church had problems in the days when the Spirit-guided apostles were preaching and teaching. But the problem of opposition did not stop the apostles and others from preaching the gospel. The apostles were under a mandate from their Lord to preach the gospel, to teach the nations, to declare "repentance and remission of sins" (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:46, 47), and they were determined to carry out that Great Commission, even if it meant jail time, beating, or death!

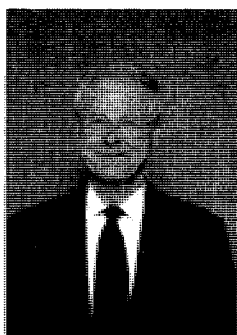
Their response to the problem of opposition was not to cower in fear, but to boldly and forcefully declare the words of life. May their example move us to be diligent in the Lord's work.

ENDNOTES

1. John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Ashamed of The Gospel*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1993), pp. 45, 46.
2. Philip Schaff, *History of The Christian Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 1907) Vol. V, p.869.

CHURCH PROBLEMS – SIN AMONG SAINTS

TOM HOLLAND



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There are blessings we may receive from a study of problems in the early church: first, encouragement. The church today has problems and these have the potential of discouraging us. We might think that the one place on earth that we can escape problems is in the church. But we hear of problems in a congregation, we may experience problems, and we could get discouraged.

Second, we may be admonished by a study of church problems in the early church. The admonition to take action and to deal with the problems. Waiting for the problem "to go away" can be dangerous; time may give the problem occasion to intensify.

In this lesson, we will: (1) look at an Old Testament illustration; (2) examine New Testament declarations; and (3) notice in the application the action taken by the church in Jerusalem in confronting a problem.

OLD TESTAMENT ILLUSTRATION

God was faithful in His promise to Israel to give them the land of Canaan. Under the leadership of Joshua, the Israelites were in the process of driving out the pagan people and claiming their inheritance. God had given them the city of Jericho. They had proceeded to take the city of Ai when they suffered a stunning defeat. Joshua fell on his face and prayed to God and asked God why they had experienced defeat. The Lord explained to Joshua that the Israelites had been defeated because of sin in the camp. God said to Joshua: "Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them" (Josh. 7:11).

Actually one man had sinned. In fact, Achan said, "I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel." (Josh. 7:20). Achan was right in confessing that he had sinned against God. All sin is basically against God. David realized that his sin was against God (Psalm 51:4). Young Joseph realized that if he had committed adultery with Potiphar's wife, he would have sinned against God, so he responded to her seductive efforts by saying, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9).

Although Achan's sin was his own transgression of God's covenant, his sin had an impact on the whole nation of Israel. His personal sin brought consequences to others, as well as to himself.

The sin of Achan was the sin of covetousness. He confessed: "When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them..." (Josh. 7:21).

God gave a law to Israel which contained the commandment, "You shall not covet" (Ex. 20:17). The New Covenant has the commandment, "You shall not covet." (Rom. 13:9).

Achan's sin had caused God's people to be defeated in the initial effort to conquer the city of Ai. Joshua was told by the Lord to take action. In fact, God told Joshua, "Neither will I be with *you* anymore unless *you* destroy the accursed *from among you*" (Josh. 7:12).

NEW TESTAMENT EXPLANATION

The first recorded sin in the Jerusalem church concerned money. Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, sold a possession and brought part of the money to the apostles to be used in the Lord's work. Others had already sold lands and houses and "brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet..." (Acts 4:34, 35). Barnabas had sold land and he had brought the money and "laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:37). So Ananias and Sapphira did as others had done, but there was a difference: they kept back part of the money while pretending to give it all. In their pretension, they lied to the Holy Spirit. Peter told Ananias that the money was in his own power. Ananias was not under obligation to sell his property, nor was he required to give the money from the sale (Acts 5:4). Satan had somehow influenced the heart of Ananias (Acts 5:3), and as a result of Satan's influencing Ananias' heart, he "lied to the Holy Spirit."

Action was taken, resulting in the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. The church was cleansed. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira did not destroy the church. The fact that action was taken by the Lord and the sinners suffered death did not destroy the church. Actually, "believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women" (Acts 5: 1 4).

APPLICATION OF THE LESSON

The integrity of the New Testament is seen in the record of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. The events that preceded this recorded sin had been positive. About three thousand had gladly received the word of God, and they had been baptized on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Then the rapid numerical growth is seen in the number who had become Christians: about two thousand more had become believers so the number "Of the men came to be about five thousand" (Acts 4:4). In addition to the numerical growth, one reads of the spirit of love and goodwill that

characterized the church. They cared for those in need even when it became necessary for some of them to sell land and houses to obtain the necessary funds (Acts 4:34).

A specific example of loving sacrifice is seen in the actions of Joseph or Barnabas, who "having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:37). The next inspired information identifies the first recorded sin in the church.

In striking contrast to the unreserved self-sacrifice of Barnabas, St. Luke places the selfishness and hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira. It is no small proof of the truth of the narrative, that the writer should not hesitate to introduce this episode side by side with his picture of the still unbroken love and fellowship of the Church. He makes no apology for the facts, but narrates them simply and without comment.¹

The Bible is very forthright in revealing both the good and the bad of people. David was, as the apostle Paul declared, "a man after My [God's, TH] own heart" (Acts 13:22). However, the Bible reveals the sins of David.

The apostle Peter was an apostle and a leader in the church and was used by the Holy Spirit to write two of the books of the New Testament. Nonetheless, his denial of Jesus and his hypocrisy are recorded (Luke 22:55-62; Gal. 2: 11-14).

Another lesson from this account of sin in the church is seen in Peter's explanation to Ananias that it was not necessary to sell the property, and even when it had been sold the money was still is Ananias' own power or control. There are things over which we have no control or power. We cannot control the weather: hurricanes, tornadoes, or earthquakes. There are some things over which we have very little control: grown children, decisions of government, actions of friends. But there are some things that are within our power or control.

Material things are in our control, as least the things we have at our disposal. After paying taxes, we have money within our control. We may develop a disposition of greed or

covetousness that results in a dangerous love of money (1 Tim. 6:10). There are some important questions concerning money: what does it do for you; what does it do with you; and what does money do to you?

The Biblical doctrine relative to giving certainly implies that money is in our power or control. God's people are instructed to give as they purpose in their hearts (2 Cor.9: 6, 7). Our talents or abilities are in our control. We may develop and use them, or we may neglect to develop and use the abilities God has given to us. Jesus taught the importance of using our talents. (Matt. 25:14-30).

Our bodies, to a great extent, are in our own power. Studies have shown that approximately 30% of our physical status is due to genetics.² But this obviously leaves us 70% with which to work.

The Lord's people are instructed to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God (Rom. 12: 1,2). God's people are taught that their bodies belong to the Lord (1 Cor. 6: 19,20). No service can be given unto God without the use of the body.

Our influence is in our control. The importance of influence is seen in the metaphors Jesus used, namely, "You are the salt of the earth" and "you are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-16). We may be the "Bibles" that some people read (2 Cor. 3:3). We all have an influence on someone. Generally speaking, the influence is either positive or negative.

Another important lesson that needs to be learned from the record of Ananias and Sapphira's sin is the need for action to be taken in dealing with sin in the church.

The nature of the church demands that the church keep itself pure. The Lord's church consists of people who have been "called to be saints" (1 Cor. 1:2). Saints are people who have been called out of the world of lust, greed, rebellion (Eph. 2: 1-4). Saints are instructed to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph.5: 11). Among the "works of darkness" is "covetousness" (Eph. 5:3).

The spirit of covetousness springs from a mistaken value system. It is based on a false sense of security; it is rooted in pride; it is unlike the spirit of Christ. The spirit of Christ is that of giving; the spirit of covetousness is that of getting. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of serving; the spirit of covetousness is pride in being served.

What is the church supposed to do with covetous, immoral, spiritually indifferent members? The church at Corinth was told to take action in the case of a man who was living in immorality. The apostle declared:

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:4, 5).

The young church at Thessalonica was commanded to withdraw from those who walked "disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us" (2 Thess.3:6).

A person who causes trouble and potential division in the church is to be rejected "after the first and second admonition" (Tit. 3:10).

People who will not work are to be withdrawn from (2 Thess. 3:10, 11).

Those who continue to be "busybodies" are to be withdrawn from (2 Thess. 3:11).

Congregations that have been divided by self-styled "Change Agents" could have been spared the heartache if some elders had given some preachers the option of either following traditions received from the apostles or finding another place to preach. Teaching lost people that in order to be saved from sin they must be believers in the Son of God, repent of sins, confess the Lord, and be baptized for the remission of sins is inspired, apostolic tradition. Preaching that in order to be saved the sinner must believe in Jesus and pray the so-called "Sinner's Prayer" is human tradition. Teaching the church to let worship become a

type of thinly-disguised entertainment instead of a God-centered and God-directed adoration, devotion and praise to God is borrowed from denominationalism and does not come from the tradition of the inspired apostles of Christ.

The nature of the church demands doctrinal and moral purity. The church must insist on both doctrinal soundness and moral purity. This demand for purity and soundness sometimes requires a purging of those who "walk disorderly."

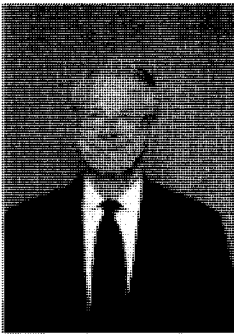
The Lord's action relative to the sin of Ananias and Sapphira should impress on us the need and sometimes the necessity of removing from the fellowship those who refuse to abide in the doctrine of Christ.

ENDNOTES

1. The Expositor's Greek Testament, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: WID. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.), Vol 1, p. 140.
2. "Unlocking Secrets of the Long-Lived," International Longevity Center-USA, AARP Bulletin, Sept. 2004, p.30.

CHURCH PROBLEMS – MURMURING MEMBERS

TOM HOLLAND



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The church of Christ originated in the mind of God, and the church was in God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:10-12). The church was purchased by the blood of Christ (Eph.5:25). The organization of the church was designed by the Lord. The worship of the church was planned by the Lord, and it is potentially directed by His word, the New Testament. The lives of members of the church are ordained by the Lord. The church, from the Divine perspective, is perfect.

However, the church on earth is composed of human beings. Problems have arisen in the church because of the human element of which the membership of the church on earth is composed. In the period when the church was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the apostles, the church had problems because of the people in the church.

The Lord's church on earth continues to have problems. In coping with problems in the church, two things become very important: (1) information from the Lord's word relative to handling problems; and (2) exhortations to God's people so they will not get discouraged as they face various problems that arise in the church.

The inspired historian informs us of a problem that arose in the Jerusalem church in the days of the apostles. He wrote: "Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint [murmuring, KJV] against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution" (Acts 6:1).

The way that the Spirit-guided apostles handled this problem is both informative and encouraging. They did not wait for the problem to resolve itself or for the problem to "go away." They did not deny the reality of the problem. The Hellenists did not say, "We think you are neglecting our widows." The fact was "their widows were neglected in the daily distribution."

In studying this problem, we will focus on: (1) the potential source of problems; (2) potential for the solution of the problem; and (3) the apostolic solution to the problem.

POTENTIAL SOURCE OF THE PROBLEM

The church had a membership of both men and women (Acts 5:14). A difference in gender has the potential for problems. Men and women may often see things differently. There were different ethnic groups, and this also makes for potential problems. Barclay observed:

In the Christian Church there were two kinds of Jews. There were the Jerusalem and the Palestinian Jews. They spoke Aramaic, the descendent of the ancestral language, and they prided themselves that there was no foreign admixture in their lives. On the other hand there were Jews from foreign countries. They had come up for Pentecost; they had made the great new discovery of Christ and they had remained.

Many of them had been away from Palestine for generations; they had forgotten their Hebrew and they spoke Greek. The very natural consequence was that the spiritually snobbish Aramaic-speaking Jews looked down on the despised foreign Jews. This contempt found its way into the daily distribution of alms and there was a complaint that the widows of the Greek-speaking Jews were being-very possibly-deliberately neglected.¹

The nature of the membership of the church is the reason for the potential problems in the church. In a typical congregation of the Lord's people there is the age factor: some young, some old, some middle-aged. There is also an educational difference: some have much formal education, others have a limited amount. In most congregations, there are political differences and different political party affiliations. There may also be differences in positions: some professional, others factory or office workers. Some people may be from a rural background, others were reared in a town or city. There may be differences in financial standing. Some may be socially prominent and others are practically unknown. Gender differences may present problems if people refuse to respect the Bible relative to the different roles of men and women in the church and the restriction placed on women in leadership roles (1 Tim. 2:11, 12). In relationship to God, all are one (Gal. 3:26-28). In relationship to one another, God has ordained different roles for men and women in the church. Women are limited, by the word of God, from leadership roles that would put them in a position of authority over a man (1 Tim. 2:11,12). However, some women seem to resent the God-ordained limitation, and this is one of the tension areas in some congregations today. If a woman has a domineering spirit, trouble may arise in the church. If women exercise this attitude in the home, they may feel that they should have the right to domineer in the church.

Some men who have financial independence, political power, social standing, and/or professional status may imagine that they, by these attainments, should thereby be qualified to be spiritual leaders.

The potential for murmuring members exists in most, if not all, congregations. The murmuring may be against the preacher and his family; the complaining may be focused on the elders; the complaining may be directed toward the older members. Because the problems already exist in some congregations and the potential exists in all congregations, a lesson in dealing with complaining members should be of interest and helpful in solving problems and maintaining a measure of peace and harmony in the church.

POTENTIAL FOR SOLUTIONS

Something had happened in the Jerusalem church from the time that the inspired historian wrote, "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul" (Acts 2:42) and the complaining of one group in the church against another group (Acts 6: 1).

The possibility of solving and even avoiding potential problems that develop because of various groups in the church is seen in the Lord's prayer for unity. He prayed: "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You: that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20,21).

The Lord's church in Ephesus was urged to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

How may various groups in a congregation be "one" and how can they not only have a "bonding in peace," but how can they avoid problems that might arise from views of the different groups? The Holy Spirit gave the answer through Paul's inspired pen in the letter to the church in Philippi. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1.2:5).

Another biblical truth that will solve problems in the church, or prevent problems from arising in a congregation, is the body concept of church (1 Cor. 12:12-26). The attitudes revealed in this passage may be found in some congregations. There are two negative attitudes revealed in the Corinthian passage: an inferior spirit, "If the foot shall say because I am not the hand, I am not of the body" or the ear should say, "because I am not an

eye I am not of the body." When people are made to feel that they are unimportant in the church they may compensate by manifesting an arrogant spirit, or they may tend to withdraw from active participation in the activities of the church. They may murmur or complain because they are not used in a public way, or they may complain of being neglected by the preacher and/or elders.

There is another negative attitude just as dangerous, or perhaps more so, than a feeling of inferiority and that is an attitude of superiority. The eye says to the hand, "I have no need of you, or the head says to the feet, I have no need of you" (1 Cor. 12:21). The feeling of superiority may be subtle in manifestation. Young educated professionals may feel that they know more about the working of the church than older, seasoned elders. Those with formal education may feel that they are thereby more spiritual than those less educated. These kinds of problems could be resolved with an application of 1 Peter 5:5: "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.'"

THE APOSTOLIC SOLUTION

How did the apostles stop the murmuring members, the complaining Christians? Their approach to the problem provides valuable information to help resolve church problems today. First, they acknowledged the problem. This may at times require a lot of courage, especially if one's own family is involved as a source of the problem. The apostles took action. Inaction is not a solution to problems. This is not to suggest that solutions to problems should be undertaken without adequate preparation being made to address the problem. But problems need to be addressed.

The apostles approached the problem with priorities in place. They said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables," and they further declared, "We will give ourselves continually to the word of God and to ministry of the word" (Acts 6:2,4).

A priority of any faithful congregation of the Lord's church is a recognition of and respect for the Lord Jesus Christ as the

Head of the church (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22,23). Closely connected to this realization and respect is the understanding that the Lord functions as the Head of His church through His New Testament. Problems have to be resolved in light of the authority of Christ.

But some problems concern matters of judgment. The apostles approached this problem of the daily distribution by showing trust in the brethren. The apostles said, "Therefore, brethren..." Like Abraham of old explaining to his nephew Lot why there should be not strife between them and their herdsman, Abraham said, "For we are brethren" (Gen. 13:8). The apostles recognized and addressed the members of the church as "brethren."

Furthermore, they revealed their trust in the brethren when they urged the brethren to "seek out from among you seven men...whom we may appoint over this business" (Acts 6:3). McGarvey observed:

It is a remarkable manifestation of generosity in the church at large that all these are Greek names, indicating that the men were selected from the very party whence the murmuring had proceeded. It was as if the Hebrews had said "We have no selfish ends to accomplish, and no jealousy toward you whose widows have been neglected; we therefore give the whole business into your hands, and fearlessly trust our widows to your care."²

The apostles guided the church in the problem-solution process and as Scott Gleaves wrote: "This process [the problem-solving process] involved three important steps." First, tap into the right resources..."It is amazing how churches are oblivious to the fact that they are their own best resource for seeking solutions to their problems. The church is filled with multi-talented people."

Second, "Temperament must match the responsibility. The situation called for men of special temperaments or qualities."

Third,

Entrust the task. The final step taken to reach a solution to the widow problem involved the entrustment of the task given to the seven men selected by the church...The third step in the problem-solving process was perhaps the most challenging. Without its implementation there could be no solution to the problem.³

As long as the Lord's church on earth is composed of humans, there will be problems. The church in Jerusalem had problems. The churches of Galatia had problems. Most of the New Testament epistles addressed problems that the congregations faced. Five of the seven churches of Asia had internal problems. The two churches that did not have specified internal problems, Smyrna and Philadelphia, had challenges from without that they faced (Rev. 2,3).

But each of the seven letters to the churches of Asia contains the exhortation: "He that overcometh" or "To him that overcometh." Ideally, membership in a congregation should help one grow spiritually and make it easier to go to heaven. However, problems may hinder spiritual growth and problems may hinder one in his/her quest for heaven. But there is the possibility of personal victory, even eternal victory, over problems and sin. There is a blessing in overcoming. Regardless of what a congregation may or may not do, we can personally overcome. We can experience eternal victory.

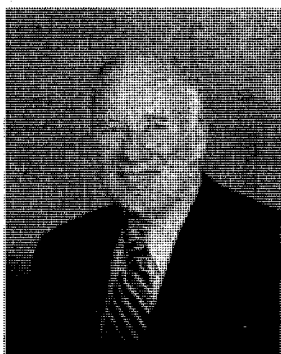
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1. William Barclay, *The Acts of The Apostles*, (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1962), pp.. 50, 51.
2. G. Scott Gleaves, *Capture The Courage*, (Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate Co., 2004), pp. 68, 69.
3. J. W. McGarvey, *New Commentary on Acts of Apostles*, (Delight, Arkansas: Gospel Light Pub. Co.,) p. 106.

REVELATION – ASSURANCE OF VICTORY

LESSON 1

MARLIN CONNELLY



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INTRODUCTION

If I live until the middle of this coming April, I shall reach the biblical "three-score-and-ten." In the beginning of the 1940's, when I was about five or six years old, toys were not high-tech electronic gadgets, and television and its special effects were unknown. My younger bother and I found excitement in seeing a large sign on the main street between my father's downtown office and our home. Light bulbs were illuminated in series, as if a magic hand writing cursive script was spelling out the logo of a local laundry across the billboard. Continually the logo appeared - - "Whiteway." It was my first introduction to a basic principle of communication: "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."

The main idea in the book of Revelation is found in the title of this lesson. The book is an *assurance of victory*. Again and again, the Lord Who "was dead" but is now "alive evermore" (Rev.1:18) assures His beleaguered church they will be on the

winning side, both when they die and when this world's time is no more. It is a "revelation," an *apokalupsis*, such as the lifting of a veil or of the lid from a cooking pot (1:1). Further, it is a "revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1). This expression employs in the Greek text a subjective genitive with a noun of action to mean that Jesus is the *Source* of the message. He is not the object of the revelation, but the *subject engaged in the action* of revealing.

Finding the central theme of a biblical book is not always a simple task. One entering the book of Revelation may feel like a tourist who steps into the high-hedge maze at Hampton Court in England. After many twisting and turnings that lead to dead-end corridors again and again, eventually he may stumble out of the maze. Perhaps, as we search for the main lesson of this book we can borrow a technique from archaeologists digging into sites of the Middle East. Certain pieces of pottery can become "diagnostic shards." These fragments differ from the many other broken pieces, in that their color, shape, or distinctive markings give some clue for dating a certain level in a site or for identifying the people who settled at a site in a certain period. "Diagnostic shards" appear in the book of Revelation. The grouping of the chapters into some sections is made easier because one section will employ letters to seven churches, another the successive opening of seven seals, a third the consecutive blowing of seven trumpets. One set of chapters will employ in sequence the emptying of seven bowls of wrath. These sections should become evident to you in the four-page outline of the book, which was given to you before this first of three class sessions. Another diagnostic clue to the structure of Revelation is a description of a final judgment scene at the close of each of the last six sections and the promise of such a judgment at the end of each of the letters to the seven congregations in the first section. Each of the seven sections has a message which could be summarized in the words of 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8, in which we are reminded, "It is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted..." Paul continues by explaining this will take place when Jesus is revealed in flaming fire to deal out retribution to those who did not know God and had not obeyed the gospel. This is the central message in each of the seven sections of Revelation.

This central idea--that Christ's people, though temporarily persecuted, will be protected and will prevail--shows the

practicality of this book. These people did not need a revelation of what would happen in each century. They needed to know what would happen to *their* lives in Christ. And since this treatise deals with this theme, the one who would read it aloud in a worship assembly, the hearers, and those who would “keep the words” (i.e., who both *preserve* and *observe* the teachings) should consider themselves to be blessed (Rev. 1:3).

Since the Living Lord is the Personage behind the book, and since His revelation was designed to fit their current needs, each of the seven congregations in Asia Minor received this admonition: “*He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches*” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Herein is a fringe-benefit lesson contingent to the central idea of the book. Here is God’s last word on scripture-- it is *the living voice of the Living Lord*. In verses 10 and 11 of Chapter 1, John, “*in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,*” heard a voice saying: “*Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches...*” In verse 12, John continued, “*I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me.*” The visible, commanding presence of the Lord was enough to cause John to fall like a dead man at His feet (1:17). Sacred scripture is not some old bone unearthed from a long forgotten grave, nor some fossil of something that once lived. Scripture is the way the Lord talks to His congregations! It is the living voice of the Lord. It is no surprise, therefore, that John was told a second time: “*Write therefore, the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things* (1:19).

THE FIRST PICTURE OF VICTORY (1:5--3:22) SEVEN CHURCHES

What John was told to write was to be sent specifically to seven congregations (Rev. 1:11). These were located in the most prosperous part of the Roman province of “Asia” (not the continent, but the province in the western part of what is now Turkey). The cities were arranged along the Roman highway in the form of an irregular oval. A messenger delivering the letters could begin at Ephesus and end at Laodicea.

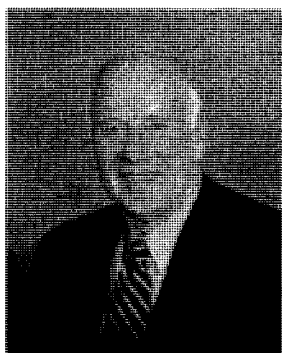
Nero’s persecution was limited to the Jews in Rome (c. A.D. 64), but affected the church in that city because Christians were regarded as a branch of Judaism. Yet, from the beginning of

Vespasian's reign (A.D. 69-79) the church was left in peace for about twenty years. However, by the time 1 Peter was written (c. A.D. 90), the Lord's apostle made clear that Christians in Asia Minor and other related Roman provinces would soon suffer for their faith. A fiery ordeal was soon to test them, for judgment from their enemies was to come upon the household of God (1 Pet. 1:1; 4:12-19). This came in the last of Domitian's reign in A.D. 95. Eusebius later wrote that Domitian "raised a persecution against us, and established himself as a successor to Nero in his hatred and hostility to God." Here, indeed, was the time when the seven churches in the province of Asia needed to hear the promises inherent in the "He that overcometh..." messages from the Lord (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). Whether one was in a church that was passionless, or persecuted, or permissive, or merely professing, each who would "overcome" was promised, in the language of metaphor, a victory.

Preceding Chapters 2 and 3, which contain the promises to any in each congregation who would make the effort to overcome, we are given an assurance of *the Power behind those promises* (1:5-7; 12-18). Regarding His past, He is "*the First-born from the dead*" (v. 5). In the present, He is "*the Ruler of the kings of the earth*" (v. 5). As to His future, to Him there will be the "*glory and the dominion forever and ever*" (v. 6), and "*He is coming with the clouds*" (v. 7). His power was made graphic to John in an awe-inspiring appearance (1:12-17), and in His authoritative affirmation: "*I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades*" (1:18).

REVELATION – ASSURANCE OF VICTORY LESSON 2

A SECOND PICTURE OF VICTORY: SEVEN SEALS



Marlin Connelly is the Senior Minister at Hillsboro church of Christ. He completed his 50th year of preaching in 2002 and has served churches in GA, NJ, OH, and TN. He has been a professor at DLU, teaching both Bible and Communications courses and served 12 years as Chair of the Department of Communication. Marlin has written "Know Your Bible" columns each month for the *Gospel Advocate* since 1999. He received his B.A. from DLC, M.A. from Temple University, and Ph.D. from OSU. He is married to the former Nancy Williamson, and they have three children (one a gospel preacher) and six grandchildren.

Occasionally, through the years, I have been awakened in the night by my wife, who was talking in her sleep. Sometime ago, she suddenly blurted out in the dark, "Marlin, you can't take everything with you!" As I quizzed her as to what she meant, my questions became a part of her unfolding dream, as did her answers. I learned we were about to leave for another trip to Israel, the plane was going to leave in less than an hour, and I was trying to push into one suitcase all the clothing I had in the closet and all that was in the wash. There are times when a speaker needs to realize he cannot cram everything he would like to say into one session, or even into three. With this understanding, I shall not try to cover in these three sessions all of the seven pictures of victory which appear in the Lord's Revelation. The outline furnished at the beginning of the sessions should be of help as you peruse areas in Revelation not covered.

The book's second picture of coming victory begins with the assurance of the Divine power, which can and will assure the victory. Chapter 4 opens with a vision of the splendor of God

upon His throne (vv. 1-3). We are then introduced to two groups of symbolic beings. The first consists of 24 "elders" (older men) seated on 24 thrones surrounding the throne of God in the center. They are clothed in white, and each has a crown of gold (v. 4). I believe 12 of these stand for the leaders of the 12 tribes of God's old-covenant people, and the other 12 stand for Christ's apostles to God's true Israel, His new-covenant people (Gal. 3:7, 29; 6:16). Christ had promised the apostles they would sit "upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" in the time of "the regeneration," the new birth (Matt. 19:28). Further, Revelation 21 follows this same 12-plus-12 motif in the figure of the "new" Jerusalem with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel written upon its 12 gates, and the names of the 12 apostles written upon the 12 foundation stones of its walls (Rev. 21:12-14).

In addition to the 24 "elders" seated around God's throne, Chapter 4 describes "four living creatures" which were before the throne. One was "like a lion," one "like a calf," one had "the face of a man," and the fourth was "like a flying eagle" (vv. 6-7). I have found at least 20 interpretations of these four living creatures. An early and popular explanation is that they stand for Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In Nazareth, for example, on the facade above the entrance to the Church of the Annunciation, one may see carved representations of these four creatures, and the names of the four who penned the gospels. My personal belief is that these creatures stand for all of God's creation. Whether wild animals or domestic, whether human beings or the birds of the air, all living things are praising the Lord God on the throne. The four creatures are singing "*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty*" (v. 8). And the 24 elders, falling down in worship before Him, and having cast their crowns before His throne, are singing "*Worthy art Thou...*" (vv. 10-11).

Now, all of this in Chapter 4 is for a purpose. It is setting the stage for the victory that comes in Chapter 6, by showing the Lord God has the power to assure the victory. Before we move further to that victory, however, I would like to turn onto a side-road thought, a fringe-benefit lesson which spins off from the main idea in the chapter. This picture in Chapter 4 shows us that true worship should be *Theocentric*, God-centered, not man-centered. Worship is not a time to "meet my needs" through entertainment, which appeals to the human side of man. It must

be a time when God's people place Him at the center, surrounding His throne in deference to Him.

Just as Chapter 4 shows the power of the Worthy One on the throne, Chapter 5 presents the Worthy One at the throne. He is both "the Lion" and "the Lamb" -- the One who is the Sovereign and the Sacrifice God has sent (vv. 5-6). He, too, receives the praise of the four living creatures and the 24 elders, as the only one worthy to remove the seven seals from a scroll into which no one has been able to look (vv. 1-4, 7-14).

If Chapters 4 and 5 show us the *Powers* who are behind the coming victory, Chapter 6 begins with the *problems* that must precede the victory (6:1-11). With the successive opening of the first four seals (vv. 1-8), the reader is made resigned to the permanence of general misfortune as long as this present world continues, and even while Christ the King is conquering with His gospel. This idea comes as in a vision given to John as four horsemen come riding in succession.

With the opening of the first seal, John hears a thundering voice saying, "Come" (6:1). Now, those reading the King James and the New King James versions will note the words "*and see*" are added to the imperative given to John. It appears these additional words were not in most of the earlier manuscripts but were a part of the *Textus Receptus* or Received Text, the traditional text of Greek Greek-speaking churches which was first published in 1516. The words "*and see*" do not appear in the text of the American Standard Version of 1901 or in the New American Standard. Further, the verb translated "come" (in verses 1, 3, 5, and 7) is an imperative in the present tense, and is therefore durative. The voice John hears with the opening of each seal seems to be saying, "*Keep on coming*" or "*Be Coming!*" (The same use of the verb in the present tense occurs in Revelation 22:17, 20). John did not need to be told to continue to come, for he was at hand. The message seems to be to each horseman. God intended for each to keep on riding through the world. *The verb speaks of a continuance of whatever each horseman is bringing on his mission.*

The first rider, coming on the white horse, is both crowned and conquering. A parallel and amplified picture of a crowned and conquering rider on a white horse appears in

Revelation 19:11-19. That rider on the white horse is clearly the Christ, for He is identified as "*Faithful and True*" (v. 11), "*The Word of God*" (v. 13), and "*King of Kings and Lord of Lords*" (v. 16). Therefore, I believe the first rider in the series of Revelation 6 represents the Christ conquering with His gospel. The fact that other horsemen also keep on coming, successively representing war, then famine, and finally death (6: 3-8), must mean that these problems will continue for mankind, and for the church, even though Christ is to be the ultimate Victor. This idea appears in Romans 8:17-23, where Christian "*the suffering of this present time*" is contrasted with a "*glory that is to be revealed.*" The whole creation of God is pictured as presently being in frustration, as groaning in the pains of childbirth, and as anxiously stretching out its neck to see the time when it will be set free from its bondage of decay. And even Christians must groan in this bondage as they wait for the promised redemption of the body.

With the opening of the 5th seal we are made even more aware that the spread of the gospel does not remove Christians from all suffering. In fact, we are reminded that the gospel will bring suffering. John sees in vision the "souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God" (6:9). These deaths were not due to the horsemen carrying war, pestilence, and death throughout the world in general. These are martyrs slain for maintaining their message. In the spirit of Him who promised that the blood of all the martyrs from Abel to Zacharias would come upon those who would persecute Christ's messengers (Matt. 23:34-36), these slain for the gospel are calling for God to avenge their deaths (6: 10). Yet, those already slain are told to "rest for a little while longer," for the number to be martyred was not yet complete (6: 11).

Indeed, more suffering was to come. In the time of the Emperor Trajan (A.D. 98-117) Pliny, the governor of the Roman province of Bithynia wrote Trajan to ask for advice in dealing with the Christians diffused throughout his territory. The Emperor's reply shows that Christianity already was viewed as criminal. Christians who would recant, abjuring their faith by making sacrificial offering to Caesar as a god, were to be acquitted. Only those who refused were to be punished. It was during this time that Ignatius, a leader of the church in Antioch, was taken to Rome and was martyred in the amphitheater. Trajan's successors in the second century continued the same policy. Christians were

accused of atheism and anarchy because of their rejection of the old gods and because they refused to worship the Emperor. A misunderstanding of the Lord's Supper led to the popular rumor that Christians practiced cannibalism by eating the flesh and drinking the blood of infants. Justin Martyr's description of what Christians were doing in their first-day-of-the-week assemblies (c. A.D. 150) was designed to correct this misconception. By A.D. 250, governmental persecution was widespread, and mob attacks on Christians were frequent. This continued into the fourth century. The Lord's answer to the martyrs John saw and heard at the opening of the 5th seal (6: 9-11) was proving to be true.

The opening of the sixth seal (6:12-17) brings to the troubled Christians the assurance of the Lord's final victory over their troublers. The promise in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-7 of "God's righteous judgment" in which He would "repay with affliction" those who brought affliction on the church is fulfilled in the vision given to John. With the breaking of the 6th seal symbols of time's end are unrolled before John's eyes. The earth quakes, the sun is darkened, the moon becomes like blood, the stars fall, the sky rolled up like a scroll, and the mountains and islands are moved from their places. (Rev. 16:17-20 presents similar images of the same coming day of wrath). In the midst of this cataclysmic scene, John sees and hears the kings, and those who had been their instruments of terror, calling for the mountains and rocks to hide them from the One on the throne (revealed in Chapter 4) and from the wrath of the Lamb (revealed in Chapter 5). "The great day of their wrath has come," they cry, "and who is able to stand?"

Chapter 7 brings the breaking of the 7th seal, and with it the comfort needed by Christians who were enduring the troubles of Chapter 6. To complete the grueling 26-mile course of the Boston Marathon, a runner must conquer the punishing slope known as "Heartbreak Hill." The saints who were persevering under heartbreaks needed to see the reward waiting at the finish line. Having come out of "great tribulation," they would be under God's tent of protection and provision. They would be led "to springs of the water of life," and God would "wipe every tear from their eyes" (7: 14-17).

John represents those who will receive this reward as "a great multitude who no man could number" (7: 9). Then why,

some ask, is a definite number of only 144,000 sealed by God on their foreheads at the opening of the chapter? Like many other numbers in Revelation, the 144,000 is a *symbol*, not a *statistic*. It is too stylized to be a real number, for each of twelve tribes contributes exactly 12,000 (vv. 4-8). The number seems designed to say, "*The Lord knows those who are His*" (2 Tim. 2:19). The seal was a sign of God's ownership. A parallel to this sealing is found in Ezekiel 9:1-4, in which "a man clothed in linen" (i.e., in a priestly garment—Ex. 28:3-8) is told to put a mark on those who were not to be harmed when God executed His judgment on Jerusalem.

In my opinion, the events of Chapter 7 do not represent a series of events which come *after* the great day of God's wrath depicted in Chapter 6. Instead, Chapter 7 represents a shift in *focus* – from the final fate awaiting one group to the final favor awaiting the other.

This second picture of victory began in Chapter 4 with a vision of God on His throne. It ends in the same way in the first four verses of Chapter 8. With the opening of the 7th seal, there is "silence in heaven for about half an hour" as the prayers of the saints go up to God (8:1-4) . It is as if all of heaven is saying, "Hush! God is listening to the prayers of His saints." The scene is pictured in the imagery of the Old Testament temple worship in which incense was burned on the altar while the people in the courtyard outside offered up prayers for the nation (see Luke 1:8-10). The return to the vision of God on His throne (with which this section began in Chapter 4) brings again an assurance of coming victory. God is on His throne, and all will be right for His people.

REVELATION – ASSURANCE OF VICTORY LESSON 3

A THIRD PICTURE OF VICTORY (12:1--14:20)



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It was the Roman poet Virgil, whose life lasted 51 years through the middle of the century before Christ, who made popular the expression *tempus fugit*--"time flies." He wrote, "Time flies, flies without recall, while we linger on details, in love with our theme." The temptation for one to linger on interesting details in John's *Apocalypse* must be resisted. In three sessions, one can but touch on some of the assurances of victory the book brings. Because time demands that we be selective, I chose to cover in the first session, a general overview of the book's theme, its arrangement, and its practicality for the immediate needs of Christians who needed its assurance. In the letters to the seven congregations, we noted the recurring theme of reward for those who would overcome. My choice for the second session was a more-detailed look at the section beginning in Chapter 4 and ending at the opening of Chapter 8. There, the Christian is given the assurance of victory over troubles. For this final session, I have chosen to concentrate on Chapters 12 through 14, in which God gives assurance of the victory over the church's enemies who were bringing those troubles.

Chapter 12 begins with two characters -- a woman about to give birth and a great red dragon. Each of these is called a "sign," meaning each is a symbolic figure with a meaning beyond itself. The meaning of the dragon (Grk., *drakon*) is given in verse 9. He is "the Devil and Satan who deceives the whole world." Since verse 5 tells us the woman was to bring forth a child who was "to rule all nations with a rod of iron" (an allusion to the Messiah in Psalm 2:7-9), some have assumed the woman was Mary. This is an assumption made too quickly. Remember, the woman is not an actual person, but is called a "sign." She is no more a literal woman than Satan is a literal red dragon. Note that verse 1 has the woman adorned with the splendor of the sun, the moon, and twelve stars. These same symbols are used in Joseph's dream (Gen. 37:9-11) to stand for the family of Israel. The woman first represents God's old testament Israel, from whom the Christ came in the flesh (Rom. 9:4-5). Later in the Chapter (12: 13-16), the dragon will persecute the woman who will be protected by God in the wilderness for three-and-a-half years. Since this takes place *after* the child brought into the world has ascended to God and to His throne (12: 5), and *after* the coming of the kingdom and the authority of the Christ (12: 10-11), the persecuted woman becomes the symbol of God's new Israel, the church (Rom. 4:16; 9:6; Gal. 3:7, 29; 6:16).

Revelation 12 is a story of earlier victories over Satan. At the time of the birth of the Christ, that "great red dragon" attempted to devour the child (12: 5). One is reminded of Herod the Great and his failed attempt to slay the Messiah after His birth at Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1-16). Yet Herod was but the failed tool of a malevolent power using him. John lets us know this was part of the great conflict between good and evil. "There was war in heaven," John tells us, and the dragon was losing (12: 7-9). Satan could not stop Christ's first coming, nor could he prevent Christ's later ascension to His throne (12: 5). Satan was "thrown down." His sphere of activity was limited to this earth (12: 9). With this initial victory, a loud voice in heaven proclaimed four things resulting from Satan's first failures -- salvation, power, the kingdom of God, and Christ's authority had arrived (12: 10). Further, John hears the voice telling the two things which had combined to overcome Satan--"the blood of the Lamb" and "the word of their testimony" (12:11). The Lord's sacrifice had paid for

sins, and the sacrifices of those “who did not love their life even to death” had spread the good news.

Having been defeated in his first attempts to thwart the coming of the Christ and His gospel, Satan embarked on a campaign of persecution against “the woman who gave birth” to the Christ, i.e., against the people of Israel who brought the Savior into the world (12: 13). This certainly happened in the aggressive persecution against the Jewish church in Jerusalem and Judea, as seen Acts of the Apostles (Chapters 4-9; Chapter 12). The protection of this part of God’s new Israel during their trials is symbolized in a picture of the woman fleeing into the wilderness, and there being nourished for three-and-a-half years (12:14-16).

Enraged by the protection given to God’s people in Israel, Satan began to make war against “the rest of her offspring.” This symbol is defined in part. We are told it represents those “who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (12:17). If Satan’s first activity was against Jewish Christians, perhaps these who are “the rest of her offspring” are Gentiles who are a part of the new covenant’s “Israel of God,” Abraham’s offspring by faith.

To continue his campaign against the church, Satan enlisted the aid of three forces—the state, the “sacred,” and the seductive. As Chapter 13 opens, the power of the state is represented in a vision of a beast emerging from the sea (13:1-10). The beast John saw had ten horns and seven heads, with diadems on its horns and a blasphemous name on its heads. Further, the beast was a composite one. It was like a leopard, but its feet were those of a bear, and its mouth was that of a lion (13:1-2). Immediately, we are reminded of Daniel’s vision of the four beasts in Daniel 7. They came from the sea, the third beast had multiple heads, and the fourth beast had ten horns. In the explanation given to Daniel, the four beasts stood for four kingdoms, or empires. The fourth beast’s ten horns stood for ten of its kings, and one of its horns was “making war against the saints, and prevailing against them until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High” (Daniel 7:15-22). It seems clear that the beast John saw emerging from the sea is a close composite of those four Daniel had seen in his vision. The power of this beast was that of

government, and his authority was over the known world of that day, "over every tribe and people and tongue and nation" (Rev. 13:7). For John, this beast was the Roman state.

In his epistle to the church at Rome, Paul exhorted every person to "be in subjection to the governing authorities," because they have been established by God. The state is "a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon one who practices evil" (Rom. 7:1-7). But Satan had hijacked this instrument ordained by God, and had perverted it into a tool for his purposes. Instead of acting under Divine authority for the good of all, the beast had declared itself a divine authority to be worshipped by all (Rev. 13:8).

John then saw a second beast, this one arising from the earth (13:11). John's description of this second beast is succinct and to-the-point. The beast was a phony in disguise. John observed: "He had two horns like a lamb, and he was speaking as a dragon." Perhaps John thought of the Lord's warning to beware of "false prophets" who "come in sheep's clothing" (Matt. 7:15), for he later calls this second beast "the false prophet" (Rev. 19:20). If the first beast represented a deviation from God's purposes for the state, this second beast symbolized a perversion of all that is sacred. His mission was to cause mankind to worship the first beast (13:12), either by using counterfeit miracles (13:13-14), or by issuing coercive mandates (13:15-17). One refusing to worship the beast forfeited his life; one refusing to wear an identifying mark, "the name of the beast or the number of his name," forfeited his livelihood.

Reams have been written concerning the meaning of "the number of the beast" (13:18). By assigning numerals to letters in the Hebrew, the Greek, or the Latin alphabet, and then adding the numerical values of the letters in some specific name, many believe they have found the name hidden in the number--666. Sometimes, it is the name of one of the Emperors, or sometimes that of one of the popes. Perhaps it is better just to hear John say, "The number is that of a man" (13:18). The number 666 always falls short of the perfection symbolic in the number 7. In short, the beast pretending to be a god is short of that perfection. His number is only that of a *man*, only a human.

It seems clear that the first beast represents the Roman state during the time when its Emperors maintained their dominion by manufacturing their deity. If so, then the second beast of Chapter 13 must represent religious powers which furthered their own causes by encouraging devotion to the state and to the Emperor as a god.

To this point, we have seen only two of the three powers employed by Satan against the church. In addition to the *state* and the “*sacred*,” the “great red dragon” used the power of the *seductive*. We do not come upon this third tool of the devil until we reach the middle of Chapter 14. And even then, John only alludes to this third enemy of the church, and withholds any detail until Chapters 17 and 18. The seductive power of Roman society is called “Babylon the Great...who has made all nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality” (14:8). Later, in Chapter 17, she is described as “the great harlot who sits on many waters” (17:1), and we learn those waters represent “peoples and multitudes, and nations, and tongues” (17:15). We are told “those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality” (17:2). On her forehead this “Babylon the Great” was called “the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth” (17:5). She is pictured as “sitting on a scarlet beast...having seven heads and ten horns” (17:4). The seven heads are explained later as standing for seven mountains (or hills) on which the woman sits (17:9). Some see in this figure the seven hills of the city of Rome. They also are identified as symbols of seven kings (17:10-11), just as the ten horns of the beast on which she rides are ten other kings yet to come (17:12). It seems reasonable to say that the great harlot is a seductive power, riding on the back of the power of the government. The “fornication” which she represents and into which she seduces even kings of the earth seems to be more than just sexual sin. It is that “love of the world” which makes one abandon his “love of the Father” (1 John 2:15-17).

In this third session, beginning in Chapter 12, we have traced the activity of Satan, our adversary, the “great dragon,” as he carried out his campaign of wrath against the Christ and then against the church. In Chapter 13, we were introduced to two allies Satan employed--the power of the government and the power of religion, as they were symbolized in two beasts. In Chapter 14, we found a brief mention of a third ally used by

Satan, the seductive power of the culture, in the symbol of the "great harlot." We then examined in Chapter 17 an amplified description of this harlot.

But one task remains—to see again the central message of the book, the assurance of victory. Chapter 14 begins with this assurance. The very stylized number of 144,000 is again used to depict the entire church (as it was in Chapter 7). But another symbol is added. This number is with the Lamb on Mount Zion, an earthly location standing for a spiritual reality (see Heb. 12:22-24). The nations may rage and plot against the Lord and His Anointed, but they shall fail, for God has set His King on His "holy hill of Zion" (Psalm 2:1-6). The threatened apostles of Christ found their security in this same Psalm (Acts 4:18-31).

Having seen the church safely secured, John is treated to the vision of an angel "having an eternal gospel to preach" (14:6). That good news is that God is to be feared and given glory, because "the hour of His judgment has come" (14:7). Here is yet another fringe-benefit lesson in Revelation—*judgment from God is not out of harmony with the gospel from God*. The judgment then proceeds with a prognostic announcement of the fall of Babylon the great, the seductive power which had made all nations to drink of her immorality (14:8). This is followed by the warning to all who worship "the beast and his image" (terms combining the work of both evil powers introduced in Chapter 13—the perverted government and false religion). They shall "drink of the wine of the wrath of God" (14:10). Yet here again, this coming judgment from God is not out of harmony with God's good news. For sandwiched between the torment awaiting those who live for the beast (14:11) and the promise of rest for those who die in the Lord (14:13), is the statement that these truths give perseverance to the saints (14:12).

In Daniel 7, Daniel had seen four beasts representing four successive empires. One horn of the fourth beast (representing one of the kings of that empire) was "making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints to possess the kingdom" (Daniel 7:21-22). That time predicted by Daniel is the theme of John in Revelation 14. In Daniel 7:14, One "like the Son of Man" is seen "coming with the clouds of heaven" to end the dominion of the beasts." In Revelation 14, this same

“one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head” puts forth His sickle and reaps the earth (14:14-16). This same image of a final harvest appears in His parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24-43).

Revelation 14 ends with the judgment on the wicked, using the imagery of the vintage harvest at summer’s end. An angel of God put his sickle to the clusters. Separated from the vine, they were thrown into the “great wine press of the wrath of God.” (14:18-19). Chapter 15 serves as God’s brief comment on the righteousness of such a judgment as an *assurance of victory* over wickedness. Set in the imagery of people standing on a sea of glass, John describes those who have come off victorious over the beast, his image, and his name. They are singing “the song of Moses and the Lamb” (as we paraphrase it in the song “*On Jordan’s Stormy Banks*”). Like the triumphant song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, this song celebrates God’s ways as “righteous and true” and His triumph over the nations in these words: “*Thy righteous acts have been revealed*” (15:2-4).

God’s present assurance of victory will one day become our celebration of victory.

MAINTAINING BALANCE IN VIEW OF LIBERALISM AND LEGALISM'S PULL

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In these challenging and stressful times, those who love the truth and the church should remember the need for balance. Right must be upheld. Error must be opposed, but extremes must be avoided. Let us react without overreacting. Legitimate concerns must not become excessive obsessions.

Like Athenians, some always seek something new. Others oppose even adjustments in method. The one tends to embrace every *innovation* for the sake of *progress*. The other rejects every change for the sake of *safety*. One is willing to compromise in almost anything in order to grow. The other is willing to remain stagnant in order to appear uncompromising.

LIBERALISM

Labels have to be defined. In the world of academic theology, "liberalism" usually applies to rejection of belief in the inspiration of the Bible, or of belief in miracles, or even of faith in a personal God. Churches of Christ are sometimes affected by

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such, but generally concerns about "liberals" among us have to do more with issues of interpretation and application of the Scriptures. While actual modernism may be behind some of the liberal tendencies, few have been so bold as to outright admit lack of confidence in the Bible. Instead, the liberalism we have in view is in the rejection of pattern authority and resultant compromises regarding the faith and practice that we have found in the Christianity of the New Testament.

We believe the New Testament provides a pattern for our faith and practice and that it is by compliance with the pattern that the church of Christ is identified. If we accept that the Bible is the word of God and that the Bible provides a pattern for what the Lord intends for the church to be, it must follow that the only basis by which religious authority can be determined is by biblical commands, precedents (approved examples) and necessary inferences. This is the hermeneutic which has defined churches of Christ. It has sometimes been incompletely described "as the *only* way the Bible teaches." Obviously, there is much more in the Bible (history, facts, poetry, etc). The point about commands, examples, and necessary inference is that this is the only basis by which to know what the Lord requires and approves in our service to him. The place of commandments is obvious (Matt. 28: 19f).¹ The examples in view are those which are demonstrations of how commands are to be obeyed (1 Cor. 11:2; Phil. 3:17). Necessary inferences are conclusions so logically necessary as that two plus two equals four.

A so-called "new hermeneutic" means little more than that the "old hermeneutic" (which has always defined churches of Christ) is being rejected. Some pride themselves in their rejection of "pattern authority," but they have nothing concrete and conclusive to offer in its place. In fact, this is what liberalism is. It is drifting on ever changing currents. Ultimately, nothing is absolute; nothing is the only thing that is right. This is not to say that all who are liberal in some respects are not willing to draw lines at some point. But logically a paradigm that allows compromise on one point must expect to apply it to other points. The only alternatives, according to 2 John 9, are either to abide in the doctrine of Christ or to leave the Lord by leaving the doctrine.

It is not the design of this lesson to cover much by way of details, but some specific things which characterize present day l

iberalism in the church are: refusal to oppose (if not to accept) instrumental music in worship, communion at times other than on the Lord's Day, women in worship leadership roles, fellowship with denominations, acceptance of denominational baptisms, youth programs that emphasize emotions and excitement at the expense of truth, views of grace that effectively deny the Bible plan of salvation, inordinate admiration of talented and influential leaders in denominations, repudiation of the concept of one church and its undenominational character, and arrogant ridicule of the faithful pioneers.

LEGALISM

Again, terms must be defined. The label of legalism is sometimes applied to those who stand faithfully for the truth. To insist on scriptural baptism, for example, is called legalistic by those who will not accept the truth. So also when we will not compromise on music, or the Lord's Supper, or women preachers, etc. Legalism is defined in some works as "A keeping of the law...and a regarding of obedience as meritorious."²

For this study, however, a better term might be radicalism. The late Franklin Camp cautioned against the "extremes of *liberalism, radicalism and ugliness*." We have in mind extreme positions, radical views, and the mean spirit that sometimes is characteristic of that kind of legalism. We cannot be critical of one who stands by his convictions. Indeed, we have to admire one who has thought through what he believes and wants to be faithful to it. What ought not to be is a harsh and demanding spirit. Even when we are correct, we may still be wrong if our use of the truth is from wrong motives and with an unchristian method. Jesus warned of wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15). We should also beware of *sheep in wolves' clothing*. There are always those who "by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16: 18). But is truth served any better when harsh words and ugly speeches are used in its defense? The old restoration slogan is a call for biblical balance: "In faith unity, in opinion liberty, and in all things charity."

Do you realize that it has always been conservatives that have produced human creeds? Liberals do not care enough to codify their positions. It is the keepers of their own orthodoxy that bind the doctrines and commandments of men. What is to be

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learned from that? We should learn the humility and open-mindedness that is like the Bereans. "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). They had an open mind and an open Bible. We must "Buy the truth and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23). At the same time, however, we must be open to study and ready to surrender even our most cherished notions when new insight is brought to bear.

In the time of the apostles, there were certain ones who taught truth but from wrong motives and attitudes. Philippians 1: 15-17 says, "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel." We do not know enough about these which he says were preaching out of envy, strife and contention to say they have exact counterparts in our own times. It is obvious, however, that there are those whose preaching and writings are notorious as to their harshness and lack of fairness. Misrepresentations and incomplete information are shaped into slanders that turn brother against brother. Some assume they are privileged to repeat any charges they hear. Cliques are formed around journals, or schools, or favorite preachers. Those who do not run in the same crowd are suspect, to say the least.

A fine young man contacted me about a well-known older preacher. He was concerned that a congregation where he had once lived was having the preacher for a meeting and he had heard a report about that preacher having failed to take a firm stand on a certain occasion. (I am purposely being vague as to who, when and what.) I told him that I had heard something about it but had no first hand knowledge. But what I do know is what has been that preacher's record over the years. I suggested that fairness demands that we look at the overall course of a man's ministry, rather than a single incident in which he may or may not have been wrong.

I have to ask who writes the rules for the brotherhood? Yes, of course, the Bible is our rulebook, but there are areas wherein the Lord has left decisions to our own judgment. It

seems, though, that there is an unwritten code which all are expected to follow lest they be branded as liberal.

NEITHER TO THE RIGHT OR LEFT

It is evident that humans tend toward extremes. Here are some examples. Liberals would compromise the truth of God. Radicals might not compromise even on things left to human judgment. One is too tolerant. The other is not tolerant enough. One wants to ignore the New Testament pattern. The other thinks his own opinion is the pattern. One wants to change the church to suit the world. The other opposes change in things which are no more than "the way we have always done it." One wants to fellowship with denominations. The other is afraid to fellowship any but their own clique. One says love should make us tolerant of error. The other thinks it is good to be mean and harsh toward those with whom they differ, as long as we call it love. One thinks to be charitable, we must compromise. The other thinks being uncharitable is a sign of soundness. One will allow almost anything for the sake of growth. The other would rather keep the church small and under control. One loves to hear brotherhood scandals. The other wants to pretend nothing is wrong anywhere.

Several years ago we had a lectureship here on the theme, "Neither to the Right or to the Left." Israel was admonished: "Ye shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left" (Deut. 5:32). The emphasis of the lectures was on balance. Balance is not the same as compromise. One can stand firm for what is right without harshness and extremism. One can be fair and patient without being liberal.

Certain scriptural concepts and attitudes should be kept in juxtaposition. We find two sides, two directions, two positions. These are not opposites; there is no contradiction. But each balances the other. Some texts need to be applied side by side.

"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God" (Rom. 11:22). Should one be so emphasized that it nearly excludes the other?

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We are saved by grace (Eph. 2:4). We are saved by faithful obedience (Heb. 5:9). A dichotomy need not be assumed. Both sides should be taught.

Authority in both binding and loosing was delegated to the apostles (Matt. 18:18). It is wrong to ignore what the apostles bound. It is also wrong to make a law where the apostles did not give one.

Paul said he did not seek to please men (Gal. 1:10). The Galatian epistle demonstrates how that he would neither enforce the law of Moses to placate the Judaizers nor compromise the law of Christ as an antinomian. On the other hand, wherein it was possible, he made himself "all things to all men" (1 Cor. 9:22). No one could pressure him to have a Gentile (Titus) circumcised when it would mean the surrender of gospel liberty (Gal. 2:3-5), but it was expedient for the ritual to be performed on the Jewish youth Timothy (Acts 15).

In 2 Timothy 4:2, preachers are charged to "reprove and rebuke," but in the same verse they are also charged to "exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." There are times for "stepping on toes"; there are times for lifting spirits.

Ephesians 4: 15 says, "speaking the truth in love." I appreciate the way I have heard James Meadows talk about this. He says that it is not just instruction to speak. Neither is it only that we speak the truth. It says to speak the truth "in love."

Some sin must be rebuked before all (1 Tim. 5:20). Personal issues should be handled as quietly as possible (Matt. 18:15). Apollos' preaching was seriously flawed, but Aquila and Priscilla corrected him privately (Acts 18:26).

Paul would not hold back his refutation of the Judaizers, "no, not for an hour" (Gal. 2:5), and he would rebuke Peter publicly when his actions were dividing the church (Gal. 2:14). This seems blunt, and there are times when bluntness is needed. But to keep us in balance, the same apostle told preacher Timothy:

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in

meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

There are times to call down fire from heaven (2 Kings 1), and there are times when we must remember "what manner of spirit ye are of" (Luke 9:54f).

We must respect the instructions in 2 John 10-11, but that needs to be held in balance with the guidance in Romans 14. Those that cause division by the teaching are to be marked and avoided (Rom. 16: 17f), but we are not to judge "according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Liberals may fondly embrace what they see in Matthew 7: 1-4, but ignore Ephesians 5: 11. Legalists are ready to expose every mistake, but they have little appreciation for texts such as James 4:11-12.

It is sinful to gossip and to be busybodies in other men's matters. Repeating slander is no less slander. A lie is a lie no matter whom it is about and no matter where we heard it. On the other hand, some things have to be reported. Paul wrote about what he had heard from Chloe's house (1 Cor. 1:11). Remember, though, that Paul had heard this with, so to speak, "inspired ears." Warnings about error and erring brethren are sometimes necessary, but one ought first to be certain of the facts. See Leviticus 19: 16.

It is good to have close companions in our work. Some personalities are more compatible. Associations over time build confidence. Paul had special confidence in Timothy. "I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state" (Phil. 2:20). But care must be exercised that our special friendships and compatibility do not evolve into a clique. John made the mistake of thinking none could be legitimate unless they were in their group. "And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbid him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us" (Luke 9:49f). Gordon Smith made some useful observations about this.

This one who was casting out devils in Jesus' name evidently stood for and preached the same truth the apostles taught. Evidently, John was opposed to him because he was not in John's immediate circle...This man may have used a little different approach than John. His method of preaching and teaching the truth may have been different from the apostles...

In this instance, John seemingly had the problem many of our brethren have today. That is he thought because this man did things differently or because he did not fit John's preconceived mold, he should have been excluded from fellowship.

John was not willing to grant liberty where Jesus had.³

EPHESIANS 4:1-6

The seven-fold platform for unity in Ephesians 4: 1-6 has been misrepresented by those who seek a wider fellowship than the Bible allows. It is not the case that all that is necessary is a profession of "one body, and one Spirit..." Nothing in the text implies that here is the totality of faith. Instead, the apostle cites things which ought to be understood by all Christians as the beginning place for "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." His logic is that inasmuch that all in the church hold in common the seven things named they ought to be persuaded to be in harmony on other things.

We are careful not to create another extreme, either to the right or left, in our application of these verses. We cannot accept the liberal notion that as long as there is agreement on these seven things, it does not matter what else one's practice might be. Such reasoning opens the door to all sorts of innovations. On the other hand, Paul's argument will help us much in our desire to maintain balance. When we realize that we share a common participation in regard to these things, every effort should be made to come to an acceptable consensus. An all too frequent reaction when something is perceived to be error is to hastily write off (or write up) the brother believed to be in error. Perhaps we forget that our brother is a part of the "one

body," that he shares with us faith in the "one Lord," and the "one God."

Paul was not directly addressing the subject assigned in this paper, but I think it is appropriate to close with the King James wording of Philippians 4:5. It's a verse worth remembering.

"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."

ENDNOTES

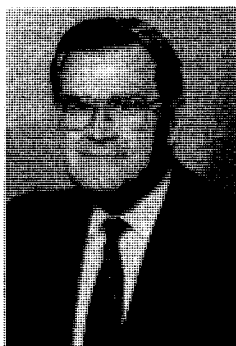
1. All scripture references are from the KJV unless indicated otherwise

2. Millard J. Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), p. 95.

3. "Overcoming Negativism and Extremism in Evangelism, 4," Freed-H Lectures, 1982, p.338.

FACING MORTALITY (DEALING WITH AGING)

WILLIAM WOODSON



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One certainty in life is that, unless Jesus comes, those of us who are alive today will some day die. Of that there is no doubt since "it is appointed unto man once to die" (Heb. 9:27). It behooves us to prepare for that which must be experienced but cannot be avoided. This awareness is the theme of this study.

AGING IS AN INCREASING REALITY in the present culture of America. A few internet searches on aging will reveal much of interest. Robert B. Blancato, who served as the executive director of the 1995 White House Conference on Aging, published an article of September 8, 2004¹ with these statistics: Rapid growth is occurring in the "old-old" (those 85 and over) and in the Asian Americans and Hispanics. In 1995, the oldest baby boomer was 48 years old; by the next White House Conference on Aging, he will be 59 and eligible for various programs and services for aging Americans. The first wave of boomers will become eligible for Medicare beginning in 2011. Congress has enacted new policies and programs on aging, such as a prescription drug benefit under Medicare (however adequate it may be), a National Family Caregiver Support Program under the Older Americans Act, and the repeal of the outside earnings

limitation under Social Security provision. According to various Congressional Committee chairmen, Medicaid reform will be a front and center issue next year. The aging population is changing, and so new policies are needed to respond accordingly. The minority elderly will double by 2030. Health care disparities must be tackled before the have-nots get any older. The role of the government, the private sector, and the individual in national aging policy must be balanced. Social Security, solvent now, must consider options in view of increasing demand and possible reduction in the proportion of wage earners who pay into the system and the recipients. Will enough be working and paying into Social Security to provide for those who are receiving those monthly checks, with increases from time to time? Must individuals have a greater involvement in savings for retirement? How can long-term care of the aging be provided? Should there be tax credits for caregivers? Under what conditions? Should the government provide long-term care insurance? If so, how, and at what cost?

Another writer observes by 2025, as the baby boomers finally mature, there will be as many people over 65 as there will be teenagers. Now we have 70,000 people over 100; by 2006 there will be 100,000, by 2025 there will be two million.²

On and on the searches can and will go. But, it is a reality that the increasing number of people living beyond the age of 70 will impact the individual, the care-givers, retirement funds, Social Security, and Medicare and Medicaid benefits; especially so as the baby boomers come more fully into the aging population. How these general statistics will impact you and me will vary, but the reality before each of us is that significant changes are ahead in the aging population of this nation. Each person, teenagers to grand parents, has a stake in these matters and will be encountering them at different times in the future.

One's reaction to all these matters politically and financially will be for each to decide, but some spiritual principles about aging and mortality can be gained by considering some insights from Paul's closing words to Timothy.

PAUL FACED HIS COMING DEATH with a remarkable serenity and peace; his example provides relevant instruction for this study.

1. He knew that "the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim. 4:6). The verb translated "at hand" is in the perfect tense, showing that the end of his life had been approaching and had reached the point where it was about to occur. He accepted this reality.
2. He looked back on a faithful service to God: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). There had been intense struggle, he had hoped and resolved to finish his course (Acts 20:24) and now having reached the end of that long way, had kept the faith (cf. Rev. 14:12).³ The toil-worn and oft-suffering soldier has nearly come to the last day, his battles have been fought, and now the crown of victory awaits.
3. He desired the companionship of good people: "Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me" (2 Tim. 4:9 ct. vv. 11,21).⁴ Luke, Timothy, and Mark would do all they could to make his closing days as pleasant as they could; he desired them and others to be with him. Ah, how valuable and comforting are old and good friends.
4. He bore no ill will to others. Paul cited Alexander the coppersmith as one who had done much evil to him and had greatly opposed his words. Paul asked: "the Lord reward him according to his works" (2 Tim. 4:14, 15). At his first defense no man stood with him, but he said: "*I pray God* that it may not be added to their charge" (2 Tim. 4: 16). The list of his many difficulties otherwise was tremendous (2 Cor. 11 :24-28), but no bitterness twisted his heart into a receptacle of anger, hate, and desire for revenge.
5. He intended to remain active as long as he was able. After his first defense, he was still desiring "that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that the Gentiles might hear" (2 Tim. 4: 17). Also, he asked Timothy: "The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring *with thee*, and the books, *but* especially the parchments" (2 Tim. 4: 13). The "cloak" was most likely a poncho-like garment with a hole for the head that would cover the wearer down to the feet, evidently a garment for warmth in the Roman prison. The books and parchments, the

contents of which are unknown, were treasured materials that enabled Paul to keep studying and growing. William Barclay refers to the letter of William Tyndale, as he lay in prison for translating parts of the Bible into English and requested: "Send me, for Jesus's sake, a warmer cap, something to patch my leggings, a woolen shirt, and *above all my Hebrew Bible.*" Then Barclay added: "When they were up against it, and when the chill breath of death was on them, the great ones wanted more than anything else the word of God to put strength and courage into their souls."⁵ Paul had no desire to quit his work, and continued learning to the end.

6. Paul remembered the faithfulness of the Lord. He affirmed: "Notwithstanding the Lord **stood** with me, and **strengthened** me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear: and I **was delivered** out of the mouth of the lion. ¹⁸ And the Lord **shall deliver** me from every evil work, and **will preserve** me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen" (2 Tim. 4:17-18). One notices the words marked in bold: **stood, strengthened, was delivered** all referring to what had occurred in Paul's life and particularly his ongoing imprisonment; and **shall deliver** and **will preserve**, looking to what the Lord will do in the future. The expression "will preserve *me* unto his heavenly kingdom" has the word for "save" (*sozo*) with the preposition "unto" (*eis*) with the meaning "bring one safely into."⁶ He was certain the Lord would deliver him into his eternal kingdom in heaven.
7. Paul anticipated the crown he had won. He stated concerning himself and others: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8).

The "crown" refers to an award or prize for exceptional service or conduct, *prize, reward*, a symbol of victory, a symbol of exceptional merit.⁷ The crown was a crown of righteousness, that is, the crown was to be bestowed in view of the righteousness of

those who were/are faithful to Christ in/through obedience to the gospel.

These several spiritual qualities were, and had been, present in Paul through his tenure of service. Now, as the end was in view, his faith, hope, and love are secure. He was not claiming a once-saved-always-saved standing, but one linked with Christ in and through an obedient faith that had endured through sacrifice and service. It now anticipates the ultimate blessing of right standing with God when ushered into his presence. Whatever thoughts and plans one may make in view of the certainty of death, these attributes of faithful devotion exhibited by Paul should have first place as the end of one's own physical life is contemplated.

THOUGHTS CONCERNING PREACHERS on these matters may be appropriate.

Several years ago in a course on the preacher and his work, a kind of life plan by Andrew W. Blackwood caught my eye.⁸ In a chapter on "Chronic Immaturity" (pages 152-161) Blackwood sketched the following phases, with more or less arbitrary time limits, of the life of a preacher: 1. Years Full of Promise (25-40); 2. A Period of Transition (40-55); 3. A Time of Fruition (55-70); 4. Days of Retirement (70-80). While I have not followed the time frames indicated, I have within my thoughts and plans followed roughly this over-all scheme for one's growth and development as a preacher. Some thoughts along the way may be of help to others [But I must also note, perhaps not. If not, no cost].

1. Resolve to study and grow as quickly and thoroughly as one can in Bible mastery, good books of special relation to Scripture, and the mastery of one's special talent and ability in preaching.
2. Resolve that in one's marriage, complete trust between husband and wife will always be true; nothing to even hint at marring that trust will be present or tolerated.
3. Resolve to take adequate care of one's family and have this in mind in deciding to preach with this or that church. If the means of such care is not present, be careful to accept that work. Additional work in tent

making may be needed; if so, do it with care and a determination to make every effort to maintain the highest expression of one's ability in local preaching and service.

4. Resolve as quickly as possible, and the sooner the better, that regular savings will be made to prepare for purchase of good books, college expenses for children, insurance and health care, and a home one owns.
5. Resolve to have the best health one can by exercise, control of habits and nutrition, regular rest, maintaining of a hobby or two with proper restraint, and the wisest use of time to meet necessary priorities.
6. Plan on being happy, having a good disposition with family and brethren, and cultivate developing hopes and plans and dreams that may never be, but the very presence of them will enrich one's life.
7. Know when to retire and mean it. Never allow one's own life and words and work to be the cause of difficulties and division in a church or churches.
8. Control one's emotions and mental stability by clean thoughts, frequent prayer, finest of relationship with one's wife, increasing mental exercise in Bible study and related thought developing disciplines.
9. Make sure that as long as you live, you will do your best to serve God and man with a clear conscience, no involvement in brotherhood cliques and factions, be your own man who bows to no one but Jesus in regard to Christian living, preaching, and involvement in matters affecting the Lord's body.
10. Realize that death will come to you, and all of us, in due time; prepare for it in righteousness, believe and do what you preach, and trust God to fulfill his promises of love and care as one sees the end of life in this world drawing near.

ENDNOTES

1. <http://www.americanprogress.org>.
2. <http://medical-librmy.net/sites>.
3. "Here is the patience of the saints: here *are* they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Rev. 14:12".

4. The individuals named, i.e., Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia, as well as "the brethren," are unknown. An interesting study of possibilities about Pudens and Claudia is presented by Henry Alford, Prolegomena on II Timothy Chapter 9 "Excursus on Pudens and Claudia" *The Greek Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968 printing), III, 104-105.

5. Barclay, William, *The Letters to Timothy* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970 edition), pages 252-253.

6. Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon* (2000), p. 291.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

8. Andrew W. Blackwood, *The Growing Minister* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960).

TIME FOR THE FAMILY

JIM WESSON



Jim Wesson was born in Cleveland, OH, in 1951. Jim began preaching at the Toledo Rd. church of Christ in Lorain, OH. He graduated from David Lipscomb College in 1973 and did his first local work in Bradford, PA, and has done local work in PA, NY, SC, OH, and TN. Since March 2002, he has preached for the Lord's church in LaFollette, TN. He and his wife, Dianne (Dart) are the parents of two children, Peter (ETSPM 2003), who preaches in Whitwell, TN, and is married to Miracle (Woodall), and Rebecca Shanahan, who along with her husband, Scott, (ETSPM 2004), is preparing to do mission work in Pohnpei, Micronesia.

And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son! (2 Sam. 18:33)

David was grief stricken over the death of his son Absalom, a son who rebelled against him and attempted to take away his throne. Getting his kingdom back meant very little to him when he thought of the horrifying reality that his own son died in rebellion to God and country as well as to his own father. Would the outcome have been different if David had spent more time with Absalom? David, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), was a failure as a father. He apparently was too busy with the affairs of the kingdom to give the time that he needed to give to his family and he paid a bitter price for it.

How many parents down through the centuries have shed bitter tears over the loss of their children? They were just too busy with more "important" things, and they let their children

grow up without the time and guidance that they so desperately needed. How many husbands have neglected their wives because they were just too busy? How many wives have failed to give their husbands the attention they needed because they were just too busy? The sign across the junkyard of broken homes would read, "These marriages died because of neglect. Other things were 'more important'."

We are hearing a lot today about "quality time" -- that even though fathers and mothers do not spend very much time with their children, they spend "quality" time. One group of 300 seventh and eighth grade boys kept accurate records for a two-week period as to how much time their fathers spent with them. The results were that the average time a father and son had alone together for an entire week was seven and a half minutes.² Hopefully it was a "quality" seven and a half minutes. Many children today know their babysitters better than they do their own mothers. Is this the way God intended for it to be? Does God want mothers to give their children very little time, just so long as it is quality time?

It just might be that there is no more important subject to the happiness and welfare of a home than *Time For the Family*. We want to see the priority that God intends to be given to the family, the things that hinder us from giving the time we should to our families, and then we want to look at some practical steps we can take to give our families more time and attention.

THE PRIORITY THAT GOD INTENDS FOR THE FAMILY

God attaches great importance to the time that parents spend with their children. We see this from the words of Moses to the children of Israel in Deut. 6:6-7.

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Notice the expressions, "sittest in thine house," "walkest by the way," "liest down," and "risest up." The only way that

Israelite parents could fulfill this command was to spend a great deal of time with their children.

When Paul told Timothy, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15), it meant that someone had taken the time to teach Timothy the Scriptures. We learn from other passages that this was his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15).

The book of Proverbs emphasizes the fact that children are to "hear the instruction of thy father and forsake not the law of thy mother" (1:8). That means that fathers and mothers were to take the time to instruct their children. The virtuous woman is one who "looketh well to the ways of her household" (31:27). This involves giving a great deal of time to her household. Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Webster gives the following definition for the word "train": "a. To form by instruction, discipline, or drill. b. to teach so as to be fitted, qualified, or proficient."³ There is simply no way a father or mother can fulfill this command and not give the time necessary to it.

God never intended for children to be treated as an annoyance and an inconvenience that parents were to give as little time to as possible. He intended for parents to spend a great deal of time with their children. A minute or two in passing as the parents are on their way to do something "more important" will not fulfill the responsibility that God has laid upon each father and mother. It makes you wonder why some married couples make the decision to have children when they pawn their raising off on someone else and spend as little time with them as they can.

THINGS THAT HINDER US FROM GIVING TIME TO OUR FAMILY

The greatest hindrance that keeps us from giving the time to our family that we ought to give is simply the fact that our family is not a top priority with us. Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). One of the most valuable treasures is time. People often say about this or that, "I just don't have the time." Yet, in most cases, we find the time for things that are important to us. A man who loves to fish

will find the time to fish in spite of his "busy" schedule. A man who loves to hit that little white ball on the golf course will find the time to do so in spite of everything else that begs for his time, or he will drop everything for three hours or more if his favorite sports team is on television. A woman who loves to paint or work in her flower garden will find the time to do so even if she has to let other things go. However, one thing we must never let go is our family. If our family is truly important to us, nothing within our power will keep us from spending time with our family.

Another hindrance to spending time with our family is pressing matters that, at the time, seem more urgent. It is so easy to let everything else come before our family because, as we see it, "they've got to be done now!" How many mothers have said to their children, often in an impatient manner, "Not now, I've got to clean the house," or "Not now, I'm on the phone." How many fathers have said, "Don't bother me now, I've got to get these bills paid," or "get this report done." Our children get to feeling like they are just a bother, so they start bothering us less and less. The priority that ought to be given to our children was put so well in the words of Ruth Hulbert Hamilton:

The cleaning and scrubbing will wait till tomorrow,
For children grow up, as I've learned to my
sorrow.
So quiet down cobwebs, dust go to sleep.
I'm rocking my baby, and babies don't keep.

A great hindrance to families spending time together is the fact that, in so many households, both parents are now a part of the outside work force. In years long gone by, children used to grow up in constant contact with their mothers because it was considered important for her to stay at home and raise her family. Today, after years of influence by the women's liberation movement, women who decide to stay home rather than work at an outside job are made to feel lazy and unambitious. Yet God still says in His word that women are to "guide the house" and be "keepers at home" (1 Tim. 5:14; Titus 2:5). This is not to say that a Christian wife and mother cannot help to provide income for her family. The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 did so, yet there is nothing more important that she can do than to raise the precious children that God has entrusted to her care.

Does this mean that fathers have no responsibility in this regard? Certainly not. As a matter of fact, they are the ones who are specifically told to bring their children up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). In order to do this, fathers must spend a great deal of time with their children. They dare not have the attitude, "Well, I make the money, and my wife raises the children!" God wants fathers to take an active role in the raising of children, and this requires time.

Some of the worst offenders in this area, when they ought to take the lead in setting the example, are preachers. How can preachers truly be effective in teaching their congregations about the importance of the home and family when they have neglected their families? Even though Noah preached for 120 years before the flood, he was unsuccessful in persuading any of the ungodly people in the world to repent, but he did save his own family (Gen. 6:3; 1 Pet. 3:21; 2 Pet. 2:5). A preacher's first responsibility, after his responsibility to God, is to his own family. It will be little comfort to him to boast that he has preached in twenty-five gospel meetings a year and baptized 1000 people, when he has lost his own children because of his neglect. His wife and children will know if everyone else is more important to him than they are. Paul told the young evangelist Timothy to "be an example to the believers" (1 Tim. 4: 12 NKJ), and preachers today must be an example in spending time with their families.

Another hindrance to families spending time together is that each member of the family is involved in so many outside activities that there is just no time or energy left for the family. A certain amount of outside or extracurricular activities is a good thing and gives one the opportunity to meet and be with other people, possibly even making friendships that will lead to their being brought to Christ, but does a father or mother really have to be involved in every civic club in town? Do the children have to participate in every outside school activity or every organized team sport? Sometimes mothers or fathers are so frazzled from driving their children to this activity or that activity that they are just about at their wit's end. Why not give up a few of these outside activities and simply enjoy being together as a family?

PRACTICAL STEPS WE CAN TAKE

There are many practical steps we can take to ensure that families spend more time together. We need to make it a point to sit down together at the dinner table for at least one meal a day. Children often share things with their parents over a meal that they might not in other situations. Parents need to ask their children how their day went or what was going on in their lives, and make it a point to really listen to what their children have to say. The family dinner table has become a forgotten commodity in this busy age with every member of the family running hither and yon. I can still remember times when I was very young, when my mother would have each of us kids read a few verses of Scripture after supper.

We need to sell all of our television sets but one. (With all of the ungodly programs that are on television today, it is even questionable whether we should have a television at all.) While most of us are not going to get rid of all our television sets, do we really need a television in each room of the house? Something that has greatly hindered families spending time together is that each member of the family is off in his or her room, watching his own television. How can parents monitor what their children are watching when their children are in their bedroom with the door shut, watching their own television set? Would it not be far better for families to agree on some television program or movie they can watch together? Or better yet, turn off the television and play a game together.

Parents and children need to do household chores together. Children need to help their parents with the dishes, yard work, cleaning house, etc. Not only will children learn the value of work, but the time spent working side by side with their father or mother is invaluable. This can often be an excellent time for parents and children to discuss many important matters. Children will often open up to their parents more freely while working side-by-side with them than they would if the parents just sit them down and say, "Let's talk."

Families need to take vacation trips together. The family vacation can often seem like more of a hassle than a time of recreation and relaxation, and hours spent together in the same vehicle with their children may bring feelings of horror to some

parents. Yet the time spent together is worth the aggravation. The experiences shared during such trips are priceless, and the memories will last a lifetime.

In emphasizing the point that parents need to spend time doing things with their children, we cannot overlook the point that sometimes a husband and wife need to get away from their children and do things just as a couple. They were a couple before the children ever came along, and if they totally neglect this aspect of their marriage once the children are born it will have a devastating effect on the entire family. The late brother Andrew Connally once said, "The greatest thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother." That is why it is a good thing for the well-being of the entire family for the father and mother to hire a babysitter at least one night a month and go out and rekindle the romantic flame. Even though much of a couple's life centers around their children while the children are at home, before you know it the children will be grown and gone. If a husband and wife have not spent time just with each other, it will be a difficult adjustment to make when the children are no longer there. That is why spending valuable time with our children means that occasionally we need to spend some valuable time away from them.

Families need to restore the family devotional. Even just a few minutes spent at the close of each day when the family gathers together in the living room or den to read the Bible and pray and sing praises to God will be some of the most valuable few minutes they could ever spend. It is a sad commentary that many Christian families today feel awkward having a family devotional because they have never done it. Fathers and mothers need to get past the feeling of awkwardness, turn off the television, and have a devotional period with their children. The old adage, "A family that prays together, stays together," is still true. Your children may gripe at first, but, when they get older and away from home, they will never forget this. This will also show your children the priority that you give God even when it is not Sunday or Wednesday night.

Families need to attend and participate in the public worship as a family. Every preacher knows that one of the most beautiful and priceless things at the worship assembly is a pew filled with a family that has come to worship the Creator of

heaven and earth. One of the great problems with "Children's Church," besides the fact that there is no Bible authority for it and that adult members of the church have to miss the assembly in order to conduct it (1 Cor. 11:20), is that it takes the children out of the assembly and away from their families. It may be true that younger children will not understand much of the sermon or comprehend all that is taking place. Maybe they will not appreciate the significance of the Lord's Supper and wish they could have some of the "grape juice and crackers." Yet, all the while they are sitting there with their families, even when they are squirming and making commotion, they are learning and absorbing from their parents what worship is all about: that worship is offering praise and adoration to the One who made us and gave us life and sent His Son to pay the terrible price for our sins. This is one of many reasons why it is so important for a Christian to marry a Christian. How can a family worship God together if the father is attending one church, or simply staying home, while the mother is attending a different church? Incidentally, if it is at all possible, preachers need to sit with their families when they are not preaching. Even a preacher's wife needs help with the children during the worship assembly, and the preacher needs to set the example of sitting together with his family.

In addition to worship, families need to serve God together. When a congregation has a service at a nursing home, why cannot the whole family participate? When a congregation has a work day at the building, why cannot the whole family be a part of it? When a congregation is going door knocking for a gospel meeting or a vacation Bible school, why cannot each member of the family who is able go along? Why must every good work that a congregation is involved in be either a "youth" activity or an "adult" activity? Why can't they sometimes be a "family" activity? I agree with the person who said that the best youth ministers in the world are called parents. Some of the most priceless time that parents and children will ever spend together is when they are serving God together. It will have eternal consequences.

Families need to learn to live on less income. This is not to say that families need to live in poverty or just barely get by or that they can never have nice things. This also does not mean that parents should be lazy and not provide for the material needs

of their families (1 Tim. 5:8). Yet, in so many cases, the husband and wife work long hours outside the home so they can give their children the things they never had when they were growing up. In so doing, they fail to give their children the things they did have -- like their PARENTS! Do children really have to be given every material thing they desire? Do they have to have the most expensive sneakers or designer jeans? Do parents have to work to be sure their children have their own car when they turn sixteen, including insurance? Does every dollar of their college education have to be paid for before they even finish high school? So often, mom and dad are working hard to provide these things for their children when what their children really need is mom and dad. A college education can be a wonderful blessing in a child's life, but a far more wonderful blessing is a father or mother who has the time and energy to spend with that child. It also teaches children the value of a dollar when they have to work to help provide some of the things they just "have to have." It is amazing the things children learn they do not need when they have to earn their own money to have them. Material things are nice, but having time to enjoy your family is "priceless."

CONCLUSION

Over 2000 years ago, the Greek philosopher Socrates said, "Could I climb to the highest place in Athens, I would lift my voice and proclaim, 'Fellow citizens, why do you turn and scrape every stone to gather wealth, and take so little care of your children, to whom one day you must relinquish it all?'" Emma K. Hulburt said, "Parents are prone to give their children everything except the thing they need most. That is time. Time for listening, time for understanding, time for helping and time for guiding. It sounds simple, but in reality it is the most difficult and the most sacrificial task of parenthood."

Time has a way of slipping away from us (James 4:14), children grow up far too fast, so if we are ever going to spend more time with the family it has to be now. Someone wrote:

One day you will turn around to hug them...they will be gone...do it now. One day you will turn around to show them some promise of God...they will be gone...do it now. One day you will turn around to show them some treasure of your heart

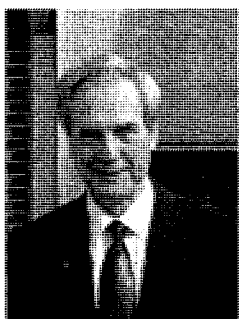
.they will be gone...do it now. One day you will turn around to correct them for some unseemly manner...they will be gone...do it now. One day you will turn around to apologize to them for some selfish mistake you made...they will be gone...do it now. One day you will turn around to enjoy them...they will be gone...do it now. One day you will turn around to guide them...they will be gone...do it now.

ENDNOTES

1. All quotes are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.
2. Phillip Wylie, article in the bulletin of the Sandy Hook church of Christ, Mt. Pleasant, TN
3. Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, 1963, p. 939.

STRUGGLES OF THE PIONEER RESTORATION PREACHERS

CHARLES BROWN



Charles Brown was born in Henderson County, TN. He and Jane (Pierce) have three children; Steven, Tim, and Karen Green, and nine grandchildren. Charles attended FHC (AA), DLC (BA), and Memphis State College (MA). He preached his first sermon in October 1950, and has done local work in TN, NJ, VA, and OH. Mission trips to Ghana and India have been made. He has spoken almost 4,000 times on the radio and has appeared on numerous church and college lectureships. He has taught at FHC and OVC, and at ETSPM since 1991, where he is also Dean of Admissions.

INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century American restoration movement had its beginning with men such as James O'Kelley (1735-1826) and Rice Haggard (1769-1814) in Virginia; Elias Smith (1769-1864) and Abner James (1772-1841) in New England; Barton W. Stone (1772-1844) and "Raccoon" John Smith (1784-1868) in Kentucky; and Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) and Alexander Campbell (1786-1866) in Virginia, now West Virginia. Hundreds of others labored, some well known and others unknown. All of these men wanted to restore New Testament Christianity. They chose to wear the name Christian (Acts 11:26), to have no religious head but Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23), and to have no creed but the word of God (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

The pioneer restoration preachers in the first half of the nineteenth century were individuals, yet they shared common struggles. Our assignment is to explore some of these.

THE STRUGGLES AGAINST CALVINISM

It was John Calvin (1509-1564) who systemized the teachings of Irenaeus (c. 130- c. 202), Origen (185-254), Tertullian (160-220), Cyprian (200-258), and Augustine (354-430) on original sin. Calvinism teaches that man is born totally depraved, that God has unconditionally elected some to be saved, that Christ died only for the elect, that the grace of God is irresistible for the elect, and that the elect can never be lost. A large number of pioneer preachers came out of Calvinism.

Those under the influence of Calvinism were always looking for some direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart to show they were saved, some sign to show they were called to preach, and throughout life some sign they were pleasing or displeasing to God. "Raccoon" John Smith believed that since he was not bitten by a rattlesnake and did not die after being badly gored by an ox, that God was sparing his life to become a Baptist preacher.¹

The New England preacher, Elias Smith, declared he had felt the bitterness of Calvinism from his youth. "The terrible doctrine I held about ten years and then signed acquittance forever."²

A New England co-worker with Smith, Abner James, struggled with Calvinism. Gardner wrote:

Eight-year-old Abner feared death [from Indian attacks] and imagined it all around him. The religion which he learned from his father, far from allaying his fears or offering any comfort, tortured the little boy with the spectacle of the fires of hell that awaited him after the Indians had done their work. Later, he wrote concerning his childhood, "I do not remember that the thought ever passed my mind that religion yielded any joy, or peace."...His only view of Christianity was that contained in fearful doctrine of Calvinism; that all

people are naturally and completely evil from the moment of their birth, that God for no reason other than blind caprice has chosen to save some souls and damn the rest to eternal hell, and that the penitent human beings have no way to reach out to God, but must wait in prayer to receive a gift of grace, an emotional experience, that brings peace and confidence that God had saved them. If the penitent never received this gift, then he knew that God hated him and wished him in hell.³

Barton W. Stone gave his evaluation of Calvinism in these words:

Let me here speak when I shall be lying under the clod of the grave. Calvinism is among the heaviest clogs of Christianity in the world. It is a dark mountain between heaven and earth, and is among the most discouraging hindrance to sinners for seeking the kingdom of God, and engenders bondage and gloominess to the saints. Its influence is felt throughout the Christian world, even when it is least expected. Its first link is total depravity, yet there are thousands of precious saints in this system.⁴

John Mulkey was teaching Calvinism from John Chapter 10 in the home of Davis Sims in 1809 when it occurred to him that Calvinism is not found in this text. He suddenly stopped teaching and sat down.⁵

"Raccoon" John Smith was at Spencer Creek, March, 1822, when "he was urging sinners to repent, and to believe the Gospel."

His mind was suddenly confused with the thought that, if the elect should not believe, his preaching was false, for they would not be damned; and, if the non-elect should believe, then faith would be false, for according to his creed, Christ did not die for them..."Brethren," said he, "something is wrong – I am in the dark – we are all in the dark;

but how to lead you to the light, or to find the way myself, before God, I know not.”

Smith then gave himself to a thorough study of the Bible and God’s plan of salvation and ultimately preached the restoration of New Testament Christianity.

He saw, finally, that the entire superstructure of Calvinism, as he had held and preached it, was based on the notion that moral death destroys man’s free agency. Calvinism, he reasoned, depends at least on the definition of a single term. “What, then is death?” he asked. As the candle burned to the socket of his little stand at midnight – and the peace of a hundred churches hung on his answer to the question!

Christians, too, are said to be dead – dead to sin. Does this death, he inquired, take from them the power to sin? If, then, the Christian who is dead to sin, can nevertheless do wrong, surely the sinner who is dead to righteousness, may nevertheless do right.

When that conclusion was firmly grasped, he felt persuaded that the system which he had so long preached, was but a wind of doctrine without substantial basis.⁶

THE STUGGLE WITH POVERTY

The English people brought to the American colonies their faith, and the Church of England became the state church and its “clergy” was supported by taxation. Upon gaining political freedom, the colonies adopted the Constitution of the United States of America. The First Amendment to that Constitution states: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” Religious freedom had been gained along with political freedom.

In the years following the Revolutionary War, there were unusually strong feelings about giving preachers financial assistance. John A. Williams, in his biography of John Smith, tells

a story about a Baptist preacher named Barnes in southern Kentucky. Barnes rode a circuit of churches on his horse, Old Gray. Drought had made life especially difficult for the preacher and his faithful horse. At one church, a man named McKenzie suggested any who were able might give a little meal or corn to the preacher, for after all, he had preached for many years without any remuneration. Williams adds:

The suggestion was at once opposed by a brother who was zealous for the law and the usage of the church. he argued that the Lord did not tax his children to support the gospel; that he had ordained that it should be dispensed without money and without price; that gifts, by way of compensation, to those who preached it, were apt to puff them up with pride and that though brother Barnes rode some distance to speak to the people, many of them came quite as far to hear him.

When it was suggested that "those who preach the gospel should live of the Gospel," the response was immediate.

But his opponent replied with emphasis, that he was surprised to hear the Scriptures in question quoted as referring to such things as meat and bread; that it was to be understood only in a spiritual sense, "To live of the Gospel," said he, "is to live on the sweet and heavenly feelings which the Gospel produces on those divine things the preacher ought to feel." Old brother Barnes suddenly raised his head, and asked: "But what is Old Gray to do, my brother? He can't live on these sort of feelin's."⁷

Samuel Rogers addressed the lack of financial support for preachers with this assessment.

I never knew more than two or three of the preachers in our ranks, at that day, who supported themselves by preaching exclusively...Both among our preachers and people, there was prevalent a sense of foolish

timidity upon the matter of taking up contributions of money for the ambassadors of God, but the world might conclude that he cared more for the fleece than he did for the flock. The little that we did receive was collected and given to us in a manner so sly and so secret, that the giver often appeared more like a felon than like God's cheerful giver. And we, who were the recipients of those small favors, were ready to jump out of our boots if anyone should hear the money jingle in our pockets. Well do I remember how I used to receive those small pittances from my brethren. When a brother or sister, in telling you good-bye, took hold of your hand in a clumsy sort of way, with the hand half shut and half opened, you might look out for a quarter, or a few cut nine-pences...The people were not nearly so scrupulous about giving anything else as they were about giving money. They acted as if they really thought money was the root of all evil, whose very touch would contaminate the fingers of the men of God. Some persons may take this to be an attempt at burlesque on my part; but I am writing the history of facts, and have not drawn an extravagant picture of the case, by any means!⁸

"Raccoon" John Smith went to Montgomery County, Kentucky, to preach for Baptist churches. They promised him financial help to buy a 100-acre farm. He received almost nothing from any of the four churches. Then, when he renounced Calvinism in 1822 and became a restoration preacher, not a single church or member helped him financially from 1822-1828. the only assistance was from a Mt. Sterling merchant who had compassion on him.⁹

Samuel Rogers attributed some of the failure to assist preachers to the twisting of Alexander Campbell's teachings. Although Campbell believed and taught "the laborer is worthy of his hire," he preached without financial support. Having married into a wealthy family and becoming a successful farmer, he needed no support. Also, his view was that mature churches

should have elders who could teach the flock so that the church should not need a paid preacher. Rogers wrote the following:

Unfortunately there were some who, desiring an excuse for their avarice, seized upon and tortured some of the sayings of the great Reformer [Alexander Campbell] so as to find justification in their withholding of support for the faithful minister of the gospel, who, having forsaken all, had gone forth to preach to a perishing world the unsearchable riches of Christ. Preaching had never been a profitable business to me, pecuniarily; but it had now become, I may say, fairly a starving business. The result was not altogether from the cause alluded to above, but was, no doubt, partly brought about by revolutionary effects of the Reformation. Many churches which, before I preached this apostolic doctrine, were friendly to me, and ready to lend me a helping hand, now turned from me; while others were so engaged with their home troubles, and so discouraged, that they were powerless to do anything toward sending the gospel to the world – or at least, they felt themselves so to be.¹⁰

THE STRUGGLE WITH EXTENDED ABSENCES FROM HOME

The American pioneer preachers were usually everything but “located” preachers. They were constantly answering Macedonian calls from distant places. Only a few of these dedicated men of God could afford to travel by boat or by carriage. Most walked or rode horseback. Their journeys near home may have lasted only a week or two, but others to more distant shores lasted from four to six months.

Alexander Campbell made numerous extended journeys to Virginia, Boston, Tennessee, Louisiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, the Carolinas, and other places. Barton W. Stone was also traveling in Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, the Carolinas, and other states. Samuel Rogers made four three-month preaching tours from his home in Ohio or Indiana to Missouri.

"Raccoon" John Smith traveled constantly from 1826-1828. Then he determined to stay home and farm. But after a year at home, he announced to his wife in January, 1829:

Nancy, I shall work no more! Get whom you please to carry on the farm, but do not call on me! In all the land, there is not one soul to open his mouth in defense of the best cause under the sun! I am determined, from this time forth, to preach the Gospel and leave the consequences to God.¹¹

Nancy agreed wholeheartedly with her husband's decision, knowing she would have to oversee the farm and the children alone. After a year, Nancy pleaded with John to make every effort to come home every week. Often he is said to have stopped without dismounting to drop off soiled clothes and pick up clean ones. On such a hurried visit, Nancy said:

"Mr. Smith," said she, pleasantly, but with a trace of sadness in her voice, "is it not time that you were having your washing done somewhere else? We have attended to it for you a long time."

"No Nancy," said he: "I am much pleased with your way of doing things, and I don't wish to make any change."¹²

During this time, the grain needed to be reaped, but there was no harvester. Her nights were long and troubled, dreaming of unharvested grain and hungry children. On one of these troubled nights, she arose and fervently prayed to God for

strength to labor and endure. The full moon shown serene without and all the fields were silvered with its light. As she walked the floor in her wakefulness, her wistful eye glanced out through her window, and, to her amazement, she saw that her field was already reaped, and every sheaf stood bound and gathered to its stock!¹³

That some neighboring new converts had assisted Mrs. Smith was not unusual according to Samuel Rogers.

I must add that though we suffered and sacrificed much more for the cause of Christ we were advocating than our children can ever appreciate, yet there was a compensating feature that is matter of note. Our families were not left to starve in our absence by any means. It is true they did not enjoy the luxuries in which the families of preachers now indulge, but they were supplied by the benevolent of their neighborhood with the ordinary comforts of life. There was no regular agreement to this effect, but, by common consent, it was understood that the preacher's family must not suffer while he was preaching the gospel to the world without promise of earthly gain. The brethren, in sending to the mill, generally put in an extra bushel or two of corn, or of wheat, for the preacher's family. At hog-killing, there was also remembrance made of the preacher. At sugar-making, there was an extra stirring-off for the benefit of the preacher. In preparing the web for the loom, there was often an extra yard or two of linsey put in for this girl or that, and the same of jeans for the little boy; so that in the long run we got along bravely, considering all the circumstances.¹⁴

It is unlikely that any other pioneer preacher traveled more extensively than Joseph Thomas, known as the "white Pilgrim." He was ordained a Methodist preacher by Frances Asbury and joined with James O'Kelley, Rice Haggard, and others to proclaim the restoration message. He married Christiana Rittenour in 1812 and in 1815, he determined to give all of his time to evangelism.

I sold my possessions in Kernstown, my house, etc., and prepared to travel on foot to preach the gospel...July 6th, 1815, I gave my family to God and to the word of his grace, and started, as a stranger, and yet well known, as a 'deceiver, and

yet true, to preach the everlasting gospel to them that dwell on the earth.¹⁵

Excerpts from the autobiography of Joseph Thomas reveal that in 1815 he was away from home 13 days, preached 23 times, and walked 130 miles. Later that year, he was away 92 days, preached 97 times, and walked over 1,100 miles.¹⁶

His travels during 1816 included being "absent about thirteen days, had preached sixteen times, and walked upwards of one hundred miles." In April and May, 1816, he made two journeys totaling 39 days, preaching 49 times, and walking the whole distance. He purchased a horse July 10, 1816, and on July 13, left for Philadelphia, preaching as he went in Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware. On this journey, he was away seven weeks, preached 51 times, and traveled 700 miles.

In 1817, Thomas traveled in Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, stating:

I was absent about sixty days, traveled upward of one thousand four hundred miles, preached forty-seven times, expended forty-seven dollars, and had two dollars and seventy-five cents given to me. I met with necessities, hard times, and much persecution, and was sometimes greatly dejected in my mind...¹⁷

Thomas continued his travels from 1815 until his death in 1835. He was thought to have contracted small pox in New York City and died in New Jersey at 44 years of age.

Shortly before her husband's death, Christiana wrote a letter about being the wife of the evangelist, Joseph Thomas. A portion of that letter stated:

When I joined him in matrimony, I agreed never to stand in his way in preaching the gospel, and I have reason to be thankful that God has to this day enabled me with all cheerfulness not only to submit, but to aid him by my prayers, in industry and economy, to continue and extend his itinerate labors over the world. He has suffered

much for Jesus' sake for the salvation of perishing sinners, he has sacrificed the world. My song has always went [sic] with him in his arduous and distant travels, has panted high for the prosperity of the cause, has participated in his griefs and trials. Anxieties and solicitude have often spread a gloom over many solitary and lonesome nights. But the success with which God has often attended his labors has so often been to me like a morning without a cloud, and as the brilliant sunshine to my soul. I have gladly suffered with him for the sake of Jesus, and I strongly hope I shall share of his reward in heaven...Let all the sisters who have preaching husbands, whose hearts burn with the holy fire of the ancient evangelist, give them up to God, and be willing to partake of their sufferings that they may share their reward. I remain the Pilgrim's wife, and your sister in the Lord.¹⁸

It took a strong, brave, and dedicated wife and mother of the pioneer preacher to meet the demands and oversee the farm and family in the husband's absence. Christiana Thomas was surely a special wife and mother.

THE STRUGGLES AGAINST THOSE OPPOSING THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

The apostle Paul met opposition to his preaching wherever he went in the first century. The pioneer preachers were also a persecuted people. Elias Smith conducted a meeting starting on September 8, 1808, in Ipswich, Massachusetts when:

several dozen of Webster's [congregation preacher] supporters appeared armed with muskets. Smith and his fellow preachers, unwilling either needlessly to provoke violence or to surrender to the intimidation of the hoodlums, decided to proceed with the meeting at a less inflammatory site in a field some distance away, but the self-constituted militia of religion marched to the new location and started firing their weapons over the heads of the crowd. When the

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preachers still attempted to address their audience despite all threats the defenders of the established order began throwing dirt and potatoes at the Christians, overturned the makeshift pulpit, and finally silenced the speaker by wrestling him to the ground. Pursued to the house where he was staying, Smith had to escape out the back door and returned to Portsmouth glad to be alive.¹⁹

In a letter written by Elias Smith in 1803, he told of interruptions of worship "with drums, fifes, fiddles, trumpets, and whistles..." Guns were fired, stones broke windows, the gate was broken, and they "fastened our meeting house door when we were within..."²⁰

Abner Jones was so harassed in Massachusetts that he "felt compelled to petition the Boston board of selectmen in a letter dated September 6, 1804, for protection from harassment by groups of young thugs."²¹

Thomas and Alexander Campbell felt the sting of opposition. Alexander was refused refuge in a house during a violent storm when the woman of the house recognized his identity.²²

These oppositions to the Campbells continued in many ways!

The bitter prejudice thus existed by clerical influence continued to manifest itself in various ways and for a number of years. Misrepresentations of all kinds were freely circulated amongst the people; friendships were broken off; the ties of family relationships were weakened, and discord of religious controversy invaded the quietude of the most secluded inhabitants...

It happened more than once, that while Thomas Campbell was baptizing individuals who came forward from time to time to unite with the church, sticks and stones were thrown into the water from

amongst the crowd assembled; implications also would sometimes be heard, and even threats of personal violence."²³

John Mulkey lived in McMinn County, Tennessee, from 1826-1832 or 1833 and worshipped and preached in the Spring Creek Church of Christ. During this time, someone posted the following announcement along the road, "Twenty dollars reward for any man or set of men that will whip old John Mulkey and Rees Jones."²⁴

Samuel Rogers describes the actions of "a band of ruffians" who followed some for baptism. The opposition gathered across the stream

and set up such wild, fiendish howls as never before saluted my ears. They cried, yelled, howled, barked, and did everything in their power that fiendishness could invent to destroy the solemnity of the occasion, and make the place hideous.²⁵

Those advocating a return to New Testament Christianity were often referred to by such derogatory names as Campbellites, Stones, and New Lights. All of these names were loaded words accompanied with strong emotions.

THE STRUGGLES FOR AN EDUCATION

Public schools in America had not been developed in the early days of the nineteenth century. Teachers were few and opportunities to obtain an education were limited. Some of the early restoration preachers had university training when they came to America. Among these were Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott, to name a few. Others were able to obtain quality training in America. These included Barton W. Stone, W. K. Pendleton, D.S. Burnet, and Tolbert Fanning.

The vast majority of pioneer preachers had very little formal training, not more than a few weeks, or a few months. Among these were Elias Smith, Abner Jones, Joseph Thomas, "Raccoon" John Smith, Ben Franklin, and Samuel Rogers. In spite of limited formal education, these men sometimes became

teachers themselves and were recognized as scholars. They had keen minds and an insatiable thirst for learning. Most of them would be thought of as "self educated."

Moses E. Lard could neither read nor write when seventeen years of age. He taught himself by learning letters and words from public posters. Lard later graduated with honors from Bethany College. Gardner has the following to say about Abner Jones' thirst for knowledge:

Jones might have been the most thoroughly and impressively self-educated man in America. With his meager public schooling, he yet attained a level of scholarship that few college graduates (or even professors) could approach. In an age when frontier preachers sometimes had difficulty in the use of English, he drove himself to master Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.²⁶

These were men who toiled all day and studied through much of the night. Many of them were to be found reading their Bibles in the fields while their horses were resting. They learned many things, but most importantly, they knew God's word, committing much of it to memory. Formal education was often lacking, but these were far from being uneducated men.

CONCLUSION

Life on the frontier in the early days of the nineteenth century was difficult at best. These early pioneer preachers faced not only the trial of frontier life, but the struggles with Calvinism, poverty, long absences from their families, obtaining an education, plus many, many more. Yet they endured admirably to leave us a rich heritage. Their shining examples should be inspiration for all.

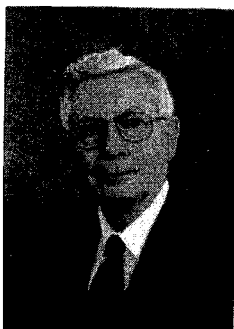
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RESTORING THE WAYWARD

DAVID R. PHARR



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"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).¹ The text is a primary passage on the subject of restoring the wayward. Another, which is parallel in its concern, is James 5:19-20. "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Various approaches might be used in a sermon on this subject, but for this occasion, I want to just use the wording of Galatians 6:1 to outline the lesson.

CONSIDERING THYSELF

This is not addressed to the person who is wayward, but to the ones who are faithful. It is about restoring those who have fallen, but its emphasis is on the attitude of those "which are spiritual." Our feelings about erring members may be disappointment, or disgust, or even anger. About some there may be contempt. Here may be fuel for gossip and maybe

amusement. Paul said that some at Corinth were "puffed up" over the outrageous conduct of one of their members (1 Cor. 5:2). He said they ought rather to be grieving, which suggests that instead of grieving, they were conceited over their own avoidance of like sin.

In 1971, Martel Pace spoke on this at Freed-Hardeman University. He told about a denominational preacher who reported to his board that a member had sinned grievously and had fallen away. In seeking to know which of the men would be best suited to approach the wayward member, he asked how they might have acted in similar circumstances. One man replied, "I am sure I would never have fallen into that sin," and this was typical of the answers given. However, one man said this: "I feel in my heart that if I had been tempted and tested as he, I would probably have fallen even lower." No doubt the preacher was thinking of Galatians 6 when he said, "You are the only one fit to go with me to talk with our erring brother and attempt to restore him to fellowship."²

Faith and confidence in God's grace and Christ's blood assures our salvation and hope, but inordinate self-confidence is foolish. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). Peter was bold in declaring his loyalty, but a short time later he denied the Lord. Satan is always looking for opportunities to "devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). He observes both our weaknesses and our strengths and is ready with enticements. Paul acknowledged this when he said, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27; cf. Rom. 12:3; 15:1; 2 Cor. 10:12). The caution in Galatians 6:3 reinforces the point. "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."

OVERTAKEN IN A FAULT

This means falling into sin. The word translated fault, *paraptoma*, means a transgression. It is interesting that the backslider is described as having been "overtaken." Barnes commentary insists that deliberate sin is not under consideration. A Christian does not take up a life of sin with deliberation. The willful sin of Hebrews 10:26 is the choice to be apostate. Ananias and Sapphira conspired and planned to sin (Acts 5:1ff). The

restoration of such does not seem to be what the present text is about. Other passages show us that any member who seeks forgiveness in penitent confession will be forgiven (1 John 1:9). But it is likely that here the attention is not on a willful apostate, but on one who has fallen into the devil's trap. Whether out of ignorance, or because of passion, or because of being unprepared, this is a brother or sister who has drifted. James speaks of this as erring from the truth. Another translation has it as wandering from the truth.³ In one text, there is the possibility of one being suddenly caught in the snare of sin. In the other the idea might be of one's departure being gradual over time.

What is the nature of the offense? It might be either doctrinal or practical. That is, one may have taken up some spiritual error. Some believe Paul has in mind those who have taken up the Judaizing heresy, as consistent with the context of Galatians.⁴ Actually, doctrine and practice always relate to each other. It matters what one believes, the principles he embraces.

I believe in the importance of church attendance, but it may be that we have let attendance become the main measure of faithfulness, and that missing is the "fault" which we most readily see as evidence that one is wayward. The fact is that non-attendance is often the fruit of other sins. It is also a fact that some who are always present may be unfaithful in the way they live. Being at all the services is not the last word on faithfulness. Near the end of the previous chapter, the works of the flesh are listed (Gal. 5: 19-21). When such things are found in the way one is living, there can be no hope of heaven. "[T]hey which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." The kind of "fault" in view includes any participation in the "works of the flesh."

We know that we all have shortcomings. But there is a difference between perfection and faithfulness. A woman may have to admit that her husband is not perfect, but she can say with validity that he is faithful. Unfaithfulness in marriage means breaking the vows. A spouse may have his imperfections yet be faithful. The wayward brother or sister of the text is not merely someone with shortcomings. It is one who has adulterated his commitment to the Lord. The way James puts it, restoration means saving a soul from "death," which underscores the jeopardy before one who errs from the truth.

RESTORE

We have custom of reporting responses as "baptisms" and "restorations." Some restorations really may not be restorations. We cannot be critical of sincere persons who come before the church for any legitimate reason. Some ask for special prayers because of problems in their lives. Some want to be encouraged to be stronger: Such are responses but not restorations. The text says to "restore." The word is used in Matthew 4:21, "mending their nets." It means to correct what is wrong, to fix what is broken, to bring one back into his proper place. There is a "fault" that needs to be corrected. Restoration has not taken place until there is repentance and forgiveness.

What is meant by restoration? A teen gave an explanation like this: "First, you are baptized and all your sins are forgiven. Then, when you sin some more you go forward during the invitation and you are forgiven again." This sounds rather simplistic, does it not? Of course, the youth learned this from observation of what is practiced, rather than from Bible instruction. Is going down the aisle what the Bible requires in restoration?

James says that those who err from the truth need to be "converted." This means to turn, to turn in the right direction. In the case of the wayward brother, it means to turn back into the way he was going when he was faithful. It is the same word that is used in Acts 3: 19, where it is applied to the obedience in the new birth. It is also the word that Jesus applied to Peter in foretelling his backsliding in denying the Lord and his subsequent restoration (Luke 22:32ff).

There can be no restoration without forgiveness. There can be no forgiveness without repentance. There can be no repentance without godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:10). And repentance is not genuine without what has been wrong being corrected. It appears in some cases that a person has been talked into coming back to the church without any clear call for repentance. We have even known of apologies being made for the faithful in order to satisfy the feelings of an unfaithful person. Repentance is not measured by shows of emotion, but it seems to me that there is a big difference between one who comes back with a casual "I'm back" and the way James defines restoration: "Cleanse your

hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (Jas. 4:8-10).

IN THE SPIRIT OF MEEKNESS

Our reading says, "in the spirit of meekness." The word might also be "gentleness." This is not a term for weakness. It does not mean the kind of softness that makes excuses for sin. It does not preclude reproof and rebuking. What it does mean is that the mission must not be undertaken with harshness, or anger, impatience, or with an overbearing spirit. The goal is restoration. The reward is the saving of a soul from death. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus outlined the process for restoring a brother who had committed a personal offense against another. All cases are not the same and the steps may vary, but the procedure Jesus gave shows important principles regarding how to restore someone "in the spirit of meekness."

First, we see that matters should not be made worse than they already are. "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." Two points can be taken from this. Whether it is a personal offense or some other "fault" that puts a soul in jeopardy, the less public it is known, the less tension there will be in bringing about restoration. Also, there is the point that problems need to be addressed promptly. The error of Simon in wanting to buy apostolic power needed immediate attention and the bluntness of Peter's rebuke was consistent with the enormity of his sin (Acts 8: 18ff).

The second step, when the first has not achieved its goal, is to involve a sufficient number of others. "But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." This has become necessary, but still it is not intended to make the situation more difficult to resolve. The "two or three witnesses" must also be persons who are meek and gentle. A gentle spirit will not want to appear to be "ganging up" on the wayward brother. In too many cases, the restoration effort may be carried on only by the preacher, or by one of the elders, or by some other concerned

brother or sister. It can appear that few are concerned. By involving others the message of caring is accentuated.

The instructions in verse 17 parallel the church's process of public discipline. "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." Paul wrote, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 Thess.3:6). Again, in verses 14 and 15, "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

Withdrawal is not with the purpose of putting one out, but for bringing him back in. It is major surgery, but it is soul saving surgery. It requires firmness, but it is to be carried out with meekness. We might compare how the paramedics must handle an accident victim. It will cause pain for him to be treated and moved, but it is essential for saving life. So, one who must be rebuked publicly and who has forfeited the fellowship of the church may be embarrassed and feel hurt, but the purpose is the saving of his soul.

It should be remembered that when one is restored, he is restored! Probably the penitent who is the subject of 2 Corinthians 2:6-7 is the man whose scandalous conduct is named in 1 Corinthians 5. Hard discipline had been necessary, delivering him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, but when he repented fellowship should have been restored. "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow."

Here also is guidance as to what is required in confessing sin. All sin is to be confessed to God (1 John 1:9). To confess means to acknowledge. The point is not to reveal information, but to acknowledge with penitence what is already known. When we are told to "confess your faults one to another" (Jas. 5: 16), the purpose is not to publicize such matters. Rather, it is to make it known to those who know that repentance has taken place. The

way we have often stated it, is that the sin should be confessed as broadly as it is known. Widely known sin should be confessed publicly. The "sin unto death" is a sin that is not confessed. The reason there can be no prayer for forgiveness for one who is guilty of "sin unto death" is because he has not repented. But how can it be known whether one has repented? "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

YE WHICH ARE SPIRITUAL

The older brother in the parable of the prodigal is the opposite of what it means to be a "spiritual" person, especially in the matter of restoring the erring (Luke 15: 11 ff). He had stayed in his father's house, but he did not have his father in his heart. All three parables in Luke 15 emphasize the joy that should follow the lost being saved. A man asked, "What is the one thing better than going to heaven?" The answer: "Taking someone else with you." The older brother was envious of the attention given to the brother who had come home. He could not rid his mind of his brother's wayward past. He felt more honor was due himself for his own years of faithfulness.

Brother Pace gave the following application on the lesson from the older brother.

The message comes ringing through the ages to you Christian: "see the real love of God and contrast it with your own joyless, loveless and thankless life." Do you really rejoice when the lost come home? When the spiritually dead rise again? Does your heart go out to them in the far country and pray for their return? Do you ever make the excursion to their fallen state and encourage their return showing a brother's love in lending the helping hand?⁵

Spiritual people care about the souls of others. Several years ago, I attended a gospel meeting where James Meadows was preaching. Someone had turned in the following question: "What do you think is the greatest problem facing the church today?" Before brother Meadows gave his answer, I had written on a card, "Complacency." He gave the same answer.

Indifference to the plight of the wayward is proof of not being spiritual.

When his brother left, his father's heart was broken, but not his. His disposition indicates he may have thought: "It's none of my business; if he wants to be lost, that's his problem." The elder brother sought to maintain the institution of the farm for his own personal benefit, not to be used for rejoicing with a fallen brother.⁶

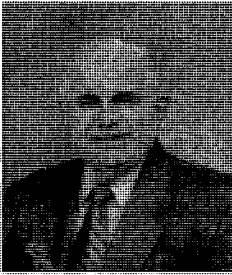
Galatians 6:1 follows instruction about walking "in the Spirit," where there is a list of virtues characteristic of "the fruit of the Spirit" (5:22f). Chapter 5 ends with caution against "vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another." Chapter 6 begins with how those who have the fruit of the Spirit should seek the spiritual welfare of any who are wayward. The epistle to the Galatians has as its central theme the repudiation of legalism. The spirit of a religion that is mere law keeping is not concerned with bearing the burdens of others. "For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matt. 23:4). "The legalist is always harder on other people than he is on himself, but the spirit-led Christian demands more of himself than he does of others *that he might be able to help others.*"⁷

ENDNOTES

1. All Scripture quotations are from KJV, unless otherwise noted.
2. Martel Pace, Freed-Hardeman University Lectures, 1971, p. 177.
3. New American Standard Version.
4. R. Alan Cole, "Galatians," (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1989), p. 224.
5. Pace, *Ibid.* p. 175.
6. Pace, *Ibid.* p. 176f.
7. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Free*, (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1975), p. 140.

PREACHERS WORKING WITH ELDERS

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INTRODUCTION

It is an annual joy to come to Karns and speak on this lectureship as I have done almost every year since 1977. I think I have missed only two or three during this long interval. Gratitude is expressed to James Meadows, the elders, the school and each member for the treasured invitation to speak on this one for 2005 and pen a chapter for the lectureship volume.

MUTUAL RESPECT IS AN ESSENTIAL

I grew up in a congregation that had elders and deacons. My late father served as an elder a number of years in two different congregations. I began to do local work more than fifty years ago. I have worked in this capacity with five different congregations. Each one has had elders. I have participated in 400 gospel meetings and nearly 600 lectureships. Most of these have been at congregations that had elders. Therefore, most of my life has been spent in close association with elders and fellow

preachers. I have now been at Ripley, Tennessee, more than thirty years. Ripley has had elders and deacons all the years I have been with this good and great congregation. One of our elders, Everett Presson, has served thirty-seven years having been appointed in 1968. Four men also serve with him currently.

Elders have a work to do. They oversee the congregation. They shepherd the flock. Spiritually, they rule the congregation. Authority inheres their work. They are **under** shepherds to the great and glorious Head of the church--the Christ--but are **over** shepherds to the congregation that appointed them. Qualifications for them in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1 and 1 Peter 5 touch them in character, reputation, domestic success, ability to lead, competence in defending the truth and the setting of a living example for others to emulate. They oversee the preacher and his work. This prohibits a popular, but wrong practice in some of our congregations, of evangelistic oversight. Preachers guilty of such could stop it quickly if they **wanted** to do what is right! Elders should be men deserving of respect and preachers and members should be **punctual** in conferring such. Yet, too many, far too many, children in our congregations are treated regularly to fried preachers and scorched elders on the way home or around the dining table each Sunday at noon. Preachers and their families sometimes are guilty of such and **this** is inexcusable.

Preachers have a **work** to do. Paul told Timothy to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). Far too many do not associate preaching with any kind of work! Many a preacher's child has been asked, "Does your Dad **preach** or **work** for a living?" Such is not always asked just in fun either! Preaching requires an immense **amount** of study. There is visitation to be done. There are home Bible Studies to conduct. There are people with problems who come to preachers for help. These do not come neatly between 8:00 and 4:00 or 5:00. They may come late at night, when most members are already in bed. There are funerals to preach, and these may come on holidays when families are at his house. There are inquiries to be answered whether by phone, E-mail, letter or face-to-face meetings. There may be radio, TV or internet lessons to prepare. The week I type this, I have three radio lessons, four TV tapings to do - 120 miles from Ripley - and two internet lectures to prepare and conduct. Area gospel meetings and lectureships need his support either in attending or

speaking. He has family duties as does any other husband/father in the congregation. He should be worthy of respect, and elders should lead the way in expressing such. I once served under an elder who never complimented a sermon or Bible Class all the time I served under him. I once quoted a verse and missed its exact location by two verses--Romans 2:9 instead of Romans 2:11. He was quick to tell me of this. I needed to be corrected, but a word of appreciation would have done much good to a young preacher in his early twenties. Elders who read this, do you EVER express a word of appreciation for your preacher? If not, why not?

Respect should be requited or reciprocated. Preachers may be prompt in expressing thanks and exhibiting respect to elders and yet **never** have any by way of return. This is inexcusable as unrequited love. More than once I have been requested to deal with very thorny problems from the pulpit with elders requesting that I do it. Yet when I have done so, very few have been the times when elders followed me publicly with a strong word of approval and support. A thank-you at the back of the auditorium is insufficient! When elders make decisions that are right but unpopular, preachers should be in the forefront in extending support and loyalty. This should be done publicly--not just privately!

ELDERS AND PREACHERS ARE ON THE LORD'S TEAM AND SHOULD COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER

Congregations are composed of imperfect people. Some are old in the faith; others are yet young in the faith. Some have known truth all their responsible years. Others have come out of religious errors deeply ingrained from youth up. Problems will arise. At times they may threaten congregational peace and unity. Public preaching may be required to help solve these. Preachers should be ready and able to do so! Elders should back up **unpleasant** truths when proclaimed. Private meetings may be necessary with both elders and preacher meeting with the ones causing the commotions. Preacher and elders should form a unified team in dealing with said problems whether they touch marital matters, doctrinal errors, bitterness between brethren, laxity in attendance, entertainment evils, drinking, drugs which are illegal, profanity in speech, etc. This is no time for elders and preachers to become alienated from each other thus failing to take a unified, solid stand in solving thorny problems. The good of

the church is at stake. Souls can be saved or lost forever by unwise preachers and elders failing miserably in their respective works.

WITH – THAT PRECIOUS PREPOSITION

There is a bold and wide contrast in preachers working **with** elders and elders working **with** preachers than preachers working **against** elders and elders working **against** preachers. Far too frequently, we have the latter in congregational operations and not the fundamental former. During the honeymoon period, when a new preacher arrives, he cannot say enough good about the elders and they cannot say enough good about their new preacher. Praise is heaped on top of praise between the preacher and the elders. But as the tenure wears on, the preacher and the elders may become like the Ephesians were in Revelation 2:4 – an abandonment of that first love. With ruptured relationships between the preacher and the elders, all suffer—the preacher, the elders, the deacons, Bible teachers and all members. Warmth, harmony and unity, once very prevalent, are all but relics of the past. That precious **with** becomes antagonism, bickering, bitterness and disunity. Why should that **with** not remain permanently and experience a constant growth in mutual love and respect for each other?

Men who have long served as preachers may become elders in their later years. In such a change of roles some even have been heard to remark, "I had not been an elder one week until I hated all preachers!" This should not be said even in jest. The dual work of preachers and elders is filled with too much gravity to reduce such to joking. What if preachers were to say, "I had not been in local work one week until I hated all elders!" Either concept is not "being kind" as we are counseled to do in Ephesians 4:32. This is not practicing the Golden Rule as inculcated by the Christ in Matthew 7:12.

HELPFUL ESSENTIALS IN PREACHER-ELDERS RELATIONSHIPS

Elders should know what the real work of an evangelist is and is not. In my book, Studies in First and Second Timothy, Titus and Philemon, I devote three chapters to "The Work Of An Evangelist" and one chapter to "The Work Of The preacher's

Wife." Both concepts are widely misunderstood, even by some elders and far too many members. Elders should form their attitudes and actions toward the preacher and his work from the New Testament in general and the Timothy-Titus epistles in particular--not from denominational, pastoral guidelines or even the novel views held by too many of our superficial members who have nothing in the way of a grasp of the preacher and his work. Elders should uphold the hands of their preacher much like Hur and Aaron did with the weary hands and arms of a tired Moses in Exodus 17. Elders should be a shield for their preachers when worldly members get upset because their pet sins are exposed and thus begin an avalanche of accusations against both the preacher and his family. It is inexcusable when they turn on the preacher and take it out on his family. Elders should not allow affluent givers to soften up what comes from the pulpit else their contributions will diminish or even disappear totally. This is blackmail and judgment will be hot and heavy on members who practice such and elders who bend to such mercenary machinations. Elders should keep preachers and members informed of their congregational decisions. Elders should be generous in preacher support. An elder who lives in a mansion should be ashamed to move a preacher and his family into a house run down with practically no upkeep of it through the years. **It has happened!**

Elders should allow some time for the preacher to do gospel meetings and speak on lectureships. The Ripley elders have allowed me to preach in over three hundred gospel meetings and over four hundred lectureships in the thirty plus years I have worked under them. We have about eight or ten who can fill the pulpit efficiently when I am gone. An eldership once told a visiting evangelist who had come to preach in their meeting, "We do not allow our preacher to do gospel meetings." He responded, "If the elders where I preach had that policy, I would not be here for this current meeting!"

Preachers should know what the work of elders is. Years ago, I wrote a book, The Elder And His Work, in which I tried to touch the major bases of elders as men, their qualifications, clearing up injurious misconceptions, their authority, eldership background and beginnings, how they are designated, what they owe the congregation, what the congregation owes them, their appointment, appreciation for them, cooperation in

submissiveness toward them, elder-evangelist relationships and some deserved tributes. Preachers should be adept in their knowledge, acceptance and genuine respect of elders in all these awesome areas. Preachers should be an Aaron and Hur, holding up the often weary hands of tried and tested elders. Preachers should stay abreast of what is happening in religious society in general and in our brotherhood in particular, aiding elders to stay well informed. Preachers should encourage elders in every way as long as they remain true and steadfast in that faith most holy. Preachers should teach members to be obedient to elders, to hold them in high esteem due to the work they do, and give the elders a united and peaceful flock over which to shepherd (1 Thess. 5:12-13). Preachers should study how Paul, Timothy and others felt about elders in the first century. Acts 20:17-38. All thirteen chapters of 1, 2 Timothy and Titus should be the constant curriculum of every preacher toward every elder.

WORTHY BIBLICAL EXAMPLES WE SHOULD EMULATE

Elders and evangelists are frequently linked by inspiration. From the eloquent Ephesian epistle we note, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (4:11 emphasis added). Pastors, in this passage, were elders, presbyters, bishops, overseers and shepherds. They are surrounded by preachers and teachers in this verse. Quite likely all these, not just apostles and prophets, were possessive of miraculous powers in view of the context in Ephesians 4:7ff. Spiritually close were elders with these others who imparted the Word of God. In unique unison they all complemented the work of God.

Apostles, prophets and elders were all associated at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Paul's account in Galatians 2 makes mention of James, Cephas (Peter) and John designating them as pillars of the Jerusalem church. It is interesting to contemplate whether these three may have been elders. Peter later said he was an elder (1 Pet. 5:1). Incidentally, Paul listed James before Cephas or Peter. Beevers, in his historic Oklahoma debate with Eldred Stevens, great gospel preacher and truth defender, said in this 1952 discussion that in **every** apostolic listing Peter was always first. Brother Stevens had done his homework; Beevers had not. Brother Stevens promptly went to Galatians 2:9 and showed where James was listed before

Cephas or Peter. Another primacy of Peter's balloon had just been punctured permanently with a crowd stunning declaration to every Catholic in the audience.

Timothy was an evangelist. Paul so designated him as such in 2 Timothy 4:5. Timothy was associated with the Ephesian congregation that had elders. Yet, Paul left Timothy at Ephesus in order that he might "charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:3). Elders are charged with being able to defeat with sound doctrine terrorists and their false doctrines (Tit. 1:9). Yet, elders and preachers can and must work together as mutual defenders of the faith when it is assailed or assaulted. It may well be the case that Timothy was still at Ephesus when Paul wrote 2 Timothy. If so, Timothy is told to do the work of an evangelist where elders were present and operating. This is a rousing refutation of the old Ketcherside-Garrett radicalism that preachers should not be working in such a capacity where elders were present but should be preaching to outsiders. They said gospel is for the world and doctrine is for the church. They said one cannot preach to the church but to the world. They tried to make a difference between preaching and teaching. In a debate with Ketcherside brother G. K. Wallace challenged his opponent to preach to us for ten minutes and teach us for ten minutes and let us see if we can determine when you cease to do the one and do the other! **The challenge was not accepted!** They were against located preachers and yet, I remember hearing Garrett, in the 1950's, locate with a Nashville congregation for an extended gospel meeting and he preached to the church in that meeting. He was not dislocated, at least physically, while in that effort.

Tychicus, a gospel preacher, was sent to Ephesus, a congregation that had elders. This possibly was done to free Timothy making possible his coming with dispatch to Paul in Rome (2 Tim. 4:9,21). Ephesus surely had elders, as we learn from Acts 20:17-38.

Look at how much Paul wrote about elders or bishops to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3 and 5. Paul, herein, recognized how comprehensively close would be the working relationship between Timothy and elders.

Paul left Titus on the Mediterranean island of Crete in order that he might "set in order the things that were wanting, and

ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee" (Tit. 1:5). In subsequent verses he gave the Titus table of eldership qualifications just as he had given the Timothy table of the same in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Titus still could do the work of an evangelist subsequent to the appointment of elders in the various Cretian cities the old Ketcherside-Garrett radicalism to the contrary notwithstanding. As a side thought, Ketcherside and Garrett later traveled 180 degrees from the radical right to the very liberal left. Ketcherside is now dead and knows better. Garrett is still liberal to the very core.

In the opening verse of Philippians 1:1 Paul, a preacher, and Timothy, a preacher, saluted the precious Philippian saints plus the bishops and deacons. It is generally believed that Luke, a gospel preacher, remained at Philippi subsequent to the departure of Paul, Silas and later Timothy. He may have remained there till we have him with Paul's group in Acts 20 during the closing part of the third missionary journey. It is conceivable that Luke could have helped install elders there and remained after they had been appointed. Hence, we have another strong case of a preacher working with a congregation that had elders. Lovable Luke would have worked in happy harmony with the godly elders at Philippi.

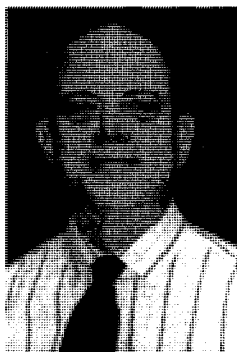
A person may be an elder and a preacher at the same time. Peter was. If James, Cephas and John were elders at Jerusalem in Galatians 2:9, they were preachers and elders simultaneously. G. C. Brewer served in both of these capacities in Memphis before his death in the mid 1950's. So did Gus Nichols at Jasper, Alabama. So does David Jones at Nesbit, Mississippi.

CONCLUSION

Preachers and elders should love each other, respect each other, hold up the hands of each other, defend each other and show the entire congregation the beautiful blessings accruing from a spirit of Christlike cooperation.

GROUP PRESSURE

EDWIN S. JONES



Edwin Jones was born in Atlanta, GA. He and his wife, Sara, have three children. He holds B.S., M.S., M.R.E., and M.Div. degrees from AL Christian School of Religion, and a Th.D. from the Theological University of America. Edwin began preaching in 1968 and has preached in LA, NC, OH, New Zealand, and TN and has been an instructor and Academic Dean at ETSPM. His articles have appeared in *CBT*, *Words of Truth*, *Enduring Words*, *GA*, *FF* and *Spiritual Sword*. He has also authored a commentary on Genesis.

Next to “the Devil made me do it,” group pressure is the most commonly given excuse for sinning. While this excuse is commonly linked with the failings of young people, the temptations generated by groups actually play no favorites. No demographic category is immune from its strong pull. Because of its power, we need to take a close look at this potent force to see what makes it tick. Understanding how group pressure exerts force on our behavior will allow us to more successfully deal with it. In fact, we can even discover how to constructively employ the influence of a group.

NEGATIVE PEER PRESSURE—HOW IT WORKS

Since young people, particularly teens, are so commonly linked with the negative effects of peer pressure, let us begin with them. There are a variety of reasons why a crowd, most especially a peer group, often becomes a negative force in adolescence.

- A lack of maturity makes young people susceptible to sophisticated, though corrupt, points of view (Eph. 4:14; 1 Cor. 13:11).

- The common naïve idealism of youth can reject practical wisdom about the nature of the real world and fall for immature enticements (Matt. 10:16).
- Many sinful adult behaviors exert an almost hypnotic allure to the young, allowing those who have experimented with adult pleasures to be held in high esteem.
- Sexual desire can be at its strongest in the teenage years among those least able to resist its temptation. Frequent exposure to those who flaunt their sexuality is, therefore, quite problematic (2 Tim. 2:22).
- Though envied for their lifestyle, adults are commonly distrusted for being out of touch and therefore ignored, even when they give wise advice and set good examples.

These and other vulnerabilities allow group pressure to wield enormous power. As we have said, however, group pressure is not just a problem for young people; all ages face these challenges to their integrity. What then are common post-adolescent challenges?

- A generally permissive society habitually confronts adults (cf. Gen. 6:5; Jud. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).
- When godly values and behaviors decrease as a cultural influence, as they currently are doing, unacceptable replacements take center stage (Rom. 1:18, 21, 26, 28).
- The distorted gender roles of men and women and the acceptance of homosexuality strongly influence adults to think of toleration in unbiblical ways (Rom. 1:26-27).
- The high-powered, relativistic "showtime" emphasis of postmodernism can dazzle, at times, even the most settled adults and create an appreciation for form over substance (Isa. 53:1-3).

THE CURE

The solution to the unrelenting pressure exerted by the groups we associate with is singular in nature. The level of inoculation needed to sufficiently condition our spiritual immune system centers on Jesus. The degree to which we let Him into our hearts will in direct proportion affect how successful we are in our struggles with all forms of group pressure.

This principle is illustrated by a fact every elementary physics class teaches, nature abhors a vacuum. So does the heart. We will be filled up by something. The thing that fills us rules us. To resist the considerable pressure of the group, we must aggressively seek the cure and be filled up with Christ.

As we consider the application of the spirit of Christ to the general problem of Group Pressure, let us address each of the particular points mentioned above as they apply both to children and adults. Unless the general philosophy of Christlikeness is applied to the realities of everyday life, it will be both ineffective and frustrating.

YOUNG PEOPLE

- The home and the church must accept their respective areas of responsibility to promote maturity. Children must not be allowed to avoid seriously coming to terms with the need to grow up. When allowed to lead an unstructured, undisciplined lifestyle, children will most likely fail to develop a healthy resistance to group pressures (Prov. 22:6; 23:13).
- Youthful idealism must be instructed by the knowledge of Christ and tempered by practicality. Many idealistic notions of the young are ill-founded. Their idealism must be directed to the standard of Jesus. Additionally, while all truly appropriate idealism must never be sacrificed, the application of such principles must have a practical bent. We neither want to sell out or to set ourselves up for failure (Eph. 6:6-9; Deut. 6:4-9).
- The "initiated" among the younger set are to be viewed with caution and their potential negative influence is to be soberly warned against. Those who "grow up too fast" in the ways of the world should be identified and, as much as can be done, led to a more constructive way of life (1 Cor. 15:33).
- Strong sexual desire in adolescence is a very real thing. If we ignore it, we place young people in particularly vulnerable situations. With the ready access to distorted sexuality that is present in our culture, parental restrictions are needed. Visual stimulation seen in movies or pictures, as well as the sexually provocative dress (or undress) that daily presents itself, must not be allowed to

run free course in the lives of the young people for whom we are responsible (2 Tim. 2:22).

- Strong relationships between young people and adults are very helpful. Children do not learn how to become adults from interacting with children. Adult role models are extremely valuable in the formation of mature values that will mitigate against the inappropriate influence of group pressure (Ex. 13:8a, 14a; Deut. 6:20a).

ADULTS

- To offset the effects of our permissive society, wholesome activities and godly relationships are needed. Adults must be proactive in seeking out places to be and things to do that will encourage the development of strong values (2 Cor. 6:1-18).
- Rather than standing idly by while culture disintegrates, a proactive course of action that can make a positive difference will help offset negative group pressure. Idle hands truly are the devil's workshop (1 John 1:7; 1 Pet. 2:12; 1 Cor. 11:1).
- Providing strong role model in ways that honor biblical gender distinctions is a non-negotiable in this gender-distorted culture of ours. Again, proactivity is the key. Marriage must be respected, and strong marriages must be available for all to see (Eph. 5:22-33).
- The razzle dazzle way our society has of displaying everything from toothpaste to lawnmowers has dulled many senses to the value of the simple things of life. We must return to the simple virtues of life, the things that bring true fulfillment. As much as possible, we need to slow down and smell the roses of God's garden of true values. Our lives must demonstrate the value of the things that we say are valuable. Avid participation in the sensually based extravaganzas of this world will only drown out any words that point in a counter direction (1 Thess. 4:11-12; Ps. 1:2; Col. 3:1-17, 23).

A GREAT GIFT

In all the things about group pressure we might single out and hold up to the light of biblical principle, there is one gift we have that is more valuable than anything else. That gift is our

ability to observe the Christ as he walked among us. The Word become flesh is a surpassingly powerful thing.

What do we notice about Him that will help us all to better resist the pull of the world? When we see Jesus in action, what do we see?

- He loved God more than anything else. His focus was always most sharp when the Father's will was considered (John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10). The crowd cannot win when we love God more than even self.
- He knew that a cloistered approach to life was not the answer to warding off peer pressure (Matt. 11:19; 9:11; Lk. 5:1-3). Withdrawal is not the solution to the pressure of the crowd. Positive interaction in service to God's cause lets us influence the people.
- He called things what they were, no "spin" (Luke 7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-24). Satan buys time to do his evil by convincing us that we are "impolite" or "unkind" if we deal truthfully with the wrongs we encounter. He lies! While we are not Jesus, and must be patient and sure of our judgments, we must deal in reality (Matt. 7:6). The failings of those on the broad road are real. Pretending otherwise only allows peer pressure a free hand to do its dirty work.
- He had time for "real" people, but only rebuke for hypocrites (John 4:1-42; Matt. 23:1-39). Involvement in the lives of receptive people gives us meaning and purpose. The crowd will be hard pressed to have its way with us if we are engaged in meaningful, challenging interaction. Additionally, resisting evil will further insulate from harmful pressures (Eph. 5:11-16).
- He was a servant (Matt. 20:20-28). We were created for honorable work (Gen. 2:15). Selfishness gives the crowd its edge, it makes us vulnerable. Selflessness, on the contrary, makes us strong. In service we prove the seemingly odd truth, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).
- He was great even though He had "nothing" (Luke 2:1-20; Matt. 8:20; John 7:14-15). Jesus was not adorned with the finery of men (Isa. 53:1-3). All the things that the crowd clamors for, Jesus lived without.—and He was the greatest man who ever lived! Satisfaction is not found in

what men covet. Knowing this allows us to resist the temptations of the world.

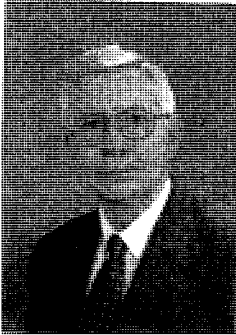
What can group pressure accomplish if we walk closely to Jesus, following His example and trusting in His protection? The fact that He walked among us is huge! Let this one thing be our refuge above all others.

TURNING THE TABLES

Finally, let us consider the fact that group pressure is also powerful in influencing people to do the right thing. That is one reason why our assemblies are so important (Heb. 10:24-25). Working together gives us strength and potential we must not underestimate (Eph. 4:16, 3:20-21). United we stand, divided we fall.

HELPING MEMBERS MATURE IN CHRIST

DAVID R. PHARR



David Pharr was born in Wilkesboro, NC. He attended FHC, Rio Grande College, and SCU. He and Peggy (Bunker) have four children; two sons are preachers. David has done local work in WV, OH, SC, and TN. He served as Director of ETSPM from 1988-1995 and is presently at Rock Hill, SC church, where he had previously served for 25 years. He holds several gospel meetings each year and speaks on several lecture programs. He is a former editor of *Carolina Christian*, current editor of *Carolina Messenger*, regular writer for *Spiritual Sword*, as well as articles for other publications. He has authored six books, including a correspondence course, *Getting to Know Jesus*.

The writer of Hebrews knew he was limited in how he might cover the subject of Melchisedec because of the immaturity of his readers. There are "babes," and there are people "of full age." The disappointment was in the fact that there had been sufficient time for "babes" to have graduated into teachers. Instead, they still needed "milk," the "first principles" (Heb. 5: 10ff).¹ The point is that as time passes every Christian should be maturing spiritually. Thus, the admonition that continues into the next chapter urges that we "go on unto perfection." The wording in the KJV would be better as in the NASB and other later translations, which render it as "maturity."

This is Christian growth. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). It is for the purpose of maturing in Christ that we are to add the Christian graces named in 2 Peter 1:5-11. Likewise, the NRSV gives us Colossians 1:28 as "mature in Christ." Paul's warnings and teaching had the goal of making them "perfect" [mature].

REALIZING THE NEED

We tend to be satisfied with ourselves. Even as Christians, we may assume we are all right just as we are. The Laodiceans felt they were as spiritual as they needed to be (Rev. 3: 17ff). How different was the apostle Paul, who saw the need to guard his own soul. "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27; d. 10:12). Not only did he guard his soul, he was always seeking to be more like Jesus. The purpose of God in bringing us into his family is that we "be conformed to the image of his son" (Rom. 8:29). It is in view of this that the apostle says:

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12-14).

C. W. Bradley gave lessons on "Essentials for Personal Spiritual Development" at the 1989 Freed-Hardeman University Lectures. He observed this about the above text: "The road to personal spiritual development requires a focused life. With Paul, we must say, 'This one thing I do.'" Regarding such a life, he explained that it must be a "channeled life." We must accept that we cannot do everything. Further, it is a "restricted life." "We must bypass many good things in order that we may give attention to better things." Such a life must have a

definite and clear center. This center must dominate the whole of life. We must establish some priorities. We must decide what we consider most important, what we want most of all. We must ask ourselves what it is to which we want to give the best of our time, talents and energies.

Another thing to be appreciated in Paul's determination is that he was not satisfied with the accomplishments of the past. He said, "forgetting those things which are behind." This is often interpreted as putting behind one's life before his new birth. Certainly, one must not admire or long for his days as a sinner. "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." I think, though, that Paul's thought includes his worthy accomplishments of the past. His was no mean record. But there was more to do. We are appropriating the text to emphasize that there is never a time in our flesh life when we can feel we are as mature as we should want to be.

MATURITY IS IN GODLINESS

The Holy Spirit gave particular warning against doctrines that make asceticism the method of spirituality.

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats...(1 Tim. 4:1-3).

Church history tells how Gnosticism led to the notion that depriving the flesh of ordinary pleasures was the way to spiritual maturity. The probable connection of verse 8 is that the kind of discipline that pertains to the body can be helpful in some ways, but that which is truly valuable for now and eternally is genuine godliness. This is in answer to asceticism in that it shows that the measure of spiritual health is not in austerities.

The specifics may vary, but the principle covered in this reminds us that spiritual maturity may be measured by the wrong standards.

Maturity is not in whether our knowledge and participation is greater than others.

Maturity is not in being satisfied that we do not have the weaknesses we see in others. (See Luke 18:11).

Maturity is not in smugness that pretends to be absorbed in what is on a plain higher than the interests and pursuits of ordinary people.

Maturity is not in frequent reminders to others of one's own piety.

Maturity is not in sourness of disposition that keeps itself aloof from the humor and pleasantries found in sociable people. Neither is it merely in a superficial cheerfulness that thinks positively about everything. "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven...A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (Eccl. 3: 1, 4).

HELPING PEOPLE TO GROW

When Peter wrote of growth, he named "grace" and "knowledge" (2 Pet. 3:18). Christian growth is twofold. It is easier, perhaps, for us to help people with the knowledge aspect. Facts can be communicated, passages explained, doctrines expounded, and error exposed. If people are willing to learn, prepared teachers can help them to be continually growing in their understanding. It is certain, however, that people may take in considerable knowledge without having enjoyed a corresponding growth in "grace."

What is it to grow in grace? Grace on God's part is his unmerited favor. What we do serves neither to increase nor decrease that grace. In the first chapter of the epistle, Peter gave an octave of spiritual excellences, which we often refer to as the "Christian Graces." It is the pursuit of these qualities that makes us more Christlike. It was, and is, the grand purpose of God's grace that we be "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). Growing in grace is becoming more and more like Jesus.

But there is more in this than self-improvement. The gospel is not merely a guide for better living. This grace shows itself outwardly, but it is essentially within. Alexander Maclaren put it like this:

So then, if you are a Christian, you ought to be continually realizing a deeper and more blessed

consciousness of Christ's love and favor as yours. You ought to be, if I may so say, nestling everyday nearer and nearer to His heart, and getting more and more sure, and more and more happily sure, of more and more of His mercy and love to you.³

There is a danger that we may so sanitize our religion that it becomes little more than intellectual exercises and routine rituals. We do not want emotionalism, but we may become emotionless. We want a comfortable religion, one without tears of either sorrow or joy. It can be a kind of sterile spirituality. For example, we know it is our duty to evangelize, so we seek methods on how to reach people. Paul explained the how and why of his outreach program: "We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak" (2 Cor. 4:13). His faith was so real that it could not be concealed. I remember a spiritual song that was popular fifty years ago. The singer tells how he overcame his timidity regarding spiritual things.

Well, I said I wouldn't tell it to a living soul,
Just how salvation had made me whole;
But I found I couldn't hide the love of Jesus in my
heart.

The success of Paul's mission was in the *grace* that filled his heart. "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10).

Still, the intellectual side of growth is an absolute essential. It is possible that some may really enjoy their religion without knowing much of what it is about. It is the activities, the spiritual buzz words, the excitement. But the Lord cannot be known without knowing the Book that reveals him. Jesus said one reason some fall away is that they have no root. Someone described "spurt and sputter" religion like a car that starts off with a spurt of power but soon sputters and dies. When Christians do not grow in knowledge, they will "run out of gas." Paul cautioned against running and fighting "as one that beateth the air" (1 Cor. 9:26). There is too much religion that is beating the air; there is

little of substance to it. The Christian race must be run "with patience" (Heb. 12:1f). That endurance is not possible without an ever growing knowledge of and appreciation for the written word.

The sad reality is, however, that in spite of numerous teaching advantages our people seem less informed. Part of the problem is lack of appetite. Another part of the problem is that classes and pulpits are serving too much junk food. Some are serving poison! Some rarely get past baby food. I am not among those who denigrate teaching from the book of Acts, but as important as the conversion stories are, there is more to Scripture than the primary steps of obedience. I have long tried to impress people with the fact that the entire Bible is for our edification and that the more we examine every part, the more we will see that it helps fill out the picture of God's redeeming grace.

CONSEQUENCES OF NOT GROWING

It is not accidental that the admonition to grow immediately follows a warning against falling. Having referred to the writing of Paul, Peter says:

As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness (2 Pet. 3:16-17).

The point is that to keep from falling, one must always be growing.

Just as muscles unused deteriorate, so it is only by continual exercise in godliness that we can continue to be strong. A standing stream stagnates. You cannot stand in one place on a moving treadmill. You must either keep moving forward or you will quickly fall backwards. One who assumes his maturity is at the same level that it was a year ago is mistaken. One who does not daily seek to be closer to God, more Christlike in heart and character, more knowledgeable in the holy word, may feel as

satisfied as the Laodiceans. But it is that very feeling of satisfaction that will lead to his ruin.

ENDNOTES

1. All Scripture references are from the KJV unless indicated otherwise.

2. pp.27f

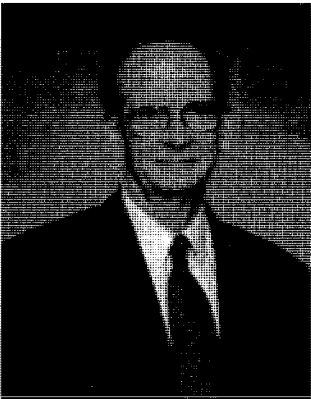
3. *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol. 16*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, reprinted 1982), p. 235.



SECTION II
SPECIAL STUDIES

LONELINESS

JIM DEARMAN



Jim Dearman, native of Smithville, TN, is the program director of the Gospel Broadcasting Network. A graduate of UT with a degree in communications, he also attended Memphis School of Preaching and earned his Master's from Alabama Christian School of Religion. He has preached in AL, TN, and TX. He directed the Malaysia School of Preaching and taught at the Memphis School of Preaching. Jim began the Sound Words radio program in 1976. It later expanded and became the Truth for the World. He still participates as a speaker for Truth for the World radio and television.

How many times has a song or book expressed the thought of loneliness? Loneliness is not merely a word songwriters and authors use; it is a debilitating emotional condition that far too many in our society experience. If one doubts the accuracy of that statement, let him go to the Internet and conduct a search using the word "loneliness." He will be overwhelmed by the volume of material dealing with the subject. It is a pervasive problem in our society.

How, then, is loneliness defined, and how may it be confronted and conquered? Does God's Word provide principles that will produce solutions to the problem of loneliness? These questions will form the basis for this study.

What is loneliness? The dictionary initially defines it simply as "being alone." However, it is possible to be lonely without being alone, and it is possible to be alone without being lonely. Therefore, it would be more accurate to define loneliness as the feeling on the part of an individual that no one really cares

deeply and genuinely for him, and that he has no one to whom he may turn for help.

On one occasion in David's life, when Saul was determined to kill David, even "the man after God's own heart" expressed such a feeling. He cried out from the cave: "Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me: refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul" (Psa. 142:4).

How many people today feel such loneliness and despair? Tragically, they are too many to number, and no one who is thinking clearly relishes being in such a state. Aristotle wrote: "No one would choose a friendless existence on condition of having all the other things in the world." The author, Pearl S. Buck, wrote: "The person who tries to live alone will not succeed as a human being. His heart withers if it does not answer another heart. His mind shrinks away if he hears only the echoes of his own thoughts and finds no other inspiration."

While the descriptions and definitions of loneliness may vary, there is one word always associated appropriately with the condition--that is, "loss." Where there is loneliness, there is loss. First of all, there is a loss of laughter; the lonely individual derives little or no real enjoyment in life. Secondly, there is loss of love; the lonely person feels unloved and, at times, incapable of loving himself with the healthy self-love God desires for us to possess. Thirdly, when loneliness is chronic, it may lead literally to loss of life, either through physical self-abuse and neglect, or through suicide.

Is there a solution for loneliness? At the outset of this study, we affirm that the ultimate cure for loneliness is found in the Lord. The "perfect law of liberty" can free one from the shackles of loneliness and despair and allow him to rejoice in the Lord, despite the discouragements and disappointments that inevitably come from dealing with the problems and personalities of this world.

From the beginning, God intended for man to have fellowship with Him and with those created in God's image. After creating Adam, God declared that it was not good for man to be alone. He determined to create a human helpmate who would

complement the pinnacle of God's creation. This is not to say that only the married man is complete before God. We know of those in Scripture, such as Paul, who chose not to marry and who devoted himself to the Lord's service. However, in doing so, Paul, though unmarried, still enjoyed fellowship with God and with all those of like precious faith in the kingdom for which he ultimately gave his life.

All who live a considerable period of time here on earth will suffer loss. The crucial question, then, is this: How will we react to the losses that will inevitably come? Relationships may be permanently severed by factors over which we have no control. A sudden change in circumstances may thrust us into new situations physically and socially. The attitude with which we face such changes in our lives will determine how successful we are in facing them. The key to avoiding prolonged loneliness after loss lies in the Scriptures; it begins with an understanding of the most important relationship of all – our relationship with God.

People were created with a two-fold need – fellowship with God and companionship with other humans. This is clear from Genesis 2:18: "And the Lord God said, *"It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him"* (NKJV). Adam and Eve enjoyed the ideal relationship in the Garden of Eden until Satan convinced Eve that she did not need God's favor and fellowship. Both she and Adam soon realized, however, what the weeping prophet later expressed: "The way of man is not in himself" (Jer. 10:23). Man cannot direct his own steps. Man has been slow to learn this truth, and today, manifold problems result from man's unwillingness to conform fully to God's pattern for productive and peaceful living.

All one has to do is to look around him to see that he is not alone. As the psalmist declared, God's creation reveals His glory and, to a certain degree, His goodness toward man. Paul so affirmed in Acts 14:17: "Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Again, in Romans 1:18-20, Paul noted that the Gentiles were without excuse in their rejection of the God of heaven. He wrote:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven
against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of

men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

Jesus, in pointing out that God sends rain on the just and on the unjust, reminds us that some of God's blessings are bestowed upon all mankind. The discerning observer will recognize these blessings and pursue a more perfect knowledge of the provider of such blessings. However, far too many are like the proverbial pig that eats the acorns and never looks up to see the tree from whence they come. Then, tragically, many who do consider the physical blessings in creation and acknowledge God's existence, still fail to seek the greater spiritual blessings that come through His complete revelation—among those blessings, the ability to confront and to conquer loneliness.

The great prophet Elijah provides us with a clear example of how God's revelation enables us to resist loneliness and its potentially devastating effects. It is ironic that, on the heels of a great victory over the false prophets of Baal, this great man of God temporarily lost his perspective and had to be reminded that he was not alone and that God had more work for him to do. The account of Elijah's battle with the blues is found in 1 Kings 19:1-18:

And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword.

Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do *to me*, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time."

And when he saw *that*, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which *belongs* to Judah, and left his servant there.

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I *am* no better than my fathers!"

Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise *and* eat."

Then he looked, and there by his head *was* a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again.

And the angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise *and* eat, because the journey *is* too great for you."

So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord *came* to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

So he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, *but* the Lord *was* not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, *but* the Lord *was* not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, *but* the Lord *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

So it was, when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice *came* to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

And he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

Then the Lord said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. It shall be *that* whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (1Kgs. 19:1-18).

Who could deny that the news of Jezebel's threats were disappointing to Elijah? However, the great prophet allowed his disappointment to turn to despair. Elijah's view of reality had become distorted by his deep feeling of loneliness, and he needed revelation from above to re-focus his thinking, to revive his spirits, and to resume his God-given mission. The application is obvious. Without God's revelation man is not only lost, but lonely in the worst way; he is without God in this world and without hope for anything good in the next world.

Of course, today, God's revelation is available through His Word. It furnishes a man completely for every good work, and it gives man the prescription that will cure loneliness when it rears its potentially debilitating head. It is not a miracle cure, but a cure confirmed by miracles and available to all who will read and follow its directions. Yet, tragically, most people turn to every other source rather than to the divinely given revelation of God to man.

Earlier it was noted that with loneliness there is loss--a loss of laughter, of love, and, at times, of life. Virtually overnight, Elijah's loneliness produced loss of the first two of these qualities; and, if he had been granted his desire, it would have produced the loss of the third. Shortly before this time, one might have heard laughter in Elijah's voice, as he mocked the pathetic prophets of Baal with these words: "Cry aloud, for he *is* a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened" (1 Kgs. 18:27). There had been a healthy love for God, along with a healthy self-love, that had allowed Elijah confidently to confront the pretenders on Mount Carmel. However, now, under the broom tree, he is begging to die, affirming that he is no better than his fathers, an expression of self-pity and lack of self-respect.

It is only after his encounter with God's messenger that the picture changed for Elijah. First of all, the angel told him to eat. Could it be that Elijah's downcast spirit was produced, in part, by fatigue and lack of food? Certainly, he had tried to put as much distance between himself and Jezebel as possible in the shortest time; therefore, it is conceivable that his weakened physical condition may have contributed to his pessimism.

In 1 Samuel 14, Saul charged the Israelites not to eat any food until the Philistines had been defeated in battle; but Jonathan, Saul's son "had not heard his father charge the people with the oath; therefore, he stretched out the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his countenance brightened" (1 Sam. 14:27). The people informed Jonathan of Saul's command; but he said:

My father has troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance has brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines? (1 Sam. 14:29-30).

Poor nutrition not only affects one's physical health, but it, certainly, may have an impact on a person's emotional and mental well-being. While purposeful periods of fasting for spiritual reasons may have a beneficial overall effect on a person, the

continual neglect or abuse of one's body has an opposite result, and is also contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture. Paul wrote: "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1Cor. 6:19-20).

Every child of God has a responsibility to keep himself ready to serve the Lord fully with his body and his mind. He should never purposely hinder his effectiveness by harming his health.

The second event that changed Elijah's perspective and lifted him out of his loneliness and despair took place at Mount Horeb. Here, Elijah came to realize the situation in Israel was not as desperate as had thought. God manifested to Elijah His majesty, His mercy, and His mission for Elijah. It was just what Elijah needed to awaken him from his spiritual slumber and to allow him to return to active duty as a soldier of the Lord.

Today, God manifests His majesty, mercy, and mission for us in His Word. In the law of the Lord is found the remedy for the complaint, "No one cares for my soul." God cares, and His care culminates in the Christ, who died, so that those who avail themselves of His sacrifice may never be alone again. Such assurance, knowing that God will never leave us or forsake us, should enable us to deal with any earthly or material loss.

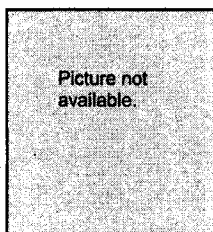
In the church, we also have those who have not bowed the knee to Baal and who may edify and encourage us in our journey through life. God's Word, also, provides us with instructions for combating loneliness, by becoming involved in the lives of others and not withdrawing from them. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

A young boy was listening to his parents tell about his grandfather, who, after the death of his wife, had come to live with one of his children. The young lad sat quietly as his parents told of his grandfather's terrible loneliness. Suddenly, the boy said, "I know why he's lonely. He never goes upstairs." He meant, of course, that his grandfather was spending too much time alone in his downstairs room, away from other family members. The little boy was quite perceptive; he recognized the importance of

involvement with others. There is a more important sense in which all need to “go upstairs.” In our lives, when loss occurs and loneliness lurks, we can overcome them by ascending to the throne of God through the privilege of prayer that comes with obedience to His Word.

"DO NOT WORRY": THE ANTIDOTE FOR ANXIETY MATTHEW 6:25-34

DAN CHAMBERS



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In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus calls those who subject themselves to God's rule to be wholeheartedly devoted to God. He is to be our first priority. His words are "*seek first His kingdom and His righteousness*" (Matt. 6:33).

As we seek to make God our number one priority, the Lord informs us that we face two very common barriers -- materialism and worry.

In verses 19-21, Jesus talks about the barrier of materialism. We have a tendency to be loyal to the material things of the world. Some of us just cannot let go; our heart has been captured by "stuff" (Matt. 19:21).

In verses 25-34, Jesus discusses the barrier of worry. Whole-hearted allegiance to God is short-circuited by anxiety, or worry.

To those facing the obstacle of materialism, Jesus says, "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.*" This is not to be understood as an absolute prohibition against making sensible provision for the future. The Bible clearly teaches that

wise people will make sensible provision for the future (Prov. 6: 6-11). Nor is Jesus advocating poverty as a means of spirituality. Jesus simply means do not put your emphasis on material things.

DO NOT BE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR LIFE

To those facing the obstacle of worry, Jesus says, *"Do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on."* Just as *"do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth"* must not be understood as an absolute prohibition against making sensible provision for the future; *"do not be worried about your life"* must not be understood as an absolute prohibition against having reasonable concern for your needs and the needs of others.

In other words, Jesus is not saying, "I want you to be completely apathetic about your life. I want you to be completely indifferent about your life-needs. I do not want you to care one whit about your needs." The point that Jesus is making is that we do not need to fret about even the bare essentials of life.

The English word "fret," I think, captures what Jesus is saying. Our word "fret" comes from the Old English word "fretan" which meant "to devour." Jesus is saying, in effect, "Don't be devoured...worn away...consumed with concern for even the basic necessities of life."

Why would we be consumed by concern for the basic necessities of life? Because common sense says that the basic necessities of life -- the bare essentials of living -- are the most important things in life. If any worry is legitimate, common sense tells us that worry about the bare essentials of living is legitimate worry. Common sense says, "If you are going to worry about anything, worry about those things."

But why would Jesus say that we should not be devoured, or consumed, with even the bare essentials of living? Because, He says, those things are not the most important things in life. Look at the last few words of verse 25: *"Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"* When we are devoured with concern over these things, it reflects the belief that these things are of ultimate value in life.

Jesus is working on priorities here. He is trying to cultivate a sense of priorities in listeners where even the bare essentials of life are not given our ultimate concern. He is trying to cultivate in His listeners the conviction that God and His kingdom must be our ultimate -- that is, our first -concern.

A life consumed by the concern for material needs will of necessity lack commitment and devotion to the kingdom of God. When you are fretting over material things, you are focusing entirely on it. And when your focus is entirely on those things, there is little room left in your heart for kingdom matters.

After telling us not to worry, Jesus provides us with the antidote to anxiety and reminds us of the futility of fretting. Let us take a look first at what Jesus has to say about the futility of fretting.

THE FUTILITY OF FRETTING

Being consumed -- being devoured -- by worry has no real benefit to your life. In fact, it does not make a single positive contribution to the quality or quantity of your life. It achieves absolutely nothing.

Take a look at verse 27: *"And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?"* Some translations say worry cannot add a single "cubit" to your height or stature. But the Greek word that is translated "stature" refers to the length of life, or life span, not one's body size.

"But," someone may be thinking, "isn't a 'cubit' a measurement. So, doesn't 'height' fit the context better than 'lifespan?'" Actually, it does not fit the context better. Jesus is trying to show that worry cannot make the *slightest* positive contribution. A cubit was equal to about 18 inches, a foot and a half. That is not slight. And for most of us, it is not really desirable to have 18 more inches of height. Jesus is obviously using the word 'cubit' as a figure of speech. Worry cannot add anything to your lifespan.

Our culture is obsessed with trying to lengthen life. We exercise, we watch what we eat, we supplement our diets with vitamins or other supplements, we get regular checkups, and we

do many other things just to add a few more days to our lives. These things have some value when done in a reasonable way, but worry has no value at all.

In fact, medical evidence points to the damaging effects of worry and anxiety, possibly resulting in an actual shortening of one's life. Dr. Charles Mayo, of the famous Mayo Clinic, wrote, "Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands and the whole nervous system. I have never met a man or known a man to die of overwork, but I have known a lot who died of worry."

THE ANTIDOTE FOR ANXIETY

So, what is the antidote to anxiety? Jesus says that it is faith. Take a look at the last words of verse 30: "*You of little faith!*"

Faith always overcomes anxiety and fear. Anxiety is a sign of little faith. In Matthew 8: 18-27 we find the familiar story of Jesus stilling a storm at sea. I am sure most of you remember most of the details. Jesus and His disciples are in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is exhausted and sleeping in the back of the boat. A massive storm develops and the disciples are terrified for their lives. "*Save us, Lord; we are perishing!*" they exclaimed in verse 25.

Jesus first responded to their terrified pleas for help with a mild rebuke. "*Why are you afraid?*" He asked in verse 26. And then He answered the question Himself when he said, "*you men of little faith.*" They were fearful because they were faithless.

This does not mean that they were completely without faith. That very day they had been with Jesus and witnessed miracle after miracle. The fact that they cried out to Jesus suggests that they thought He could help them some way. It means that Jesus expected their faith and trust to be deeper than it was. A deep faith would have driven out the fear and anxiety.

And then there is Matthew 14:31. Like Matthew 8: 18-27, the setting is in the middle of the Lake of Galilee. And, like Matthew 8:18-27, another violent squall has popped up. This time, however, Jesus' disciples are alone in a boat; Jesus had arranged to meet them on the other side of the lake.

Matthew tells us that about the *"fourth watch"* – some time just before dawn between the hours of 3:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. – *"Jesus came to them walking on the sea"* (Matthew 14:25). To make a familiar story a little shorter, Peter climbed out of the boat at Jesus' invitation and began to walk toward Jesus on the water.

Before he got to Jesus, however, he was distracted by the storm, became frightened, began to sink and cried out, *"Lord, save me!"* (Matt. 14:30). Now look carefully at verse 31: *"Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'"*

Mark those words of Jesus very carefully, *"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"* The antidote to fear, doubt, and anxiety is faith. If we are going to overcome the barrier of worry we must increase our faith. That is Jesus' point in Matthew 6:26-30. He is saying, in effect, *"Replace your worry with faith, realizing that your Father in heaven knows what you need and that He can and will provide."*

Jesus uses two examples from nature to convince us that God is interested in taking care of us and that He is able to do so.

First, He calls our attention to the birds. We can learn a great deal from nature. He says, *"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than they?"* (Matt. 6:26).

He says that birds do not plant and they do not harvest, but God ensures that their basic needs are met. Unfortunately, this illustration has been misunderstood by some. Some have pressed it too literally and have come to the conclusion that disciples of Christ have no need to work. They do not need to plant, and they do not need to harvest. They just need to sit back and let God drop food on the table, and then just marvel at how God takes care of them.

That is nothing less than absurd. That view is in error. It goes against the entire teaching of Scripture which might be best summed up in 2 Thessalonians 3: 10: *"if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either."*

Jesus' point is not that we do not need to work. Birds do not wait for God to drop food in their beaks. Anyone who has observed birds is impressed with their diligence and persistence when foraging for food. Birds expend a great deal of energy hunting or searching for their food. They spend a greater part of their time and energy finding food for themselves, their mates, and their young.

But they do not worry about where their next meal is coming from. They gather food until they have enough, then they go about other bird business until the next meal. Some birds store up food, but those birds are driven by instinct, not worry.

Jesus' point is not to guarantee health, wealth, and the absence of trials. It is simply that we are more valuable than birds, so we can rest assured that God will providentially provide our needs. Being absolutely convinced of that truth is the antidote for anxiety. In His second illustration from nature, Jesus calls our attention to the lilies of the field. He says:

Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more cloth you? You of little faith! (Matt. 6:28b-30).

When Jesus referred to the lilies of the field He may have been using "lilies" as a general term for the great variety of wild flowers that beautifully grace the rolling hills of Galilee. Jesus says that these flowers do not work. They are not involved in the process of preparing clothes, yet look how God adorns them. They are magnificent.

The beauty and splendor of God's creative clothing for the flowers surpasses even what Solomon, with all his wealth, could provide for Himself. You might want to turn and read 1 Kings 10:14-27 to remind yourself of the wealth that Solomon had at his disposal to adorn himself.

Despite the incredible beauty of these flowers, however, they do not last long. Along with the grass of the field, they are alive one day, and the next they are thrown into the furnace. "Furnace" is better translated "oven." It refers to something made out of hardened clay and used mostly to bake bread. When a woman wanted to hurry the baking process, she would build a fire inside the oven as well as under it. Fuel for inside was usually composed of dried grass and flowers gathered from nearby fields.

The point of Jesus, again, is that if God gives that kind of care and attention to something as fleeting as grass and flowers, He will certainly be responsive to our needs. That is the antidote to anxiety -- faith. Faith always overcomes anxiety and doubt. Anxiety is a sign of little faith.

A CLIMACTIC EXHORTATION

As we get ready to close, take a look at Jesus' climactic exhortation in this passage: *"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own"* (Matt. 6:33-34).

Here He sets out the positive attitude that is required if we are to have the kind of faith that overcomes worry. He says, *"seek first His kingdom and His righteousness."* Without this attitude we will inevitably be subject to anxiety. Contentment and calm will come when we are seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness first.

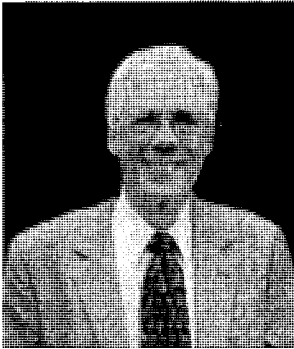
God's kingdom can refer to His sovereign rule or the subjects that He rules over. Here I believe it refers to God's sovereign rule. To seek first His kingdom is to seek first His rule and His will. I believe seeking His righteousness speaks of seeking to obey His will too.

When Matthew uses the term "righteousness" it seems to usually have the sense of doing the will of God. For instance, when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, He said that it was being done *"to fulfill all righteousness"* (Matt. 3:15). That is, it was a part of God's will that Jesus be baptized by John the Baptist.

So, seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness is a command to be wholly devoted to doing the will of God. And if we will do that, God has graciously promised to take care of our most essential needs. Stop worrying and have faith in God's promises.

ANGER

RAY W. GANN, SR.



Ray Gann is a native of Newnan, GA. Upon graduation from high school (1950), and after a brief period of military service, attended DLU. In 1954, he began his preaching career with the Ft. Valley GA church of Christ. He has since served churches in OH, FL, and KY. He presently is minister of the Cherry Grove church of Christ in Weir, KY, and preaches in four gospel meetings annually. He also speaks on lecture programs, VBS, Youth Camps, etc. In 1993, he served as a substance abuse counselor for the state of GA in the Mental Health Dept. Ray and his wife, Sue, reside in Greenville, KY. They have two living children and six grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

Aristotle said, "Anyone can become angry. That is easy. But to be angry with the right person to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose and in the right way, that is not easy."

Alexander The Great conquered kingdoms, but the mighty king could not win his personal battle with anger. One day in a fit of anger, he threw a spear and killed his best friend, Cletus, after he (Cletus) had insulted him before his soldiers. His guilt was so great until at one point he tried to kill himself with the same spear that killed Cletus. Day after day, he would lie in bed and call out the name of his best friend. He could not get the murder of his best friend off his mind. Even though he had won many battles and ruled much of the civilized world, he was unable to win the battle with his own spirit. He was defeated by anger.

Who among us has not become angry, lashed out verbally or physically just to hurt; sulked and pouted, wallowing in self-pity; made a fool of ourselves in a temper tantrum or controlled our behavior but became resentful and bitter, or responded to a person or circumstance with controlled anger and as a result a hurtful, harmful situation was averted. Welcome to the human family! All of us get angry at times, it is an emotion shared by the human family. It can happen anywhere and at any time. Wherever people are, just wait long enough and you will see anger. The Bible has much to say on the subject and each of us should profit from the study before us.

We shall approach our study with the following methodology: (1) Conflict management; (2) What causes angry feelings? (3) Man's natural response to anger; (4) The Bible and anger; (5) Anger, the bad and the good; (6) God's ideal method for handling anger; (7) Sounds complicated to me.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Basically, conflict is mental struggle, resulting from incompatibilities or opposing needs, drives, wishes and external or internal demands. Conflict is inherent in man and his relationships. It has been a part of his existence since Adam and Eve and will be until time is no more. It is natural and normal and no one is exempt from the experience. We may not recognize and call these experiences conflict, but such is the case regardless. Paul speaks often of his conflicts (Phil. 1:30; Rom. 7:15; Col. 1:29). The components of conflict are fluid, moving around and not stationary. They are like volcanoes and cancer – they are often active when they appear to be dormant. The biblical concept of heart includes man's intellectual, rational, volitional and emotional activity. Since a part of man's nature is his heart (emotions) and he is expected to serve God with his heart (Luke 10:25-28; Matt. 15:8; Eph. 5:19; Col. 2:23), it becomes very important for a person to learn how to identify, experience and work through his emotions while simultaneously serving God through various means. Anger is a powerful emotion and, of all human emotions, it appears to be the most commonly expressed. Before it destroys us, we must learn to manage it.

WHAT CAUSES ANGRY FEELINGS?

Time and space will not allow a long list of the causes. However, the few listed here should aid our understanding. We must not forget that anger is an emotion fixed (inherent) by God in each of us. The use or misuse of this powerful emotion can either be a blessing or a curse, depending on the manner in which we process it. Uncontrolled anger has wrecked the lives of many. On the other hand, anger that is identified and processed (managed) has contributed greatly to the security and well being of many individuals as well as to others. God in His book (James 4:1) has set forth the real reason as to why we have such a great problem with the emotion of anger. This passage teaches us that anger is the result of desires that battle within us. Simply speaking, you want something but do not get it. This base for anger is practiced in a variety of combinations. For example: someone is doing something you do not want them to do, or they are not doing something you want them to do, or they are not doing something in the way you want it done. Maybe something is not getting done fast enough or getting done too fast. Someone has offended or wronged you, or violated your rights. Maybe you are frustrated over something you cannot change. Regardless of the reason, anger can and must be managed, especially by the person who claims to know the Lord. An out-of-control Christian is an offense against God, himself, and the church.

MAN'S NATURAL RESPONSE TO ANGER

Man, by nature, responds to anger in two different ways. The first and most dramatic is the explosion, capable of wrecking havoc and leaving paths of destruction. The second is the implosion, internalized anger. This method is more subtle and sometimes slower, but it can be just as devastating and deadly. The explosion is easily recognized, for it is always accompanied by some type of violent behavior, such as kicking, hitting, and gouging. However, we cannot ignore or dismiss the wounds inflicted by the violent tongue (James 3:6). During an explosion of anger, some people who recoil at the thought of bringing physical pain to others do not hesitate to land a barrage of verbal abuse that causes more emotional and mental damage than any physical blow and with more lasting effects. Remember, explosion usually has one objection in mind: to hurt! And even if this is not the aim, it most likely will be the result. All too often we

seek to justify our angry explosion with such excuses as, "Well they made me mad...Of course I did that, but you should have heard what they said to me...I may have, but I was mad." Some schools of behavioral science not only justify angry explosions, they encourage them by teaching to go ahead, explode and: (1) Get it out of your system. You can never explode anger out of your system. You may get even and even feel temporarily relieved, but the problem remains. (2) You will feel better. You might, until you realize that no one else does, and you have to deal with the mess you have made. (3) Just direct it in a way that does no harm. Just pretend that a pillow is the object of your anger and hit, kick, stab, and scream at the pillow until your anger is drained. Sounds good, but in essence you are committing mental violence or murder. Explosions are never harmless and what is more, they do not solve problems. Your temper may browbeat someone into letting you have your way, but you have not solved the problem. Internalized anger is frequently more difficult to recognize than explosive anger, even though it is every bit as painful and certainly just as dangerous. It is like a festering boil. The pressure builds in internalized anger, and the pain increases until it is no longer bearable. Then it erupts into an exploding volcano or a seeping sore of resentment, bitterness, and hatred. We must forever be alert to unresolved anger in our life because it is a killer!

THE BIBLE AND ANGER

Surely we would not expect God to endow us with the ability to be angry and not give us some examples, warnings, instructions, and admonitions to guide us as we deal with this strong emotion. He has not disappointed us. Please note a few observations, especially from the book of Proverbs. The Bible teaches that anger *per se* is not a sin (Eph. 4:26-27). It also teaches that anger can be cruel (Prov. 27:4). The Scripture teaches that anger can cause one to lie, be malicious and deceitful (Prov. 10:18; 11:1; 12:22). The Bible teaches that anger stirs up dissension (Prov. 10:12; 29:22; 30:33). The Scriptures teach that anger causes quarreling (Prov. 19:13; 21:19). The apostle Paul also addressed this subject (2 Tim. 2:14, 23, 24; Titus 3:9-11). The Bible teaches that anger results from too much time together (Prov. 25:17). The Scriptures teach that anger may be difficult for a brother to process (Prov. 18:19). As we might expect, the Bible is replete with many passages regarding anger.

Strong's Concordance of the Bible lists some 235 (KJV) passages. It says some eighty times that God was angry. It also states that our Lord was angry (Mark 3:5), as well as many Old Testaments worthies. We would do well to listen to God and learn as He speaks to us on this vital subject.

ANGER, THE BAD AND THE GOOD

Anger is a powerful feeling with great potential for evil or for good. Remember, a feeling is energy, and energy is force, but force must be directed properly to accomplish any good. Hence, it is with anger. First, may we note anger that is misdirected and the result of it. Anger reveals the animal nature in man. Some folks who are kind, charming, and decent often turn into beasts when angry. It also sets brother against brother (Gen. 4:5-7). The elder brother was angry and would not go in (Luke 15:28). Some of our brethren become angry and quit. Anger intercepts the better judgment of men. Moses, in his anger, smote the rock instead of speaking as God commanded (Num. 20:10-11). Naaman, at first refused a certain cure because he was angry (2 Kings 5:11). Anger possesses a retaliatory spirit. When the three Hebrew children crossed Nebuchadnezzar's path, he ordered the furnace be heated seven times hotter (Dan. 3:19). It is also infectious (Prov. 22:24-25). Anger causes people to lose the joy of living. The joy of Cain had been destroyed by anger (Gen. 4:6). Anger results when we discover we are not adequate for the task. Two men begin a sensible discussion but one becomes angry when he becomes inadequate to meet the argument. We must avoid, at all costs, allowing anger to control us. We have the ability to be its master, and God expects us to be so.

Thus far in our study we have emphasized the negative or bad side of anger. It is rather difficult for us to admit that anger can have a positive side, but when identified, processed, and controlled, it can be a blessing to ourselves as well as to others. Peter teaches us that Jesus left us an example (1 Pet. 2:21) to follow in all matters of life and living. Both Paul and Peter taught us that Jesus knew no sin (Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22). It is evident from the scriptures that upon certain occasions, our Lord was angry. It is interesting to note that He was angry but did not sin. Note from the scripture some occasions where it is said He was angry or where it is certainly implied. In Mark 3:1-5, we have the record of the healing of the man with a withered hand on the

Sabbath. The Pharisees criticized Him for doing so. But why was He angry? In John 2:13-17, we have recorded the occasion where our Lord drove the money-changers out of the temple. His actions certainly indicate that he was angry, even though it is not stated. In Matthew 23:13-16 Jesus, four times, pronounces a "woe" against the Pharisees for their hypocritical ways. Do you detect just a little anger in his words? Other instances could be cited, but these will serve to illustrate the truth that our Lord possessed the ability to be angry. Keep in mind that He knew no sin; therefore, it must be possible to be angry and not sin. Christians need to learn the difference between righteous and sinful anger. If we but study the instances in which Jesus was angry we can get a good idea of exactly what righteous anger consists of. When innocent people are fleeced and taken advantage of for gain in the name of religion, it should anger us. It did Jesus! When God's Word is openly disobeyed and sin is flaunted, it ought to make us angry. It did our Lord! When God's name is profaned, it should anger us. It did our Master. When we see people mistreated by others, anger is the proper response. If such actions made God and Christ angry, they should also make us angry. Please know that angry feelings can work for you, if identified and processed. If ignored, such feelings can bring you and your loved one misery and pain. Unfortunately, not all my anger is of a righteous sort. Sometimes when we get angry it has nothing to do with God. It has to do with our selfishness, pride, and jealousy. Selfish, self-centered, self-serving anger has no place in the life of a Christian. Self-serving anger can ruin a wonderful event.

GOD'S IDEAL METHOD FOR HANDLING ANGER

The first and most effective of God's methods not only deals with the angry feelings, it prevents most of them. It could be called the "New Man or Replacement Method." The basis of this method is taught in Romans 6, where Paul teaches that the old you was buried in Christ, and the new you has a new life to live and a new way to behave. Ephesians 4:22-24 gives specific instructions for implementing your new life. Scientists refer to this method as Behavior Modification. It teaches you to quit doing one thing by doing something in its place. God has used this method for centuries. It goes like this: "quit lying by speaking only the truth" (Eph. 4:25); "get rid of your anger, rage, slander and brawling by being kind, compassionate and forgiving" (Eph. 4:31-

32). If you have a problem controlling your anger, try God's method. It really does work.

SOUNDS COMPLICATED TO ME

If managing anger or any other conflict sounds complicated and difficult to you, you have not misunderstood our lesson at all. It is exactly that complicated and difficult. I would not want to leave you with the impression that conflict management, and especially anger management, is simple and requires little thought or effort. It is time-consuming and requires a great deal of honesty and discernment. Without the help of God and His Word, you are sure to fail. However, with the help of God, prayer, and the assurance of our Lord, you can manage whatever conflict is ruining your life (Phil. 4:13)

ADDICTION

LONNIE SMITH



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Addiction affects many people and is very prevalent in our society today. It is an intimate attachment to something to the point that it enslaves the person to respond to whatever the attachment may be. It could be a substance, an event, a person, or a behavior. The common thread is that the person is enslaved by his or her particular attachment. Some have said that addiction is a spiritual homelessness because it is spiritual and religious. That is, the addicted person makes some thing or someone bigger than himself or herself and responds in a religious way. Society applauds many common addictions such as shopping, entertainment, exercise, or overeating.

FACTORS THAT CAN LEAD TO ADDICTION

The family is important to the emotional health of adults as well as children. Stressful situations, such as the disordered family, can lead to addiction. The trauma of divorce, the death of a spouse or a child, the effects of major illness, the isolation due to a relocation, or even children growing up and leaving home can all be factors in becoming dependent upon drugs, alcohol, exercise, shopping, eating, etc. to escape. Often, people turn to

alcohol or other substances to fill the emptiness, but only God can truly fill the emotions of a person.

Lack of self-esteem can lead to addiction. Self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves. Children growing up in troubled families tend not to feel good about themselves. They feel that they must be the problem and have a great sense of guilt and responsibility. When self-esteem is very low, the person feels a sense of failure.

Adults and teens both need healthy self-esteem; however, adults frequently cover up this need. Adults tend to derive their self-esteem from areas outside the family, particularly from careers. In our success-oriented society, a major cause of adult loss of self-esteem is the feeling of failure as a spouse or as a parent. Addiction masks the pain of failure.

Addiction is like a sickness in that it can spread insidiously from person to person through peer pressure. No addict has ever said, "I really want to get hooked on something," or "I want to be a drug addict." Adults can be more subtle than adolescents in exerting peer pressure and so may find it more difficult to say, "No." When was the last time you bought something that you absolutely did not need from a pushy salesperson? Neither adolescents nor adults want to appear "uncool" and so often strive to "keep up with the Joneses."

A lack of morals and spiritual values may also lead to addiction. America is living in a post-Christian era, according to the late Frances Schaefer, although 80% of adults polled in the U.S. by George Gallup claim to be Christians. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also." In the 1980s, the treasure of most Americans was pleasure and wealth. Even the church embraced this in some congregations.

STEPS LEADING TO ADDICTION

There is typically a progression of steps that lead to addiction, from experimentation, to occasional use, to regular use, and finally to full-blown addiction.

1. Experimentation. This is where it all begins. If a person does not try drugs, he or she will never

become addicted. Many people do try drugs. Fortunately, many stop after just a few experimental times because they find they do not like the feeling that a drug produces or do not like being under its influence. During the experimentation phase, the person learns that the drug can provide a temporary mood swing or euphoria. He or she learns to trust the drug and its effects, and hence the beginning of a relationship with the substance. These steps are true of any addiction: learning, feeling, and trusting.

2. Occasional use. Here, a person uses the drug at an appointed time or place. He or she develops self-imposed statements such as, "I don't drink until after 5:00 p.m." At this point, the person can usually control the time, amount, and outcome of the drug use.
3. Regular use. At this point, the person begins to experience loss of control over his or her addiction and can no longer maintain self-imposed rules, violating his or her own value systems. This begins a downward progression of emotional pain, guilt, increasing anger about himself or herself, emotional turmoil, and finally projection of that anger toward others. The person now develops a tolerance to the substance, which leads to ingenuous ways of getting, using, and keeping, such as sneaking drinks or hiding the drug stash. At this stage, the person undergoes deterioration of health, emotions, spirituality, and his or her family life.
4. Full-blown addiction. At this stage, the substance abuser feels normal rather than just getting a high. He or she has frequent loss of control and memory due to drug binges. Tolerance to the substance increases even further, and the addiction has reached a point where the person is using drugs simply to survive. Once a person is addicted, the addiction becomes the center of his or her life. Everything else takes second place to using or acquiring. The drug now provides the person's meaning and purpose in life.

SUBSTANCES THAT CAN BE ABUSED

Other behaviors that can become addictions, such as overeating, gambling, shopping, workaholism, cultism, exercise, and hobbies, are just as damaging as alcohol or drug abuse. All addictions are uncontrollable or compulsive behaviors that are damaging to the body, soul, mind, and spirit. "Your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). It is significant that our society tends to judge these forms of addiction less harshly than substance abuse. Some people can hide their addictions more easily than the drug addict can; therefore, they can appear more socially accepted. Addiction affects the physical body through damage to health and ultimately death. It affects the mind or soul through guilt, anxiety, fear, and depression. It affects the spirit through not having a close, vital relationship with God or family members.

Alcohol, when consumed in excess, acts to depress the area of the brain that controls behavior. While under the influence, the user experiences slurred speech, blurred vision, impaired muscle coordination, confusion, and impairment of memory. Alcohol intoxication interferes with the normal inhibition that keeps us from dangerous, harmful, and illegal activities. The majority of crimes and acts of violence are committed under the influence of alcohol. Alcohol is the most dangerous of any psychoactive drugs because it is a toxin that damages the body's muscles, nervous system, and major organs, including the brain, liver, heart, bone marrow, and reproductive system. Heavy drinkers are more likely than nondrinkers to die from cancer of the mouth, throat, or digestive tract. Over 600 people die daily in the United States from alcohol, either directly or indirectly.

Caffeine is a stimulant used as a mood-altering drug found in coffee, tea, soft drinks, and chocolate. It has two major effects on the body: release of adrenalin and neurotransmitters. The release of adrenalin is the fight or flight reflex that causes us to be more alert and have more energy. The release of neurotransmitters is the norepinephrine that causes mental stimulation. One can become addicted to caffeine if one drinks more than five cups of coffee or its equivalent per day. This represents an intake of approximately 500 mg of caffeine. Caffeine withdrawal symptoms usually occur in the morning and

include lethargy, grouchiness, headache, and sleepiness. Symptoms are dramatically relieved by drinking coffee or soda.

Nicotine is the active ingredient in tobacco smoke and is the most overlooked addicting drug. In fact, it is now considered to be as addictive as heroin. About 27% of the adult population are regular smokers. Nicotine acts as a stimulant to the brain and affects the muscles, working as a muscle relaxant. Nicotine withdrawal causes anxiety, headaches, nausea, insomnia, irritability, lightheadedness, inability to concentrate, an intense craving for cigarettes. These symptoms can last weeks, months, or even years in some cases. While nicotine itself is dangerous, tobacco smoke is even more harmful. Cigarette smoking is a major cause of death and disability, contributing to pulmonary and cardiovascular disease. Almost 1,000 people die each day from the effects of tobacco smoke, directly or indirectly. Most people who become addicted to other drugs first start with tobacco as teenagers. The converse is also true.

OVERCOMING ADDICTION

The 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous remains an excellent framework for recovery, regardless of the type of addiction a person is experiencing.

1. Admit we are powerless over alcohol, that our lives have become unmanageable.
2. Come to believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.
3. Make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand him.
4. Make a moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admit to God, to ourselves, and to another person the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Be entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly ask God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Make a list of all persons we have harmed and become willing to make amends to them all.
9. Make direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure others.
10. Continue to take a personal inventory, and when we are wrong promptly admit it.

11. Seek, through prayer and meditation, to improve our conscious contact with God as we understand him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Have a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps. We try to carry this message to alcoholics and practice these principles in all of our affairs.

Another series of steps is also associated with the 12-step program:

1. Admit hopelessness. A person says, "I can't control the drug; the drug controls me." In Psalms 51:4, David says "Against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." Paul admits his hopelessness in Romans 7:19-20, "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."
2. Commit your life to God. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). In John 6:37, Jesus tells us "All that the father gives me will come to you."
3. Self-examination. The psalmist cries out in Psalms 139:23-24, "Search me O Lord and test my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts." Scripture tells us to examine ourselves. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates."
4. Let God change you. "O Lord my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me" (Psalms 30:2). "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God; or whether we be sober, it is for your cause" (2 Cor. 5:13).
5. Live responsibly and be accountable.
6. Grow spiritually. (2 Pet. 3:18).
7. Help others (Matt. 25:35-46).

Practical advice for those struggling with addiction includes:

1. Recovery from addiction is a life-long process, not a one-time event. One must work one's program in a step-by-step process.
2. One should get help from a qualified person and not try to do it alone.
3. One should not give up if a relapse occurs. It is never too late to get back on track (1 John 1:7).
4. One must depend on God's strength and power (Phil. 4:13).
5. One must stay away from the addictive agent. Bad company corrupts good character (1 Cor. 15:23).
6. One must have confidence in God and take time to pray daily.

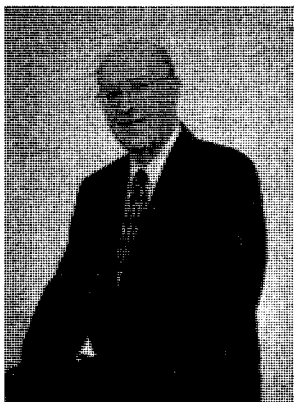
HOW TO WORK WITH THE ADDICT

1. Have the right attitude. This means one should not be judgmental and keep an open mind to the person's problems.
2. Get the facts about the addiction. Study and understand what is driving the addiction.
3. Confront at the appropriate time and place.
4. Ensure that the addict takes responsibility for his or her actions. Many family members become enablers to the addict, but what the addict needs is tough love. He or she needs to go to work their program, not you.
5. Seek counseling. The whole family is affected by the loss of trust and normalcy. Usually, when the addict gets better, the family is worse off than the addict himself. The whole family needs counseling.
6. Seek resources that are able to help.

Addiction is very prevalent in our society and is in many forms. We must make sure that Christ is Lord of our lives and that we respond to him. Paul said, in 1 Corinthians 6:12, "Let us allow the love of Christ to control us."

RESENTMENT AND BITTERNESS

HUGH FULFORD



Hugh Fulford has been preaching the gospel for over 50 years. He served churches in KY, TN, AL, and TX for over 40 years. He preached in an average of 4-5 gospel meetings each year, spoke on numerous college and congregational lectureships and carried on an extensive writing ministry. He has spoken in 21 states and four foreign countries. Now semi-retired, he preaches for the Laguardo church of Christ in Wilson County, conducts gospel meetings, speaks on lectureships, and writes. He has had many articles to appear in the *Gospel Advocate* and *The Spiritual Sword*. He had his wife, Jan, live in Gallatin, TN. They have one son and two grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

The Christian life is a walk with God. From one's baptism into Christ, he is raised to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4).¹ In his walk with God, the Christian must constantly strive to "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). It is not enough simply to be doctrinally sound; one must also be sound (the word indicates "healthful") "in faith, in love, in patience" (Titus 2:2). Every child of God must be deeply committed to having the Spirit of Christ, because "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8:9). In the context of Romans 8, Paul is discussing the Holy Spirit. To have the "Spirit of Christ" is "to be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5: 18); it is to demonstrate "the fruit of the Spirit...in all goodness, righteousness, and truth" (v. 9).

No one will be fully pleasing to God just by being a member of the right church and conforming to the correct

doctrinal pattern. The Lord also expects His people to live changed lives -- lives different from the ones lived prior to conversion. Each of us must, therefore, devote ourselves to the development of the very mind of Christ Himself and to an authentic demonstration of the fact that God's Holy Spirit is dwelling in us and animating our every attitude and action. Yet, "the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things you want" (Gal. 5: 17). Through appeals to our fleshly appetites, Satan seeks to lead us from the path of holiness. Thus, we must constantly be on the alert "lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11).

Two inter-related "devices" that Satan frequently uses on Christians are resentment and bitterness. Let us examine these un-Christlike dispositions, see them for what they are, and explore some principles that will help us to overcome these emotionally, physically, and spiritually destructive attitudes.

DEFINITIONS

1. **Resentment.** According to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, the word "resentment" does not appear in the English versions of the Bible. (It may appear in some modern speech translations). *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines **resent** as "to feel indignantly aggrieved at (an act, situation, or person)." **Resentment** is defined as "indignation or ill will felt as a result of a real or imagined offense." Resentment refers to the ill-will and suppressed anger generated by a sense of grievance. Synonyms are anger, rage, fury, ire, wrath, and indignation. Of course, it is possible to feel resentment and indignation in a righteous way -- for example, seeing the mistreatment of someone or something dear and worthy. In this lesson we shall be looking at the negative, destructive, and sinful qualities of resentment.

2. **Bitterness.** In his commentary on Ephesians, A. Skevington Wood says, "Bitterness is the opposite not only of sweetness but of kindness. It is the spite that harbors resent and keeps a score of wrongs."²

Vine points out that **bitter** comes from a root (*pik*) which

means "to cut, to prick, hence, lit., pointed, sharp, keen, pungent to the sense of taste, smell, etc..."³

Bitterness can refer to a literal substance such as food, water, medicine, etc., and it can have a metaphorical use to describe a person's attitude and demeanor. For example, we might speak of "a bitter old man."

Obviously, neither resentment nor bitterness is a complimentary attitude. They do not exhibit the mind of Christ nor reflect His spirit. If one laid the works of the flesh alongside the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 19-23) and was asked to place bitterness and resentment in one of the two categories, there is no doubt in which list they would be placed!

THE DESTRUCTIVE NATURE OF RESENTMENT AND BITTERNESS

In Genesis 25:29-34 we have the story of Esau, in a moment of weakness, selling his birthright to his younger twin, Jacob. Later, through a deceptive process contrived by Rebekah, Isaac gave to Jacob the blessing he had intended for Esau. When Esau saw what had happened "he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry...And Esau said, 'Is he not rightfully named Jacob [supplanter]? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing'" (Gen. 27:36-37).

From a human standpoint we can understand why Esau would feel such resentment and bitterness toward his brother. This attitude led to many years of alienation between the two. The positive side of this story is that years later they were reconciled, and, surprisingly, it was Esau who showed the magnanimous spirit. On Jacob's return from Syria to Canaan, "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept" (Gen. 33:4).

In the New Testament Christians are warned "lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and by this many be defiled" (Heb. 12: 15). Leon Morris, commenting on this verse, notes:

A "bitter root" is a root that bears bitter fruit. The metaphor is taken from the growth of plants. Such growth is slow, but what is in the plant will surely come out in time. So it is possible for a seed of bitterness to be sown in a community and, though nothing is immediately apparent, in due time the inevitable fruit appears. It will certainly "cause trouble."⁴

Paul instructed husbands to "love your wives and do not be bitter toward them" (1 Cor. 3:19). To all Christians he said: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:31-32). On this passage Warren Wiersbe wrote: "**Bitterness** refers to a settled hostility that poisons the whole inner man. Somebody does something we do not like, so we harbor ill-will against him."⁵

GUARDING AGAINST RESENTMENT AND BITTERNESS

All people, including Christians, are susceptible to resentment and bitterness. The person of God must strive diligently to avoid these destructive attitudes.

Preachers must guard against resentment and bitterness. If one preaches long enough he will suffer mistreatment (either real or imaginary) at the hands of his brethren. He then faces two choices: allow resentment and bitterness to take over and control him, or do what General Robert E. Lee is reported to have told a southern lady whose big beautiful oak tree had been butchered by Yankee soldiers -- "cut it down and forget it!"

Elders and deacons must not allow resentment and bitterness to infect them. All the members of a congregation will not always follow the lead of the elders or cooperate with the deacons. Patience and kindness are needed in the place of resentment.

Members of the church should not be bitter and resentful toward the elders, deacons, preachers, and teachers. Christians should understand that the leaders of the church are sincerely

seeking to do their best. Members need to be kind, considerate, and cooperative toward and with their leaders.

Husbands and wives must not become bitter toward one another. Parents should not be resentful of their children, nor should children be resentful of their parents. Christian parents have the best interests of their children at heart. Restrictions are imposed on children by godly parents to protect them. Christian young people should not resent these restrictions.

All of us must be careful not to allow the natural flow of human life to embitter us. All people face disappointments, financial reversals, divorces, loss of health, and the death of friends and loved ones. The father of a young man had a severe heart attack. The young man prayed that his father would not die, but the father did die. The young man blamed God for the death of his daddy and stopped going to church.

A number of years ago an exceptionally able gospel preacher experienced the trauma of an unfaithful wife, and ultimately a divorce. For a while, he continued to attend church and to preach. But in time, he became extremely bitter and resentful. When I tried to talk to him about his spiritual well-being he let me know, in no uncertain terms, that he was not interested in such a conversation and that he had found more comfort in the writings of an agnostic than he had found in the Bible. He further let me know that he no longer had any use for the church of Christ!

The daughter of a gospel preacher graduated from high school and left home to attend a well-known School of Music. She immediately stopped attending the services of the church. She claimed that she had lived in "a goldfish bowl" at home and had always resented having to go to church. After obtaining her degree, she became a member of a large city's symphony. She met and married another member of the symphony. Later, when two children were born to them, she decided that she wanted them to have some religious training, so she started taking them to church. When the local minister visited her, she said to him: "I didn't ask Jesus Christ to die for me, and I wish He had not. Then I would not feel so obligated and guilty!" Talk about deep-seated resentment and bitterness!

OVERCOMING RESENTMENT AND BITTERNESS

There are steps that all of us can and must take both to avoid and to overcome resentment and bitterness. We will note some of them.

1. Put on Christ. Paul urged, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts" (Rom. 13:14). In this passage, the apostle is not talking about putting on Christ in baptism (cf. Gal. 3:27); the Roman saints had already done that (Rom. 6:3-4). Rather, he is exhorting them to "put on" the mind and demeanor Christ -- that they conduct themselves as those whose "old man was crucified with Him" (v. 6), and therefore as those who "do not let sin reign in your mortal body. that you should obey it in its lusts" (v. 12). It is akin to Peter's advice when he instructed younger Christians to "be clothed with humility" (1 Pet. 5:5). Christ was totally free of bitterness and resentment. He "committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth; who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:22-23). When we clothe ourselves with the mind of Christ, we too will be free of resentment and bitterness.

2. Love. "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy...does not behave rudely...bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7). If we have Christlike love we will love even our enemies. Rather than harboring resentment and manifesting a bitter attitude, we will "do good to those who hate you, and pray for those spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 6:44). Have you ever felt "used" and taken advantage of? Instead of trying to "get even" with those who mistreat you, be kind and forgiving toward them. Remember Esau's forgiveness of Jacob. Better still, remember God's forgiveness of you! (cf. Eph. 4:32).

3. Remember that as Christians we are all members of one body (1 Cor. 12: 13,20). A body that is at war with itself is bound to self-destruct. Cancer cells in the human body, if not detected and placed into remission, will destroy the body. If Christians are bitter and resentful of each other, the spiritual body of Christ will be destroyed. James wrote: "But if you have bitter

envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth...For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 4:14-17). Love for the church, the body of Christ, will keep us from those attitudes and actions that would destroy that body.

4. Be content. Much resentment and bitterness are spawned by jealousy. When those whom we deem unworthy of such nevertheless prosper and succeed we become jealous of them and discontent with our own situation. We then begin to resent the good fortune of others. While we should always seek to accomplish the most we are capable of accomplishing, we need to learn to be content and rejoice in the success of others rather than being resentful of them. "Rejoice with those who rejoice" (Rom. 12: 15). Someone has pointed out that this is harder to do than to "weep with those who weep."

"Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). A person of genuine contentment is not a resentful and bitter person. Even when he has been wronged he is content to leave vengeance with God. The wronged person himself overcomes evil with good. (cf. Rom. 12:19-21).

5. Deepen your spirituality; become more mature. We are to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). We know what it means to grow in the knowledge of Christ, but what does it mean to grow in His grace? Does it not mean to grow in the grace that Christ Himself demonstrated to others? Should we not grow in the graces of forgiveness, charitableness, kindness, and forgiveness toward others? Spiritual maturity requires that we sincerely seek to walk in the steps of Jesus, manifesting the same spirit toward others that He so beautifully demonstrated. Jesus was kind and good and pure of heart. Resentment and bitterness were as far from Him as the east is from the west. As Christ is "formed" in us (Gal. 4:19), we too will rid ourselves of resentment and bitterness.

On one occasion a certain sister criticized brother T. B. Larimore, the great evangelist, for something he had said or done. Brother Larimore listened patiently and without interrupting while the lady had her say. When she had finished, he asked:

"And is that all, sister?" Tersely she said: "Yes." Brother Larimore then said: "I thank you," and went on with his work as though nothing had happened.⁶

CONCLUSION

As we conclude, we can do no better than to cite the words of the great apostle Paul when he wrote: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another" (Gal. 5:22-26). Indeed, we must "let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:31-32).

ENDNOTES

1. All scripture quotations from the New King James Version unless otherwise indicated. Since this version capitalizes pronouns referring to deity, this manuscript follows that format.

2. Wood, A. Skevington, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), Vol. 11, p. 65.

3. Vine, W. E., An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 13th impression 1964), p. 129.

4. Morris, Leon, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), Vol. 12, p.140.

5. Wiersbe, Warren, The Bible Exposition Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, A division of Scripture Press, 1989), Vol. 2, p. 42.

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GUILT

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INTRODUCTION

Guilt arises when one thinks he merits condemnation, either from real or imagined offenses or from a sense of inadequacy. "It is the subjective reaction of persons to some of their thoughts or behavior. Persons experiencing guilt are self-critical and self-condemning. They have put themselves under the burden of their own self-judgments and what they consider to be the judgments of society."¹

In the legal realm, a judge or jury can pronounce one guilty. Oddly enough, not all who are legally guilty actually experience any feelings of guilt, while those who have never been pronounced guilty experience deep feelings of guilt. In fact, "Guilt can become a personality trait or a prevailing mood. It is for some a way of life that must be challenged and corrected if the counselee is to reach his or her full potential."²

CAUSES OF GUILT

Guilt can be caused by a number of circumstances. The most obvious reason to feel guilty is because we have done something wrong. After their return to Jerusalem, the people of God did not separate themselves from the sins of the people around them. This happened in large measure because they violated God's will in marrying the daughters of the lands around them. When Ezra heard about this sin, he tore his clothes, plucked hair out of his head and beard and sat down astonished. Then, at the time of the evening sacrifice, he prayed,

O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings and our priests, have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the land, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day (Ezra 9:6-7).³

Ezra was responding to the guilt he felt because of the sins of the people.

Others feel guilt in reference to sins that have been forgiven because of the ongoing struggle they have with sin. "Intellectually, people know God forgives seventy times seven, but when they struggle against repeating the sin they often do not feel forgiven."⁴ Basically, they are ashamed over past bad behavior with which they have already dealt. Rather than feel shame, a person who has been forgiven needs to learn to thank God for forgiveness and not beat himself up over that which has already been forgiven (Rom. 7:24-25a).

Still others feel guilt when they are shamed by their inability to meet their own expectations or those of others. Each of us has an ideal image of the person we would like to be. Society also has an image of the type person each ought to be. When one does not achieve the ideal he has established for himself, or that which he thinks society has set, he may have an overwhelming sense of guilt. Jesus' parable of the talents shows,

in principle, that we will be judged based on how we have used what we have been given (Matt. 24:14-30). When Paul wrote about giving, he told the Corinthian brethren, "For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, not according to what he does not have" (2 Cor. 8:12). Recognizing this principle should cause one to be able to overcome the guilt and shame brought on by failing to meet one's own or other's expectations.

DAVID'S CRY FOR MERCY

For the remainder of this lesson, the guilt discussed will be that which arises because one has violated the will of God. It should be noted that such guilt can produce good results. A positive result of guilt can be recognizing the need to seek and receive forgiveness. David, after Nathan, God's prophet, exposed his unlawful relationship with Bathsheba, appears to have experienced a great deal of guilt. Some of the songs he wrote give us important insight into the way to be forgiven and overcome the burden of guilt.

The only effective response to sin is to, like David, cry to God for mercy. "Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your loving kindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin" (Psalm 51:1-2). First, it should be obvious that David saw God's mercy as the only means of escaping the guilt of sin that clouded his mind. Similarly, Paul told Titus, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

The shepherd king then went on to present a threefold view of his sin. He described it as transgression, which means he recognized that he had rebelled against God's will. He next used the word iniquity, a word that presents the bent and twisted nature of the life marred by going against the will of God. Finally, he used the word sin, which describes a missing of the mark.

Just as a precious gem has more than one facet, David made a cry for help that involved three facts. He first pled with God to blot out, or erase, cancel, his transgressions. Thankfully,

Peter told us how we can receive that very blessing, when he said, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). Next, David asked God to wash him. Anyone who has experienced guilt knows how dirty it can make you feel. Finally, the man after God's own heart wanted to be cleansed, or made free from guilt. When sin is in one's life, he would do well to follow the lead of David in his cry for mercy.

THE BLESSINGS OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS

When David thought of the Lord's forgiveness, despite the depths of guilt that lodged in his heart, he sang, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven" (Psalm 32:1a). In using the word "forgiven," the shepherd king was literally describing his transgression as being lifted and taken away. He went on to portray as blessed the one "Whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32:1b). The imagery here is of sins becoming invisible to God as though they had never taken place. Then, he declared, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit" (Psalm 32:2). If God does not impute one's sins to him, he does not charge him with sin because it is regarded as discharged, settled. Paul stated it another way in his letter to the Roman brethren. "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (5:9). One brother used a little play on the word justified to explain his meaning by saying it means, "Just as if I'd never sinned." That is one of the resulting blessings from God's forgiveness.

SILENCE DESTROYS FROM WITHIN

The story is told of a little boy who was helping his father move stones out of a ditch. "'Dad, here's a big one', he said. 'I've done my best, but I can't budge it.' The father replied, 'Son, you have never, never done your best until you have asked your father to help you.'"⁵ That story well illustrates a real problem many of us experience. We try to grapple with guilt without going to our Father for help.

We need to realize that one can inwardly degenerate while silent. Ironically, this can be compounded by the fact that one's conscience is talking to him the whole time. Certainly, that

is what David experienced. "When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long" (Psalm 34:3). Meanwhile, the heat of anxiety burns within a man and dries him up from the inside out. "For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer" (Psalm 32:4). All of this finally motivated King David to go on and sing, "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked" (Psalm 32:10a).

ACKNOWLEDGE SIN AND GOD WILL FORGIVE

Rather than remaining silent and enduring many sorrows, the man who loves God will go ahead and acknowledge his sin to the Almighty. Interestingly, David saw forgiveness as being simultaneous with his acknowledgement of sin. "I acknowledge my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' And You forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:5). In a later song, God's shepherd king wrote, "For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight—That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge" (Psalm 51:3-4). Once one sees the real damage of sin, he will readily turn to God to eliminate its eternal consequences. Paul wrote to show that Jew and Gentile were guilty of sin. The apostle quoted from another Psalm when he wrote, "As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one'" (Rom. 3:10; Psalm 14:3). He went on to conclude, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 6:23).

John informed his children in the faith that sin was very much a part of a Christian's life. One who claimed to have no sin deceived himself and made God a liar (1 John 1:8, 10). However, he also wrote, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). That word "confess" literally means, "to speak the same thing... to assent, accord, agree with... to confess by way of admitting oneself guilty of what one is accused of, the result of inward conviction."⁶ So, like David, our forgiveness, thus the beginning of our healing from guilt, begins with an acknowledgement that God is right when he says we have sinned.

DAVID'S CALL FOR A NEW MAN

David recognized the sinfulness of man when he wrote, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). While some see in this a statement that leads them to conclude man is born in sin and guilty before God, David's meaning is clearly that his mother was a sinner when he was conceived. If a young child said, "In drunkenness did my mother beat me," we would understand that the mother was drunk when she beat the child. David's statement ought to lead us to a similar conclusion. Having recognized sin as the common lot of all who have reached an age of understanding the difference between right and wrong, David went on to state that only God can remove sin.

Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And
in the hidden part You will make me to know
wisdom. Purge me with a hyssop, and I shall be
clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones
You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face
from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities
(Psalm 51:6-9).

So, he pled with God to "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit" (Psalm 51:10-12). Interestingly, the word "create" is the same one used in Genesis 1 and shows he is asking for God to make him a new man. This is precisely what the father does for those in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS AND
THE NEW MAN COMPEL ONE TO TELL

When David thought about being forgiven by the Lord, he imagined himself being surrounded by others singing a song of deliverance. "The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles" (Psalm 32:7). He went on in verses 10 and 11 to sing of his own joy in experiencing God's mercy. "But he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him.

Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous; And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"

Anyone filled with such joy will have to tell others. In fact, when David foresaw the joy of being freed from his sin, he promised to spread the good news to other sinners. "Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You" (Psalm 51:13). Every Christian should similarly feel compelled to tell others of the availability of God's mercy to any who will acknowledge their sin and turn to God's son. As one delivered from bloodguilt, David knew he should actively tell others. "Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise" (Psalm 51:14-15).

Effectively telling the good news requires one to have a broken heart. "For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:16-17). It appears such a broken heart was precisely what motivated the apostle Paul.

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life (1 Tim. 1:12-16).

The apostle knew he had persecuted the Lord's body before his sins were washed away in baptism. Knowing such motivated him to preach whenever and wherever he could. The freedom from

sin found in Christ should similarly motivate all of us to preach the gospel to all.

CONCLUSION

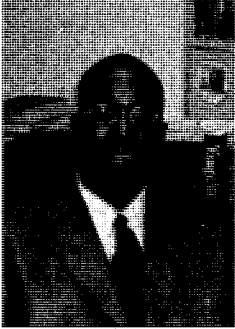
Guilt can result from a failure to live up to one's own expectations or the perceived expectations of society. It can also be the result of something one has done wrong. When confronted with guilt over his sin, David first cried for mercy. He expressed joy over God's forgiveness. He noted the danger of silence destroying one from within. Then, he noted acknowledgement of sin, instead of silence, will lead to forgiveness. He called for a new man in place of the one formerly marred by sin. His rejoicing over the freedom from sin led him to commit to spread the good news of the availability of God's forgiveness. We can be released from the guilt of sin if we will follow in David's footsteps by confessing our sin to God, pleading with him for forgiveness, rejoicing when such is received and telling other sinners of God's gracious gift.

ENDNOTES

1. Wilson, Earl D., Counseling and Guilt, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987), p. 19.
2. Wilson, p. 20.
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4. Wilson, p. 71.
5. Flatt, Bill, Since You Asked, (Abilene, Texas: Quality Publications, 1983), p. 34.
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BASIC COUNSELING SKILLS

LONNIE SMITH



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Today, there is a great need to assist members of the Lord's church in handling their daily struggles of life. The early church gives us a good principle to follow.

All that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, fearing God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:44).

A characteristic of the early church was they spent a lot of time together: they had things in common; they ensured that different needs were met; they continued together in worship; they spent time with one another from house to house. These same principles can help Christians deal with daily struggles in

our society today. This concept needs to be restored in our congregations.

The Hebrew writer instructs us to "exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13). Notice, "day by day" means constant contact with one another on a daily basis, or consistent association with one another. In Hebrews 10:24-25, we are instructed to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." These passages let us know that we need to stimulate one another, be with another, and encourage each other to live the Christian life.

Today, some congregations do not spend enough time with each other. Members see each other from service to service, and they are not able to communicate their daily struggles and help one another as they should. We see congregations filled with human problems: members struggling with depression, anxiety, grief, and guilt, marital and parenting issues, and school and work problems. Typically, members first turn to the preacher or elders for help, so there is a great need for leaders to be skilled in helping people with their daily struggles. I have received many calls from gospel preachers about dealing with situations they face in their congregations concerning life struggles. Many say, "I wish I would have had more training in some of these areas in school. Then, I would be more equipped to minister to the members."

This paper will discuss the following topics: (1) the characteristics of a good counselor; (2) basic counseling skills, and (3) counseling strategies. We need to look at The Counselor when we identify the characteristics of a good counselor (Isa. 9:6).

Preachers, elders, and members of the Lord's church should all have the same ultimate goal: to ensure that each member is complete in Christ. Paul said, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28).

God intended for us to be conformed to the image of Christ. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). Daily struggles can distract Christians from growing in Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). Leaders and preachers can help members by steering them in the right direction.

CHARACTERISTICS OF JESUS

Let us look at Jesus to determine what made him a great counselor. First, Jesus had a very good relationship with his Father, which enabled him to instruct others on how to overcome temptation, materialism, poverty, and loneliness. Our relationship with other people can be determined by our relationship with the Father. Second, Jesus was compassionate.

But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils. And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd (Matt. 9:34-36).

Third, Jesus was able to see people's pain. The Pharisees were distressed and dispirited, just as many people today are distressed and dispirited. It will take someone with a very sensitive and compassionate heart to minister to these individuals.

Even when Jesus confronted his disciples, he did so in a loving way. We read about the woman at the well in John 4, as Jesus tells her all about her life. She did not turn away from him; she loved him because she could see that he cared. We should all strive to develop the caring spirit of Jesus.

Jesus was able to instruct through the word of God. To take the word of God and be able to present it in such a way as to help the Christian see what he must do is a key quality that a Christian counselor should possess. Some Christian counselors do not implement Bible principles in their counseling, much to their detriment.

Jesus allowed people to make choices. A good counselor helps a person see what he or she needs to do, but it is ultimately

the individual who must make his or her own decisions. Jesus never forced anyone to do anything, but he gave them all they needed to know, what was the right thing to do. This is very difficult for many people to do, especially preachers, because they are problem-solvers. Some counselors quickly give advice before allowing the person time to make carefully thought out decisions. Jesus told the rich young ruler what he needed to do in Matthew 19:21-22: "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions."

BASIC COUNSELING SKILLS

LISTEN. A good counselor must be a good listener (James 1:19). It is important to get all the facts and allow the person to repeat his or her problems. The counselor should be able to establish what the problem is and set long-term and short-term goals to solve the problem. Some basic tools for good listening are:

- Focus on the person and do not think of anything else.
- Use good eye contact, but do not stare.
- Avoid nonverbal expressions.
- Avoid being judgmental.
- Avoid reacting to certain information that you might receive from the person.
- Ensure the room is conducive to counseling. Often, there are two chairs in front of a desk in the preacher's office. An area where the counselor can sit without barriers such as a desk and the member can express his or her thoughts openly are conducive to counseling.
- Wait for the person to speak; pause or be silent for a while. This can be very effective, particularly with a grieving person.
- Be able to reflect what the person has stated. For example, "So what you're saying is..."

EMPATHIZE. A good counselor can empathize with the person's thoughts and feelings. That is, putting oneself in the troubled person's shoes to feel with the member what he or she feels. Tools for empathy include:

- Be supportive, encouraging the person in such a way that he or she is motivated and has confidence to work on the issues. This is particularly helpful for people who are depressed.
- Reinforce positive behaviors such as taking steps to work on problems and making progress.
- Ask open-ended questions that will lead to discussion and comments.

RESTRUCTURE. Cognitive restructuring, or reshaping cognition or thinking, is a popular approach in counseling today. The Bible gives us the same principle. "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2). "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).

REFRAME. Reframing allows the person to see himself or herself in another situation. This, along with cognitive restructuring, is a very powerful tool. For example, a person may see himself or herself as not useful in the church. The counselor may point out characteristics of a servant and compare what the person *should* be doing with what the person *actually is* doing, which can cause him or her to see himself totally differently.

MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIALITY. This, by far, is one of the most important skills a counselor should have. The only reason to break a confidence would be if a person may be harmed or if sexual abuse is involved.

REFER. Many preachers wonder when to refer members to a mental health provider. It is important to understand that no one can help everyone equally well. Sometimes, it is most helpful to make a qualified referral. Ministers can prepare themselves for an effective referral ministry by assembling a file of community resources and building relationships with social agencies and health professionals. These files should consist of specialists, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, marriage counselors, mental health clinics, sexual abuse centers, suicide prevention centers, etc.

WHO TO REFER

- Those who can be helped more effectively by someone else.
- Those with problems for which a special agency is available in the community.

- Those who obviously need more time for treatment and counseling.
- Those who need intensive psychotherapy.
- Those who are severely depressed or suicidal.
- Those whom one is in doubt about the nature of the problem.

HOW TO REFER

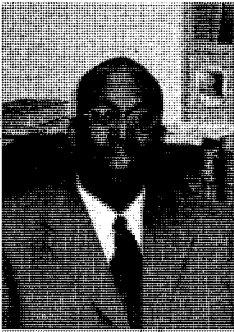
- Create the expectation with the member.
- Mention the possibility of referral early in the counseling relationship.
- Help the person resolve his or her emotional resistance to a recommended person or agency.

CONCLUSION

There is a rise in the number of congregations trying to meet the needs of their members struggling with daily problems, so it is important for members of the congregation to be trained or competent in the area of counseling, or have a good referral system.

DAILY STRUGGLES OF DEPRESSION

LONNIE SMITH



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Depression is known as the common cold of mental illness. Who do we know that has never gotten a cold? If there are any like that, they are very few in number. Depression is on the rise in our society.

What is depression? It is an affective disorder or a mood disorder. It affects every facet of one's being: the mental, the emotional, the spiritual, and the physical.

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

Depression is typically manifested in an array of symptoms that affect the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical being of the depressed person:

- Loss or absence of pleasure. Things that used to give him or her joy no longer do. This is one of the primary red flags when it comes to this mood disorder.
- Apathy. There is a lack of emotion or feeling.
- Boredom. The senses are dulled.

- Loss of interest. He or she may no longer be interested in hobbies or activities that he or she used to do.
- Hopelessness. The person may despair or think there are no possible solutions to his or her problems.
- Fatigue. He or she may be excessively tired.
- Insomnia or hyposomnia. Insomnia deals with not being able to sleep or waking up at night and not being able to get back to sleep. Hyposomnia deals with sleeping too much.
- Crying
- Weight gain. The person may eat excessively or more than usual, leading to weight gain.
- Weight loss. The person may experience loss of appetite and not eat meals.
- Suicidal thoughts. The depressed person may think death is the answer to his or her problems.
- Low self esteem. Self-worth and body image are affected.
- Withdrawal. He or she may not want to be around friends and loved ones.
- Irritable. His or her experiences may trigger anger or mood swings.

We all experience some of these symptoms some of the times. However, the key to determining if these symptoms are signs of depression is their longevity. If symptoms persist for several weeks, this is a clear sign of depression. The family physician should rule out any physical illnesses before the person is treated for depression.

CAUSES OF DEPRESSION

The cause of depression has been frequently misunderstood. Several sources cite only one cause and do not consider other causes for depression. Major causes are:

- Biological. This consists of two areas: (1) heredity and (2) biological factors. In heredity, depression may run in the family, so the person is predisposed to developing depression. The person is at high risk; it does not necessarily mean that he or she will actually develop depression in his or her lifetime. People with

a predisposition to depression need to be aware of it and use primary preventions to prepare themselves. With biological factors, the person may develop an illness or disease, which can lead to depression.

- Psychological. This pertains to a person's thought patterns, where his or her thoughts are usually negative. Studies have shown that some people think negative thoughts up to 300 times in a day, or every two and half minutes! These thoughts can consist of phrases like, "No one likes me," "I can't do anything right," "I am hopeless," "I am worthless," etc.
- Spiritual. Two factors are involved here: (1) one cannot find the meaning of life, or (2) one is not living a balanced life as a Christian. Either of these factors can cause a lot stress and lead to depression.

TREATING DEPRESSION

Treating depression depends on the type of depression that it is and its causes. For example, if it is caused by biological factors that have led to major depression, appropriate treatment would involve a combination of medication and counseling. Counseling can help the person talk out his or her feelings and deal with certain life issues. Cognitive reconstruction is the type of counseling most often used in therapy today. Cognitive reconstructing is when the patient discusses his or her insecurities and thoughts, reshaping and reframing his or her pattern of thinking. This is also an effective technique when depression has a psychological cause.

Medications prescribed are antidepressants. How long the person needs to be on medication is determined by a physician and on the progress made by the individual. There are several antidepressants, and it is possible that the patient may need to try several before finding one that works for him or her. Typically, what happens is the person gives up on medication if one medicine does not work.

Family members need to be patient when one of their members is experiencing depression. The family should support the plan of treatment and avoid making the depressed person feel ashamed.

Sociological treatment is when there is a change to the person's lifestyle to make some adjustments, such as taking away major stressors. Spiritually, one needs to prioritize and find a balance in one's life.

MYTHS ABOUT DEPRESSION

Several myths about depression can cause a person who is going through depression to feel even more hopeless.

- Depression is sinful. This may be heard from some pulpits. I had a student in one of my classes who was taught depression is due to sin. Remember, depression is a mood disorder and needs to be treated as one treats a common cold or other illness. There are occasions when a person's lifestyle may contribute to depression, but depression itself is not sinful.
- Depression is a lack of faith. Again, no one would say that there is a lack of faith when one is physically ill. Why is that the case for depression? I believe this myth has caused several Christians to not feel comfortable talking to others about the problem nor seek appropriate treatment. The congregation must be more sensitive to this disorder.
- Depression can be cured by becoming more spiritual. Depression can be dealt with better if one has a good relationship with God, but it does not take away to become more spiritual.

We can turn to scriptures to help us cope with depression, as one can cope with physical illnesses. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6). "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psalms 55:22). "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will

not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Psalms 46:1-2).

WOMEN AND DEPRESSION

One out of eight women will have an episode of major depression at some point in her life. Women also have higher rates of seasonal affective disorder, or winter depression. Heredity may account for up to 50% of the risk for major depression in women. This could explain some of the gender differences. Depression does not appear more prevalent in families of depressed men than in families of depressed women.

A major cause of depression in women is stress. Women are disproportionately subject to certain kinds of severe stress, such as child sexual abuse, adult sexual assaults, and domestic violence. Traumatic experiences early in life can have a lasting effect in some women, although every day experiences can also provoke stress leading to depression. Women are typically raised to care for others more often than men are. Women tend to subordinate their own needs. In an unhappy marriage, women are three times more likely to be depressed than the husband. Poverty is a major source of stress for some women. On the average, women are poorer than men, particularly single mothers with young children.

Women seem to be more physically sensitive to their emotions than men are. Remember, insomnia and even pain are symptoms of depression. Premenstrual disturbance, which occurs in about 10% of menstruating women, is another factor that can lead to depression in women. Ten to 15% of mothers become depressed post-partum during the first 6 months of their child's life. The rate of depression during pregnancy may be even higher.

Treating women with severe depression usually involves medication and psychotherapy. Overall, there must be a change in priorities of one's life and a change of one's attitude.

MEN AND DEPRESSION

There is an old saying that men do not get depressed. This is certainly not true, although men's depressions are deeply

misunderstood. Whereas depression in women is most often diagnosed by exploring their feelings, men are better diagnosed by paying attention to their behavior. To put it more succinctly: women feel their depression; men act theirs out.

Men typically vent their depression through frustration and anger. They become irritable and moody. They do not connect with others; instead they withdraw by giving their loved ones the silent treatment.

Men mask their depression. Masked depression is one of the more prevalent disorders in modern society because depression can be overt or covert. In overt depression, the symptoms include the traditional sadness, lethargy, negativity, and mood swings. These are the hallmarks of classic depression in females. For men, depression tends to be more covert. Common masks of men's depression are:

- Rage and pent up resentment. This can lead to road rage, work rage, and violence.
- Workaholism.
- Avoidance of intimacy. Men who go through depression do not connect and they withdraw from their closest family member.
- Sexual compulsion.

What can a woman do for her depressed male? She can communicate love and acceptance the best way she knows how and realize the man in her life does not intentionally mean to hurt her. Archibold Heart said,

With God's help in the long run, unconditional love can make a difference for both husband and wife and also for other family members even though the depressed man may never show any appreciation for this love at the time, the day will come when the wife and mother will look back with satisfaction over the way she has handled the depressive reaction of the man in her life for her, as with other challenges in her life.

DAILY PRACTICES TO HELP BUILD MOOD

- Sunlight
- Relaxation and exercise
- Eating fish and black eyed peas
- Having a pet
- Prayer

CONCLUSION

Depression is on the increase. We see it more in our congregations, so it is important that all members educate themselves on this mental disorder. They should help to support the member who is struggling with depression by being there for him or her, by understanding his or her needs, and by loving unconditionally during this time.

ENDNOTES

1. Flatt, Bill. Restoring My Soul. (Gospel Advocate Co., Nashville, TN) 2001.
2. Heart, Archibald. Unmasking Mental Depression. (World Publication, Dallas, TX) 2001.
3. Harvard Mental Health Letter, "Women and Depression," Vol. 20, No. 11, May 2004.

SCRIPTURAL BASED BUDGETING

GREG WOODALL



Gregg Woodall is a CPA and a Certified Valuation Analysts with over 25 years of professional experience in providing auditing, tax, valuation, and management advisory services to a variety of businesses, organizations and individuals. He has served for many years as a partner in public accounting firms, and as President, CEO, and CFO in government services consulting firms. He has served on several boards, including FHU, KCS, Knoxville Chamber of Commerce, and the TN Society of CPAs. He is treasurer for the Karns church of Christ and for ETSPM. A graduate of FHU and MTSU, he is married (27 years) to Sherrye Floyd. Together, they have four children.

The purpose of budgeting is to provide one with peace of mind and confidence in achieving financial goals. God expects us to be actively involved in planning and managing our financial affairs. *"The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps"* (Prov. 16:9). Therefore, as we apply some practical concepts to managing our finances, God provides godly wisdom. A budget can free one from worrying about whether the annual insurance payment will be made, whether one has put enough money aside for savings, and whether enough money will be available to buy the things that one's children need. If those are not problems for you, you are among the fortunate few. They are problems for many people, and they may well be problems for your children when they have families. A budget can serve as a great teaching tool as well as a good measure of self-discipline.

Scriptural guidelines for budgeting can be found throughout God's Word. *"Know well the condition of your flocks, and pay attention to your herd"* (Prov. 27:23). Most of us do not

have herds and flocks, but to us today God is doubtless saying, "Know well the condition of your clothing budget, your housing budget, and your food budget."

A budget can be used to develop good communication between husband and wife. It is an issue that a couple can sit down together to discuss and then come to a reasonable compromise. A budget is really very simple: there is a specific amount of money to spend, and a budget helps determine how one will spend it.

It is important for Christians to be able to recognize their financial burdens, but it is equally important to know how to achieve financial freedom. Financial peace demonstrates itself in every facet of our lives—relief from worry and tension about overdue bills, a clear conscience before God and others, and the absolute assurance that God is in control of our finances. This is not to say that our lives will be totally void of any difficulties in the area of finances. Often God will allow the consequences of earlier actions to remain in order to reinforce the lesson. God does not promise to remove every difficulty. Whatever circumstances are encountered, God does promise peace. When God manages our finances, we have nothing to worry about.

It is rare to encounter a non-Christian who has true freedom from worry, anxiety, and tension concerning money matters. Once we experience freedom from the bondage of debts, freedom from the oppression of others, freedom from envy and covetousness or greed, and freedom from resentfulness, we live a life devoted to God and we have financial peace.

What must we do according to God's plan?

Acknowledge God's Ownership. A Christian must understand that ownership of every thing belongs to God. This means money, time, family, material possessions, education, and even earning potential for the future. This is essential to experience a joyful life in the area of finances (see Psalms 8:4-6). A Christian must realize that there is absolutely no substitute for this step. If one believes that one is the owner of even a single possession, then the events affecting that possession are going

to affect one's attitude. However, if one makes a total transfer of everything to God, He will demonstrate His ability. It is important to understand and accept God's conditions for His control (see Deut. 5:32-33). God will keep His promise to provide every need we have through physical, material, and spiritual means, according to His perfect plan.

It is simple to say, "I make total transfer of everything to God," but it is not so simple to do. However, financial freedom comes from knowing God is in control. What a great relief it is to turn our burdens over to Him. Then, if something does happen to any of our stewarded possessions, we can say, "I don't own it, I have been given this to use and manage and I've done my best, so God can do with it whatever He would like." Then look for the overflowing blessings God has in store for us as a result of this attitude.

Get Rid of Debt Overload. A Christian must get out of overloaded debt as soon as possible. Overloaded debt is debt that exists with any of the following conditions:

- Payment is past due for money, goods, or services that are owed to other people.
- The total value of unsecured liabilities exceeds total assets. In simple terms, if you had to sell everything you had and paid off every debt you owed, there would be a negative balance on your account.
- The family's basic needs are not being met, producing anxiety in the area of financial responsibility.

Develop a Written Plan. A written plan is an absolute necessity for anyone who is struggling financially. This plan should list all expenditures in order of importance. The order of importance is crucial because those struggling financially have lost the point of reference between needs, wants, and desires. What does the Bible have to say about needs, wants, and desires?

- **Needs** - These are the purchases necessary to provide for your basic requirements, such as food, clothing, a job, home, medical coverage, and others. *"If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content"* (1 Tim. 6:8).

- **Wants** - These involve choices about the quality of things we choose to acquire, such as dress clothes versus work clothes, steak versus hamburger, or a new car versus a used car. These verses give a point of reference for determining wants in a Christian's life: *"Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God"* (1 Pet. 3:3-4).
- **Desires** - These are the choices we make in keeping with God's plan that can be made only out of surplus funds after all other obligations have been met. *"Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world"* (1 John 2:15-16).

Determine Your Necessities. A Christian in debt must stop any expenditure that is not absolutely essential for living (see Proverbs 21:17). Look for services around the home that can be done without outside cost. Also begin to develop some home skills. By utilizing individual skills you can begin to cut down on some of the expenditures that are not really essential. What I am expressing is an attitude of conservatism. Begin to eliminate expenditures that are not essential and keep in mind that many things are assumed to be essential only because of our society. Fifty years ago almost all the labor supplied in the home was done by family members—not by professionals who charged for it.

Christians who are burdened must begin to assess what things they can do for themselves and stop the avoidable expenses. Once a Christian has begun to do these things, whether in debt or not, it will become enjoyable and will help stabilize the family life.

Think Before Buying. A Christian who is in debt (and even those who are not) should think before every purchase (see Proverbs 24:3). Every purchase should be evaluated. Is it a

necessity? Have I assessed whether it is a need, a want, or a desire? Can I continue to subscribe to magazines or belong to book, CD, or movie clubs while I owe others? Is this the best possible buy I can get, or am I purchasing only because I want it now and it is convenient? Am I buying something that will devalue quickly? (Swimming pools, boats, sports cars all fall into this category.) Does it require costly upkeep?

Stop Buying on Credit. A Christian in debt should make purchases on a cash-only basis. Often, someone in debt overload will decide to convert an asset into cash and use the proceeds to pay off their debts only to repeat the process all over again. That solution is only appropriate if a person first learns new spending habits; otherwise, it is only the symptom being addressed rather than the root cause of the problem. If a Christian is in debt from the misuse of credit, he must stop using credit, cut up the cards, and then commit himself to buying solely on a cash basis.

Once good habits have been developed and the bondage from the misuse of credit cards has been corrected, then it would be appropriate to consider the merit in converting assets to pay off the debts. When one has overextended one's finances, it is necessary to sacrifice some of the wants and desires in life to get current; otherwise, one will continue to borrow and only get deeper into despair.

Start Saving. A Christian should practice saving money on a regular basis. This includes those who are in debt. Even if it is only \$5 a month, develop a discipline of saving. This does not mean to store up a large amount of money while failing to pay your creditors, but one of the best habits to develop is to save at least a small amount on a regular basis.

Everyone has the capability to save money, but many fail to do so because they believe that the amount they can save is too small and insignificant. Others believe that God frowns upon a Christian saving anything. Neither of these two reasons is scriptural. *"There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man swallows it up"* (Prov. 21:20). The common attitude presented in the Bible is to save on a regular basis, and it is important that Christians develop good habits to replace bad habits.

Establish Your Weekly Contribution. Every Christian should establish his or her contribution as a minimum acknowledgment of God's ownership. As mentioned earlier, how can we say that we have given total ownership to God when we have never given testimony to that fact? We can see from the scriptures that our giving is to be planned, periodic, and proportional to our provisions from God. *"On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come."* (1 Cor. 16:2).

It is through sharing that we bring His power in finances into focus. In every case, God wants us to give the first part to Him, but He also wants us to pay our creditors. That requires establishing a plan and probably making sacrifices of wants and desires until all obligations are current.

One cannot sacrifice God's part—that is not one's right as a Christian. *"Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully"* (2 Cor. 9:6). So what is the key? If a sacrifice is necessary, and it almost always is,, one must not sacrifice God's or one's creditor's share. One must choose a portion of one's own expenditures to sacrifice. If it does not hurt even a little, then it is not really a sacrifice.

Accept God's Provision. To obtain financial peace, recognize and accept that God's provision is used to direct each of our lives. Often Christians lose sight of the fact that God's will can be accomplished through a little or an abundance of money. But God does not choose for everyone to live in great abundance. As stated before, this does not imply poverty, but it may mean that God wants us to be more responsive to His daily control. Remember that God has promised us enough provision to live in this world.

Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing? For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matt. 6:31-33).

Each Christian must learn to live on what God provides and not come under the pressure brought on by the motivating desires for wealth and material things. This requires discipline and planning lifestyles around the provisions that God has supplied to each of us.

Keep Your Conscience Clear. A Christian must have a clear conscience regarding past business practices and personal dealings. Freedom from these may well require restitution, as well as a changed attitude.

Be certain that the obtaining of money through our work or business affairs is always done honestly and fairly. *“For we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men”* (2 Cor 8:21).

Put Others First. A Christian seeking financial freedom must always be willing to put other people first. This does not mean that a Christian has to become a doormat for others; it simply means that he does not profit at the disadvantage of someone else. Again, the key lies in attitude.

Budget your Time. A Christian must limit time devoted to business affairs when family involvement suffers. *“Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings like an eagle that flies toward the heavens”* (Prov. 23:4-5). Many Christians are trapped in this cycle of over commitment to business or money pursuits.

It is important to remember that the priorities God sets for us are very clear and that every Christian who seeks God must understand His priorities.

Our first priority is to develop and strengthen our personal relationship with Jesus Christ as we strive to become more Christlike. This includes participation with brethren in worship to God. Secondly, we should express our commitment to our family, which includes teaching them from God's Word. This training requires a commitment to the family unit, and that means a specific time commitment too. Christ deserves the best part of our day. Third, we should devote time in our Christian lives to include

being involved with other church activities. Finally, we allow time for work, social groups, and all the hobbies or outside interest we may have.

Avoid Indulgence. To achieve financial freedom, every Christian must avoid the indulgences of life. The range in which God's will can be found is between Luke 9:23 when Christ said, *"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me"* and John 6:27: *"Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."* Does your lifestyle fit within this range? Are you willing to trust God and deny yourself some indulgences? As you do, He will supply you even more.

Unfortunately, most of us are self-indulgers, rarely passing up a want or desire, much less a need. But, in light of the needs around us, it is important that Christians assess their standards of living. Most of us can reduce our expenditures substantially without a real reduction in our standard of living.

Get Christian Counseling. It is important to seek good Christian counseling. *"Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed"* (Prov. 15:22). God admonishes us to seek counsel and not to rely solely on our own resources. Many Christians become frustrated in financial planning because they lack the necessary skills or knowledge and then give up. God has supplied others with the ability to help in the area of finances.

Develop a Budget. Begin by fostering an appreciation for and an understanding of the allocations of income. The first part belongs to God. *"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings"* (Malachi 3:8). Then, the government wants its share. *"He said to them, 'Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's'"* (Matt. 22:21).

Total Income minus contributions and taxes yields **Net Usable Income (NUI)**. It may even be thought of as the money that Not U or I made, but what God has provided for us to use for our needs.

PRACTICAL GUIDE TO PREPARING A BUDGET

Budgeting Pitfalls. Budget pitfalls are the large problem areas that if managed improperly will destroy a budget. Failure to control even one of these problem areas can result in financial disaster. Below are some suggestions on how to identify and resolve potential troublesome areas before they become budget hazards. The following suggested percentages should serve as a general guideline for a family of four with total income of \$60,000. After providing for contribution and taxes, there would be about \$45,000 available as Net Usable Income.

Housing (32% of NUI). Typically, this is one of the largest budget problem areas. Many families buy or rent a house they simply cannot afford. Housing decisions should be based on need and financial ability, not on internal or external pressure. The following are ways to avoid housing budget problems.

1. Purchase a home only if total housing payments (mortgage, taxes, insurance, utilities, phone, and maintenance) do not exceed 38% of NUI.
2. Do not finance closing costs or a second mortgage for a down payment.
3. If trading up to a larger home, make sure it is a need and not simply a desire.

Food (12% of NUI). Reducing a family's food bill requires quantity and quality planning. The following are ways to avoid potential *food* problem areas that could become budget busters.

1. Plan a weekly family menu and stick to it.
2. Always use a *written* grocery list and try not deviate from it.
3. Avoid shopping when hungry or in a hurry.
4. Avoid expensive prepared and frozen foods.
5. Purchase sundry items, household cleaning products, and paper products at discount retail stores or retail warehouses.
6. Shop advertised specials and use manufacturer's coupons.
7. Try generic or store brand products.
8. If at all possible, avoid shopping with small children.

Automobile (obtain and maintain, 14% of NUI). Automobile expenses include (monthly payment, repairs and

maintenance, gas and oil, tags and taxes, and insurance). Often, consumers are unwise when it comes to both purchasing and maintaining automobiles. Many families buy cars they cannot afford and trade them in long before their usefulness has expired. Most people trade cars because they want to rather than need to. In addition, most Americans pay premium prices for repairs and general maintenance on their cars, which many times can be avoided. The following are ways to avoid potential *automobile* problem areas.

1. Evaluate the reason for trading. Is it a need or simply a desire?
2. Can a present car be repaired for less than six monthly payments on a new car?
3. Pay cash for a new car if possible. If not, make sure the current car is paid off before purchasing a new one.
4. Buy a quality used car rather than a new one.
5. Avoid car leases.
6. Perform routine maintenance and minor repairs yourself.
7. Purchase supplies at wholesale distributors.
8. Use the cheapest gasoline recommended by the owner's manual.
9. Consider dropping collision insurance if the car is four years old or older.

Consumer Debts (5% of NUI). Although it would be great if family budgets were restricted to only 5% debt (credit cards, home equity loans, and installment credit), the unfortunate norm for the typical American family far exceeds this amount. The following are ways to avoid problems.

1. Destroy any credit card that you cannot pay in full each month.
2. Establish a payment schedule that pays all creditors regularly.
3. Buy with cash and sacrifice wants and desires until debts are current.

Insurance (5% of NUI - assuming employer provided medical insurance). Few families understand how much and what kind of insurance is needed. Insurance is not intended for saving money or for retirement. So, select insurance based on

God's plan for your life, not what someone else says you need for your life. Consider the following.

1. Use a well informed and trusted insurance agent to determine the best possible provision for the money.
2. Consider buying term life insurance. If whole life exists, determine whether the coverage should remain in force or be converted. If medical coverage is not provided by an employer, consider buying major medical insurance rather than hospitalization. This insurance is relatively inexpensive, yet it covers up to 80 percent of medical expenses due to catastrophic illnesses or injuries.

Recreation/Entertainment (4% NUI). Although we are a fun-loving society, those who are in debt should not use their creditor's money to entertain themselves or their families. The normal tendency is to escape problems, if only for a short while—even if the problems then become greater. Although families need a certain amount of recreation and fun to maintain a healthy family atmosphere, they also must resist the urge to indulge excessively and control recreation and entertainment expenses. The following are ways to avoid potential problems in this area.

1. Plan vacations during off seasons if possible.
2. Select local vacation destinations.
3. Play family games instead of paying for entertainment.
4. Consider camping and cooking out rather than renting a motel or lodge and eating in a restaurant.
5. If flying, purchase tickets at least 21 days in advance (if possible) and select the least expensive coach fare.

Clothing (5% of NUI). Many families in debt sacrifice this area in their budget because of excesses in other areas. And yet, with prudent planning and buying, families can be clothed neatly without great expense. The following are ways to help in this area.

1. Save enough money to buy without using credit.
2. Make children's clothing if talented in that area and as time allows.
3. Purchase during off-season as much as possible.
4. Select outfits that can be mixed and used in multiple combinations.

5. Buy from discount outlets and factory outlet closeouts.
6. Select home washable fabrics in new clothes.

Medical and dental (4% of NUI). Families need to anticipate these expenses in their budgets and set aside funds regularly to cover the expenses. Do not sacrifice family health due to lack of planning, but at the same time do not use doctors and dentists excessively. Prevention is much cheaper than treatment or correction. Some suggestions follow.

1. Teach children to eat the right foods and clean their teeth properly.
2. Take care of the physical body through diet, rest, and exercise and it will most likely respond with better health.
3. Question doctors and dentists in advance regarding costs.
4. Shop around for prescriptions and ask for generic drugs.

Savings (5% of NUI). It is important that families establish some savings in a budget. Otherwise, the use of credit becomes a lifelong necessity and burden. A systematic diligence in saving will allow for the purchase of items with cash rather than credit. Consider practicing the following.

1. Use payroll deduction, if possible, for savings. This removes the money for savings before it is received as salary.
2. If payroll deduction is not available, use automatic bank withdrawal from the checking account.
3. Write a check to the savings account as if it were another creditor.
4. When an existing debt is paid off, reallocate that money to savings.

Remainder (14% of NUI). The remaining available funds after considering all of the enumerated areas above will be needed for school or child care, for miscellaneous items, and if appropriate, investments.

CONCLUSION

These suggestions should provide families with the necessary tools to establish a budget and guard against problem areas that could become budget pitfalls. No budget can be put into action by itself; it requires effort and family communication. Living on a budget is not only practical, it is absolutely necessary to maintain a financially peaceful lifestyle.

Remember to pray for guidance and seek to do God's will and all will work out well for you and your family. "*The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps*" (Prov.. 16:9).

BUDGET GUIDELINE EXAMPLE

Salary for Guideline	\$50,000
Other Income	\$10,000
Total Income	<u>\$60,000</u>

Total Income Per Month \$5,000

	% of Total	
1. Contributions	10%	\$500
2. Taxes	15%	\$750

Net Usable Income \$3,750

	% of Net	
3. Housing	32%	\$1,200
4. Food	12%	\$450
5. Auto	14%	\$525
6. Insurance	5%	\$188
7. Debts	5%	\$188
8. Entertainment/Recreation	4%	\$150
9. Clothing	5%	\$188
10. Savings	5%	\$188
11. Medical	4%	\$150
12. Miscellaneous	5%	\$188
13. School/Child Care	5%	\$188
14. Investments (remainder to balance budget)	4%	\$150

Total 100% \$3,750

(Cannot exceed Net Usable Income)

15. Unallocated Surplus 0

Note: Some expenses occur on a less frequent basis than monthly, and you will need to plan to set aside those monthly budgeted expenses until the time when they are required to be paid.

DISCOURAGEMENT

NEAL POLLARD



Neal Pollard is a native of MS. He began preaching in 1987. Educated at Faulkner University, FHU, and Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver. Local work in AL and VA and director of Cold Harbor Road Lectureship. He is founding editor of *Glad Tidings* (1992-2001). He has preached in gospel efforts in 18 states, Tanzania, and the Ukraine. He is the speaker for God's Wonderful Word TV program, which airs in OR, VA, and WA (at least at one time in NC). He and his wife, Kathleen, have three sons.

Georges Rouault, renowned painter, came upon a circus caravan and saw an old clown sitting in his trailer mending his glittery costume. Rouault was struck by the contrast between the costume and makeup worn by the clown and the "infinite sadness" he exuded. From that occasion, Rouault launched a series of circus-themed paintings that are considered symbolic of mankind's tendency, like that clown, to project to others an image quite different from what is really going on inside of us.¹

How often does a Christian, particularly the involved, committed Christian entrenched in the transformed life, cope with the bane of discouragement? How many elder resignations, cases of preacher burnout, and membership apostasies have discouragement at their roots? In fact, the more involved and more greatly tasked one is, perhaps the greater the tendency toward this problem. As one becomes a pupil studied in the observation of human behavior, he or she notices the telltale signs of this enemy of joy and peace.

What about the man who won the debate on the existence of God, but was shortly so discouraged that he became

fearful, completely isolated himself and was even somewhat suicidal? Or the man who was trying to live right, endured some hardships, and had to listen to armchair psychologists, armed with a lot of bad theology and little fact, diagnose him as the source of his own troubles? Or the congregational leader who was so burned out trying to solve his brethren's problems that he was nearly at the end of his rope? Or the man who faced the constant, needling criticism of those who opposed his good and needed efforts for the cause of truth? Or the preachers who knew in advance that no one would listen to their sermons? Or the one who had questions about the validity and legitimacy of his entire life's work for God? Or the gospel preacher who felt that almost everybody had abandoned him in his greatest hour of need?²

Consider three broad aspects of this spiritual enemy known as discouragement.

SOURCES OF DISCOURAGEMENT

Personal Failures. It is an inescapable reality that every person struggles with sin (cf. Rom. 3:23; Ecc. 7:20). While the world may care little or know nothing of how to overcome the sway of Satan (1 John 5:4,19), the Christian is conscientious. Personal failures are not welcome, but their presence in our lives discourages us. Like Paul, contemporary Christians can become disheartened over their personal, spiritual tugs of war (cf. Rom. 7:14-21). Sin, however, is not the lone avenue leading to personal failure. Failing to achieve personal goals, trying one's best but still falling short, lapses in judgment, and foolish decisions all breed discouragement.

Unmet Expectations. The preacher in local work struggles with this when he enthusiastically introduces a fantastic program, only to be met with cool indifference or has it incorporated only to find it very poorly supported. The elders advertise a gospel meeting or evangelistic campaign, show up expectantly on the appointed day, but witness visible apathy proven by epidemic absenteeism. In every relationship, because each constituent is susceptible to that Romans 3:23 problem, there will be unmet expectations. It is discouraging when friends, family, or brethren disappoint. Such failure on the part of others may increase one's own workload or responsibilities.

Stress. Ongoing tension can lead to discouragement. The inability to see relief from financial, relational, or social pressures can so overwhelm one that he or she simply languishes in despair. The attempt to negotiate the daily routine may become seemingly futile, while the hole becomes deeper. Speaking of stress in the marriage context, for example, Collins specifies such stressors as “the demands of a time-consuming vocation, physical or psychological abuse, continuing financial pressures, boredom, alcoholism or drug abuse in one of the partners, the instabilities of middle age, or the rigidities and resentments that can build up over the years...”³ Responses to such stressors vary from anger to withdrawal, violence to extreme passivity. Yet, neither is it extraordinary for one to react in resigned discouragement.

Unrecognized Achievements. Successful corporations long ago learned the wisdom of providing worker incentive through praise and recognition. In whatever one invests sweat, equity, and toil, he or she appreciates being appreciated. When this does not occur, whether professionally or personally, fighting discouragement may be difficult. One can question his or her skill or worth in the absence of affirmation. While no one should inordinately desire the praise of men (cf. John 12:43), it is discouraging to have our work ignored or overlooked. Especially is it discouraging if this happens repeatedly.

Criticism. Someone has said, “One of the easiest things to find is fault.” It often feels that way, particularly if you are on the receiving end. Preachers tell of listeners who never address them after the sermon unless it is to correct or disagree with them. Elders never hear from some members except concerning their supposed shortcomings as shepherds. Some members may be made to feel that nothing they do is right. Discouragement is predictable where disparagement is present.

Chronic Problems. Part of the mental management of problems is the knowledge that they come to pass (cf. Acts 27:44). What can be done when the problems do not depart? A myriad of physical illnesses are unremitting, and coping with them can be a test of mental attitude. New Christians who came to Christ in deep financial debt must still climb a mountain that may take a great many years. Some, who must become “eunuchs for the kingdom’s sake” (cf. Matt. 19:12) because of unscriptural

divorce prior to conversion or as the guilty party with regard to fornication against their mates (Matt. 19:9), must persistently deal with the temptations that accompany their mandatory state. In fact, any negative condition or circumstance that is long-standing or even never-ending can easily put one into a state of discouragement. The surprise of suffering at all, much less doing so long-term, can compound the discouragement. As Jones says, "Most of us go through life constantly surprised when something hard or painful happens to us. We seem to expect that life should be a smooth path..." but "suffering is in the fabric of our lives. There is no life without pain—be it mental, physical, emotional or spiritual."⁴

Opposition From Within The Home. Bill Flatt relates the thoughtlessness of a husband "who almost never told his wife that he love [sic] her...He seldom stayed with the children so she could have a few minutes to herself. He often criticized what she was doing with the children but seldom did anything to help. He would not talk very much to his wife but would give her the silent treatment and shut her out. He did not give of himself to her."⁵ Such apathy or antagonism breeds discouragement. One's mate has tremendous power to either encourage or discourage. Certainly, the other relationships in the home where giving love is absent and selfishness is central discourages those to whom it is demonstrated. When one's good qualities are not recognized and flaws are magnified by those who should be on the front line of support, discouragement follows.

Apprehension Or Fear Of Something Future. The Bible warns against being fearful of perceived future problems. Jesus says, "Be not therefore anxious for the morrow"⁶ (Matt. 6:34). Yet, resisting the inclination to fret over the future is a Herculean struggle. Persistent uneasiness sometimes produces discouragement, a resignation that the future is filled with doom and gloom. Older preachers with inadequate retirement or frustrations over congregations' enamor with younger preachers may get discouraged, thinking the golden years do not appear so golden. The general concerns accompanying aging, financial deadlines (like taxes and bills), some necessary confrontation, and the like, especially where the outcome looks grim, breed discouragement.

Coping With Unclear Expectations. Employees whose managers fail to communicate job descriptions are set up for failure. The same breakdown can occur in the local congregation. How many deacons wear a name without having any idea what is expected of them as such? Any time one is given vague guidelines and instruction in a situation where he or she bears accountability, discouragement is probable.

The Let Down That Follows Something Positive Or Triumphant. Was not this Elijah's struggle in 1 Kings 19? He had mightily defeated the false prophets of Baal, drawing the wrath of Ahab. Elijah had to run for his life. Soon, he found himself distraught and dejected in a cave. Today, the same can occur. Consider the wake following an evangelistic campaign, a building program, camp work, gospel meetings, goal days, or lectureships. There is the build up, a list of things to be done to accomplish the task, a general business that goes along with preparation, and then the culmination of the activity. Many describe the after effects of even a very successful venture as "let down." Discouragement may ensue after that into which so much emotion and energy has been poured transpires.

Discouragement comes from a variety of sources. Some of these may surprise us. They may come once or repeatedly. Yet, all of them have the potential to take a major toll on us as we strive to travel along the narrow road. The worse case scenario is most grave!

EFFECTS OF DISCOURAGEMENT

Loss Of Productivity. Discouragement can shut down a person. Time that could be devoted to fruitful labors are instead squandered by distraction, concern, upset, or frustration growing out of the discouragement. It is counterproductive to sit and think about how poorly things are going. A preacher's performance, both daily and in the pulpit, suffers when he is discouraged. When a member is discouraged by church or personal problems, he or she can cease being a viable asset to her work. Discouraged elders have a harder time visiting and generally shepherding the flock.

Tests One's Faith. Especially prolonged discouragement can allow doubts to creep into the heart. When various efforts

have been made to handle the discouragement without success, one can begin blaming God or decreasing spiritual living. Those in the throes of discouragement often ask, "Why?" and, a related question, "What's the use?"

Can Produce A Negative Attitude. Some handle discouragement like a porcupine. Hurt themselves, they lash out with such responses as bitterness, wrath, grumbling, and railing. It must be remembered that these are all sinful reactions (Eph. 4:31; 1 Pet. 3:9; Phil. 2:14). Feeding discouragement is dangerous and deadly, and the longer it is nurtured the more likely it is to adversely affect one's personality.

A Distorted View Of Reality. Was not this Elijah's difficulty? In his discouragement, he saw himself as God's only remaining faithful servant (1 Kings 19:14). This writer has encountered preachers who were so discouraged by local work or brotherhood problems that it completely jaundiced their view of things. They thought somebody or everyone was out to get them. They suspected other preachers of compromise. They felt sure almost every Christian was a religious pretender. Minus the discouragement, however, they were positive, optimistic men. That is what discouragement can do! When discouraged and prone to draw less than rational conclusions, one must search carefully and find out if it is the discouragement "talking."

Rash Decision-Making. Wendell Winkler often encouraged his preacher students, "Never make a big decision on a bad day!" How many discouraged preachers have, through such, taken drastic actions, such as relocating, "telling off the elders," engaging in backbiting, or worse? Elders should not make large financial decisions, take disciplinary actions, or terminate relationships solely from the force of discouragement. In the individual Christian's life, whether regarding marriage, occupation, or social life, discouragement should not taint and distort one's thinking in deciding matters. Patience and deliberation ought to rule the day of one's discouragement!

Isolation. The closer one's discouragement comes to depression, the more apt one is to withdraw from others. When frustration comes, it is natural for one to wish for time alone. Yet, when discouraged, one may choose more and more time away from others. At some point, this becomes detrimental. The Lord

needs His saints in the valley to lift the lost up to the mountain of the Lord's house (cf. Isa. 2:2-3). One cannot take the gospel into all the world when shut up in the cave of discouragement! When God encountered Elijah, he was alone with his discouragement. God addressed this (1 Kings 19:15)!

Influences The Attitude Of Others. If no man is an island to himself, the effects of his discouragement will impact those around him! Discouraged preachers, who cannot "snap out of it" eventually carry it into the content and delivery of their sermons. It spills out in their conversations, especially in the intimate circle of the home! One can very often pick out a discouraged elder and deacon! When the individual is losing the battle of discouragement, it can have such a leavening influence! The Gaddites and Reubenites, in the days and events leading up to the wilderness wanderings, were dismayed by the inhabitants of Canaan. How did they respond to their own weakness of heart? Moses says of them, "They discouraged the heart of the people of Israel from going into the land that the LORD had given them" (Num. 32:9, ESV).

Devalues One's Opinion Of Self. Discouragement can leave one feeling worthless. After all, highly effective people should be able to handle life's disappointments without becoming so effected by them, right? Look at Elijah's self-evaluation in the face of his discouragement. He says, "I am not better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4). Discouragement and positive self-image are normally antithetical.

Depression. Billings and Moos report that some five percent of the U.S. population suffer with clinical, significant depression, but that between ten and twenty percent of her citizens deal with "significant depressive symptoms."⁷ In addition to major stressors like negative life changes and chronic strain, the authors list a variety of "micro-stressors" such as daily hassles, irritants and frustrations.⁸ The authors go on to connect these continuing, mounting problems as the antecedents of depression. A great many of them are the outgrowth or catalysts of discouragement. Another writer adds, "Discouragement can be one of many expressions of depression. Depressed people often feel that everything is wrong and they blame themselves, feeling they are incapable of doing anything right."⁹ Discouragement,

unchecked and unconquered, can grow into a far more serious problem.

Apostasy. This is the most fatal danger posed by discouragement. Many brethren no longer attend services, offer themselves as living sacrifices, teach the truth, or live right because they so succumbed to their discouragement that they fell away from faithfulness. Satan will try and use discouragement as a tool to pry one away from his or her salvation (cf. 2 Cor. 2:11).

Discouragement neutralizes individuals and whole churches. Therefore, it must be properly identified and assessed. Thankfully, however, it need not be debilitating and victorious.

REMEDIES FOR DISCOURAGEMENT

Do Something For Someone Else. The late J.M. Powell, great and able church history writer and teacher, author of such classics as *N.B.H.*¹⁰ and *The Cause We Plead*, among others, one time president of a Christian college, director of a well-known Bible camp for a quarter of a century, and eight-time tour leader to the middle east, spoke of his declining health and limitations near the end of his life. He could have succumbed to the discouragement of increased limitations and feebleness. However, as recorded by Cecil May, Powell related, "For 70 years I have been a gospel preacher and at the age of 90 I'm more or less house bound; *my ministry is confined to writing notes of encouragement*" (emph., NP).¹¹ Whatever the potential source of discouragement, it can be combated by focusing outwardly on the needs of others. That is what God did for Elijah. He gave him a task to anoint two kings and one prophet (1 Kings 19:15-16). If you are in "the dumps," look around and help somebody else down there to escape! There is mental benefit to Paul's instruction to look to the things of others and not just one's own things (Phil. 2:3-4).

Renew And Rededicate. This is certainly a biblical concept. Whether in the context of personal sin or of problems like discouragement, it is always right to ask God, "Renew a right spirit within me" (Psa.51:10). When flat on the floor of frustration, God's child must muster up the strength to start anew and reaffirm commitment to Him. One must refuse to allow discouragement to extinguish his or her figurative light.

Remember that transformation over the world comes only by “the renewal of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). Resolve to resist the downward pull of discouragement by rededicating and redoubling your efforts as a Christian!

Increase Your Devotion. What spiritual struggle is there that cannot be defeated by spending more time with God? While the cause or circumstances of the discouragement may be truly complex, it can be managed and often conquered by prayer, trust, and study. Conversely, many struggling with discouragement are trying to do so alone and neglecting their greatest source of help (cf. Phil. 4:19). Try going into your “closet,” singing praises to God for an hour, and “coming out” forlorn and depressed! Pour out your heart in prayer, casting your cares on the Caring Creator (1 Pet. 5:7), and see how it impacts your mental disposition! It was his interaction with God that lent assistance to Elijah’s outlook (1 Kings 19:11-13).

In Look For The Rainbow/Count Your Blessings. Yancey writes,

Harry Boer, who served four years as chaplain during World War II, spent the final days of that war among marines in the Pacific Theater. ‘The Second Division saw much action, with great losses. Yet I never met an enlisted man or an officer who doubted for a moment the outcome of the war. Nor did I ever meet a marine who asked why, if victory was so sure, we couldn’t have it immediately. It was just a question of slogging through till the enemy gave up.’¹²

What an example for Christians on the spiritual battlefield “slogging” it out with Satan (Eph. 6:10ff)! In the end, whatever the discouragement, faithful Christians will win (2 Tim. 4:8). Despite the factors producing the discouragement, seldom are things so bad that they outweigh the bounty of blessings so greater a part of the Christian life (Eph. 1:3).

Act Your Way Back Into Being Encouraged. As Crabb says, “Don’t move around your problems or get absorbed in them. Move through them.”¹³ While this writer strongly rejects his evolutionary model to explain human development, he would

agree with Minsky that discouragement responds to "changes of context, interest, and schedule."¹⁴ Feeding the negative feelings producing the discouragement only heightens the level and accentuates the feeling of it. Until one determines to cast off discouragement by refusing to allow it domination, he or she will become more mired. As one brother put it, after showing evidence from experts in the field of mental health, "Act better than you feel, and act as if every tomorrow will be better than today, even when common sense tells you otherwise, and they will be."¹⁵

Tackle The Source Of Your Discouragement. This may mean gently confronting the brother or sister who is creating the discouragement, whether wittingly or unwittingly (Matt. 18:15-17; 5:23-24). It may require changing environments, finding another job, or otherwise distancing one's self from the source. Often, though, it means making inward changes to one's way of thinking, reacting, and assuming. The source of one's discouragement, at times, is "all in the mind." It should be remembered that overcoming discouragement is tantamount to greater spiritual strength and mental toughness.

Ask God's Help. Simply, turn the problem over to Him (cf. 1 Pet. 5:7). Let go of it and He will help you cope, even if the stress is not eliminated. Remember Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:9). Have the confidence of David, who said, "In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears" (Psa. 18:6). He will always give what is best!

Step Away From The Situation. Taking a vacation or at least a day or two off, refocusing and redirecting energies in an entirely different direction, or even laying the discouraging matter aside for a while can alleviate the severity of discouragement. That is where having some hobby can prove a healthy outlet and distraction. Whether gardening, running, reading, golf, or some other moderately patronized diversion, the distraction can aid in resolving discouragement. Then, coming back and squaring off with the source of discouragement, one may find it much more manageable.

Rely On Christian Fellowship. Throughout the book of Acts, the first Christians came together and shared their common

faith. No doubt, many reasons for discouragement abounded. Yet, they "continued in fellowship" (cf. Acts 2:42). The epistles are replete with exhortation to lean upon one another and build up each other (Rom. 15:2; 1 Thes. 5:11). Remember, "two are better than one..." (Ecc. 4:9-11). It helps to know that one's problems do not have to be tackled alone.

Find Someone Else To Encourage. With whom was Elijah under that juniper tree or broom bush (1 Kings 19:4)? Nobody! It allowed him to intently focus on his own dire situation, and it made him want to die. That may be a more extreme reaction than is normally felt with discouragement, but discouragement often is kept alive by staying centered on self. Go visit a lonely widow or widower. Drive down to the local Veterans' Hospital and spend time with the amputees, paralyzed, or terminally ill. Write five or ten new, wayward, single, or hurting Christians. Invite a poor family for dinner. Call a preacher or elder who you think may have cause to be discouraged; cheer them up and do not compare war wounds. Email a struggling, lonely missionary. The list of prospects is inexhaustible. Eventually, this endeavor will work like salve on the wound of your spirit.

Some of God's greatest servants have been discouraged. That knowledge is helpful. One poet said, "His love in time past forbids us to think, He'll leave us at last in trouble to sink." Joe Bayly is credited with having said, "Don't forget in the darkness what you have learned in the light." This is the unvarying variable for dealing with discouragement. Like David, let us believe, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psa. 46:1)."

ENDNOTES

1. Purcell, Steven D. *Even Among These Rocks: A Spiritual Journey.* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2000).

2. Those are: Elijah (1 Kings 19), Job, Moses (Exodus 18), Nehemiah (ch. 4-6), Jeremiah and Ezekiel (7:27;3:7), John the Baptist (Luke 7:18ff), and Paul (2 Timothy 4:11,16). Certainly, several other Bible characters could be added to this list.

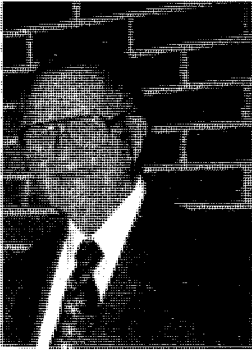
3. Collins, Gary R., Ph. D. *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide.* (Dallas: Word Pub. Co., 1988), p. 455.

4. Jones, James. *Why Do People Suffer: The Scandal of Pain in God's World.* (Oxford: Lion Pub., 1993), p. 8.

5. Flatt , Bill. *Since You Asked*. (Abilene: Quality Pub., 1983). p. 119.
6. Eugene Peterson's *The Message* renders it, "Don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow."
7. Blake ,Toni, Ed. *Enduring Issues in Psychology*. (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc., 1995). p. 218.
8. Op. Cit., pp. 221, 222.
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10. This is the massive biography of the life of N.B. Hardeman. He also authored a biography of T.B. Larimore's life.
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DOUBT

BILL NICKS



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Definitions: "doubt: v.t.: 1. to be uncertain about; consider questionable or unlikely. 2. to distrust. noun: 1. a feeling of uncertainty. 2. distrust or suspicion. Idiom: **Beyond the shadow of a doubt**, with certainty; definitely."¹

Webster's dictionary expresses the meaning of the Greek word *aporeo*, (doubt), literally "without a way," or in perplexity or uncertainty, and its intensive word, *diaporeo*, to be utterly at a loss.²

These words do not imply a lack of faith, but merely that one is uncertain in regard to a situation. Not so with the word *diakrino*, often used in the New Testament and implying a lack of faith, sometimes translated "making a distinction, or separation."³ This word is used in Acts 10:20, when Peter was told by the Spirit, "Arise therefore, go down with them **doubting** nothing; for I have sent them." This implies that Peter was to make no distinction racially, since these were Gentiles, and, though Peter had said on Pentecost that the gospel was not only to the Jews and their children, but also "to all who are afar off [Gentiles], as

many as the Lord our God will call," no move had been taken to get the gospel to the Gentile world. It was important that Peter understand that the gospel was to be taken to the Gentiles without "making a distinction." The sheet from heaven instructing Peter, "What God hath cleansed you must not call common" (Acts 10: 15) was a clear message, as Peter learned, "In truth, I perceive that God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34).

The same word (*diakrino*) is used in James 1:6. After showing the man who lacks wisdom is to ask of God, James says. "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind." Vine comments, "This verb suggests, not so much weakness of faith, as lack of it."⁴

The wisdom which we need to rise to higher plateaus of usefulness, using life's difficulties as stepping stones on which to climb to these higher elevations, must come from God; he alone can give it. But we must receive it; and to receive it, we must believe in him who alone can bestow it. Surely it is idle to expect God to give us wisdom if we will not give him trust! "Doubting," (from *diakrinomenos*), the chief idea of which, as used in our text, is inner debate; and it presents the picture of a person torn by conflicting notions, now disposed to feel this way, now that. It is, as Thayer remarks, "To be at variance with one's self, to hesitate, to doubt; and while it does not denote the utter absence of faith, it describes the disposition of a person who, at one moment feels God will keep his promise, and at another moment, that he will not."⁵

James goes on, "For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (1:7f). Such a person is, as illustrated by likeness to "a wave of the sea," is wavering, vacillating, thus unstable in his thinking and in "all his ways."

Jude says, "And on some have compassion, (who are) doubting (making a distinction)" (*diakrinomenous*) (Jude 22). When they are "tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14), we are to exercise patience and compassion on such, making every effort to persuade them to have firmness of conviction.

DIFFERENCE IN SKEPTICISM AND PERPLEXITY

While some people are doubting, in the sense of (*diakriminous*), as a skeptic doubts the existence of God, most of the cases in the Bible, and in the opinion of this writer, most cases for Christians facing today's problems, are at times uncertain, or perplexed. It is the nature of Christian growth to develop from weakness to strength. In the midst of Christian growth, often life's problems are complicated, and one does not know which way to turn. In such cases, we do not doubt God's existence or his power or glory, but we are often perplexed, and turn to God in prayer for his guidance and providential leadership. This is the doubt that faced ancient worthies, men and women of old who "waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10).

God had promised Abraham, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). As time passed, Abraham, in his weakness, could not understand how this promise could be fulfilled. In his perplexity, he asked, "Lord God what will you give me, seeing I go childless...You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir [Eliezer]" (Gen. 15:2f). God assured him that, not Eliezer, but "one who will come from your own body shall be your heir" (15:4). His wife, Sarai, seized upon this moment of uncertainty, and proposed that, since "the Lord has restrained me from having children, please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her. And Abraham heeded the voice of Sarai." When trouble arose between Hagar and Sarah after the birth of Ishmael, Sarai realized their mistake (Gen. 16:1-6). Both Abraham and Sarai were people of great faith, but the problem with them was their misunderstanding of how God was going to fulfill his promise. Even when the Lord appeared to Abraham when he was ninety-nine and Sarai was eighty-nine and made it clear that, not Ishmael, but "Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him" (Gen. 17:18f). Both Sarah and Abraham doubted they could bear a child in their old age, but Abraham, "not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom. 4: 19f).

Both before Pharaoh in Egypt (Gen. 12:11-20) and before Abimelech in Gerar, in his weak moment of uncertainty of what might happen to him if he told the truth about Sarah, he lied and said, "She is my sister." He should have had more trust in God to take care of him and Sarah, but again, we see how men often make mistakes in their human weaknesses when faced with perplexing situations.

Isaac made this same mistake. He also had a beautiful wife, Rebekah. When he dwelt in Gerar, "the men of the place asked about his wife, And he said, 'She is my sister'" (Gen. 26:6f). He, like his father before him, was afraid, because of the beauty of his wife, that the men of the place would kill him. Isaac dug wells and prospered. The Lord appeared to him and assured him that He was with Isaac. "I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake" (Gen. 26:24). God overlooks, in his mercy toward his servants, their human weaknesses, if he sees they show trust in Him to lead the way, and worship him as Isaac and Abraham did (Gen. 26:25).

In like manner, Jacob and Rebekah deceived Isaac, when he was "old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see" (Gen. 24:1). Rebekah favored Jacob while Isaac favored Esau, the hunter, who would bring him game to eat. Urged by his mother to "bring me two choice kids of the goats, and I will make savory food from them for your father, such as he loves" (Gen. 27:9). Then, dressed so that he would feel and smell like Esau, he brought the food to his father, pretending to be Esau. "And he [Isaac] did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him" (Gen. 27:15-23). Thus, by deceit, he received the blessing usually given the first born, the birthright. "So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing...and Esau said in his heart, 'The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" (Gen. 27:41). When Rebekah heard of this, she sent Jacob to her brother, Laban, to find a wife from there. She was dismayed that Esau had taken wives from the Canaanites, and she and Isaac instructed Jacob, before sending him to Padan Aram, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan" (Gen. 28:1f). It is obvious that God overruled in this case to bring about his promise through Jacob and Joseph to bring the descendants of Abraham

to a "strange land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years" (Gen. 15:13).

God moves in a mysterious way
 His wonders to perform
 He plants his footsteps in the sea,
 and rides upon the storm.
 You fearful saints, fresh courage take,
 the clouds you so much dread
 Are big with mercy, and shall break
 in blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord with feeble sense,
 but trust him for his grace;
 Behind a frowning providence
 He hides a smiling face.
 Blind unbelief is sure to err
 and scan His work in vain;
 God is His own interpreter,
 and He will make it plain.⁶

Just as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had to overcome struggles, even so we must place our trust in an ever-loving God. "Does Jesus care when my way is dark with a nameless dread and fear? As the daylight fades into deep night shades, does He dare enough to be near? O, yes, He cares, I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief. When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares."⁷

NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES OF DOUBT

On the day of Pentecost, the multitude "were confounded [confused, perplexed], because everyone heard them speak in his own language" (Acts 2:6). They were hearing an unusual phenomena. The Holy Spirit had been "poured out" on the twelve apostles, empowering them to speak in at least 15 languages (Acts 2: 17). The crowd knew these were Galileans, "And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?" (Acts 2:8). Peter explained that this was not brought on by drunkenness, but that it was the fulfillment of prophecy (Joel 2:28-30). The church was born on that day, when 3,000 souls responded in faith, repentance, and baptism. The Lord added

these to the church and continued to "add daily to the church those who were being saved" (Acts 2: 15-47).

Not a shadow can rise,
Not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt nor a fear,
Not a sigh nor a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey.

Not a burden we bear,
Not a sorrow we share,
But our toil He doth richly repay;
Not a grief nor a loss,
Not a frown nor a cross,
But is blest if we trust and obey.
Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.⁸

When Cornelius was converted, a series of events happened to both Cornelius and Peter that perplexed them. Cornelius, an Italian centurion, was a just man and held in high esteem by the Jews (Acts 10:1,2,22). An angel appeared to him in a vision one day about three o'clock in the afternoon. When he became terrified, he said, "What is it, Lord?" (Acts 10:3-7). He was instructed to send for Peter, who resided with Simon the tanner in Joppa by the sea. Peter was to tell him what he must do. Cornelius made haste to send two of his household servants and a devout soldier unto Peter. Meanwhile, Cornelius called together "his relatives and close friends." He had "advertised" the meeting. When Peter came with six Jews (Acts 11:12), Cornelius "met him and fell at his feet and worshipped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand up; I myself am also a man'" (Acts 10:26). Prior to this, Peter had a perplexing experience. At noon on the day Cornelius was sending men to him, in a vision Peter saw heaven opened and a great sheet bound at the four comers "descending to him and let down to the earth" (Acts 10:9-11). All kinds of four-footed animals, wild beasts and creeping things, and birds of the air were in the sheet. Peter was commanded to "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." The animals were unclean to Jews, so Peter refused to obey with this remark, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten common or unclean." A voice spoke again saying, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." This was done

three times and the object taken up into heaven. While Peter wondered about these events, the men from Cornelius appeared and explained that he was divinely instructed to come and preach to them. The first thing Peter preached was, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34f). Peter, in recounting what happened, told the Jews later, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning...If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11: 15-17). The outpouring of the Spirit on Gentiles was obviously to convince Peter and the six Jews to admit the Gentiles into the family of God on the same terms as the Jews, namely, by faith, repentance and baptism (Acts 10:44-48).

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound-
 that saved a wretch like me!
 I once was lost, but now am found,
 was blind, but now I see.
 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
 and grace my fears relieved;
 How precious did that grace appear
 the hour I first believed!
 And when this flesh and heart shall fail,
 and mortal life shall cease,
 I shall possess within the veil
 a life of joy and peace.
 When we've been there ten thousand years,
 bright shining as the sun,
 We've no less days to sing God's praise than
 when we've first begun.⁹

One of the most noted cases of doubt in the New Testament is that of "doubting" Thomas. Perhaps he does not deserve this "title," since he was merely seeking proof of the resurrection of Jesus. For some reason unknown to us, Thomas, called the twin, "one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came" (John 20:24). When the other apostles told him they had seen the Lord, his reply was, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). On the next first day of the week, Thomas was present, and the Lord honored

this day with His presence, indicating to us that we too should honor Him with our presence on His day, the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10). Thomas' "apparent stubbornness melted in the presence of the Savior and he passed from a melancholy unbelief to warm and vibrant faith."¹⁰

While Christianity is not a religion of superstition and does not require its devotees to adhere in blind faith to its principles, there is a time when rejection of reasonable evidence becomes a lack of love and faith. We cannot accuse Thomas of having a lack of love and faith, since, upon seeing, he said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). But we can accuse those today who have every opportunity to hear and believe the gospel, yet time and again reject it, of showing no love, which Peter declared was essential to those who had never seen the Lord. "Whom having not seen, but you love though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith- the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:8f).

There is one form of doubt that at least borders on unbelief, about which the following may be said, "And better had they ne'er been born, who read to doubt, or read to scorn."¹¹ "For right is right, since God is God, and right the day must win; to doubt would be disloyalty, To falter would be sin."¹²

Once to every man and nation
comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of Truth and Falsehood,
for the good or evil side...
Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne...
Then to side with Truth is noble
when we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit,
and 'tis prosperous to be just;
Then it is the brave man chooses,
while the coward stands aside,
Doubting in his abject spirit,
till his Lord is crucified.¹³

But when one is merely facing the perplexities in life and is praying for guidance to help him face the right and better way,

it is noble to admit one's inadequacy and fall at the feet of God, begging help. "God laughs in heaven when any man says, 'Here I'm learned; this I understand; in that I am never caught at fault or doubt.'"¹⁴

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3. Op. Cit., p. 92.
4. Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, W.E. Vine, Merrill Unger, Wm. White, Jr. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996) p. 182.
5. Guy N. Woods, "Commentary on James" (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1987) p. 93.
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12. Op. Cit., Frederick Wm. Saber, "On the Field," p. 503.
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SECTION III

ALUMNI

SELF-ESTEEM

NELSON BROCKENBOROUGH



Nelson Patrick Brockenborough preaches for the Catawba Valley church of Christ in Hickory, North Carolina. A 2004 graduate of ETSPM in Knoxville, TN, he also served as interim minister for the Central church of Christ during his last year of school. Nelson obeyed the gospel in 1995, at the Coconut Grove church of Christ in Miami, FL. His secular work experience has primarily been in the area of juvenile justice, and he is presently completing his B.A. in Human Communications at Southern Christian University. He and his wife, Suzanne, are the parents of three daughters: Shaye, Sidney and Zoe.

INTRODUCTION

“Self-esteem” is a term that I used to avoid when talking about religious matters. Since it is not a biblical term and is more commonly used by social scientists to encourage humanistic beliefs, I felt that it was an inappropriate idea for Christians to express. However, after listening to Christians use the term commonly among themselves (often in a self-serving way), I think it is time to transform this often misused term into a spiritual concept. “Self-esteem” is a term generally used by professionals and others to describe how people value and perceive themselves. It is a barometer to measure the confidence one has about oneself:

Self-esteem is how you feel about being you, how you feel about being alive. It is a result from an evaluation of your self-image, how you feel about the way you see yourself. It is influenced by the distance of the gap between your self-image and your ideal image.¹

Though the world may use this term to promote selfishness, children of God are to have a different view of self-esteem. We are to have the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5) and our focus is to "let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves" (Phil. 2:3).² In this lesson, I will seek to: (1) Define worldly self-esteem; (2) Define spiritual self-esteem; and (3) Show how to build a proper self-esteem.

SELF-WORTH

Self-esteem has two components: self-worth (how one values oneself) and self-image (how one perceives oneself). When you combine these two concepts, the outcome is self-esteem. A worldly self-worth is based on outward material circumstances. When you recall Jesus' parable of the "Rich Fool" in Luke 12, this man was having such a banner crop year that he built greater structures to hold all that he gleaned from his fields. He described his self-worth in this manner: "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." His value was his treasure. His outward material possessions made him feel confident about his situation. Since his self-worth was based on the abundance of his goods, he was condemned by God.

Often, we are amazed by people in this world and become impressed with the riches they have amassed. Their wealth is exciting to us, and we think more of them because of their material accomplishments. When we begin to compare ourselves to them, our self-worth is not as great because we are using a faulty measuring stick. We must not base our self-worth on the things that we possess but on the inward qualities of godliness and righteousness. Jesus gives an admonition in the same Luke 12 when He says, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). Jesus unveils the true nature of worldly self-worth - sin (covetousness). The rich fool gave priority to his worldly goods and pursuits before a relationship with God.

As Christians, our spiritual self-worth must be based on the scriptures (Prov. 3:5-6; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The scriptures allow us to become complete in Christ. There are no possessions or

accomplishments that we can obtain that will increase our value as Christians. The Bible tells us who we are in the sight of God, and this allows us to understand our value in His sight. We are God's greatest creation; and, as Christians, we must know that we have been bought with a price - the precious blood of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:19). The Bible tells us that we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood and a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9). These scriptures strengthen us and help us to develop a proper spiritual self-esteem.

SELF-IMAGE

The other part of self-esteem is our self-image. Self-image is based on how one perceives or sees oneself. According to Bill Flatt, "It [self-esteem] results from an evaluation of your self-image, how you feel about the way you see yourself."³ The ability to see oneself accurately is a challenge for many. Jesus illustrates an inaccurate self-image in the story of the tax collector and the Pharisee in Luke 18:10-14. He tells of a situation where these two Jewish men are going into the temple to pray. The Pharisee begins to pray to himself and says, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican" (v.11). When we examine the statements of the Pharisee, we see that his self-image is based upon his perception of the faults of others. This faulty method of constructing self-image is commonly practiced by many of us today, and we are often unaware of our distorted self-perception. As Christians, our standard of self-image is measured by God. Our self-perceptions should be based on who we are in His sight, not on how we appear in our own eyes.

The Pharisee makes a grave mistake when he judges himself by the standard of others; but, conversely, the tax collector is justified by his spiritual self evaluation: "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). His self-image is based on what God thinks of his situation, and his mind is in tune with God's judgments. He knows that God's word condemns his way of life and that, ultimately, his life will have to be transformed into God's image (Rom. 12:2) rather than man's.

Many times, our growth is hindered by our inability to seek God's guidance for self-perception. Often, pride and selfishness are the results of an improper self-image, and this can cause us to be hindered in the Christian walk. We may think that we are too good to associate with some people and thus not show the love of Christ (John 13:34-35), or we may see ourselves as nothing and become entangled in a downward spiral of self-pity. The greatest damage of a worldly self-image is the fact that we will not have the confidence that God has given us...confidence that we need to endure the race. It does not matter how many talents, abilities, or gifts we possess. These things do not make us who we are in the sight of God. It is the inward qualities of purity, righteousness, and godliness that we should use to measure our self-image.

GOD'S LOVE AND SELF-ESTEEM

Combining a proper self-worth and self-image, we build spiritual self-esteem. Our value is priceless in this world. No thing or person can replace our bodies and souls except God. The more we learn of the love of God, the greater value we have of ourselves. God, the sovereign ruler of the world, loved us so much that He sent His Son Jesus to this world to save us. Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit to tell us, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8, NASV). The love of God ought to be our focus. His sacrifice of Jesus for our lives gives us value (worth) in His sight and in the sight of all. Our self-perception (image) is also based on the love of God. Not only did He send His son to die for us, but he has allowed us to be co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Since we are members of His body, His church (1 Cor. 12:27), we have taken on a more precious worth and image beyond anything else in this world, and it is through the love of God that this is all made possible.

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

Intellectually, we understand the goodness of God and our relationship to him through Christ, but you may still find that you have low self-esteem. Where does one begin to build or repair self-esteem? I would like to suggest five ways for you to S.T.A.R.T. building a proper self-esteem:

Set goals. One of our greatest failures is that we do not set goals for ourselves that are measurable, attainable, realistic and controllable (MARC). For example, you feel that your self-image is poor, and you find yourself depressed about your life and accomplishments. You can start by making a goal to daily read scriptures about God's image of your life and to pray about the issues with which you struggle. Or, if you find that your value or self-worth has been based on material things, you can follow the same goal-setting techniques. Take a scripture like Matthew 6:33, which says, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Oftentimes, you have misplaced your priorities, and they need to be reorganized. Maybe you have put your physical pursuits ahead of your spiritual service. A good goal for this situation might be to set a permanent weekly time to do spiritual service. Congregations are always looking for people to "Reach Out" to the sick, the shut-in and the delinquent. By doing this, you begin to take the focus off of yourself and shift your selfishness to self-less-ness. You will begin to see that the focus of your Christianity is that of being a servant to others rather than a servant to self. Jesus said, "but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt 20:26-27). Our primary goal as children of God is to be servants.

Think positively. Optimism is one of the keys to our success as Christians. We must have a positive outlook. This means that our view of life should be based on scriptures like Romans 8:28. After all, we have the greatest hope of all – eternal life. Trying times will come, but we must have a positive view of life's situations. We need to think about positive things. Paul said:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things (Phil 4:8).

God gives us the formula for a positive self-esteem – think positively.

A-ccept responsibility for your thoughts, feelings, and actions. Acceptance of responsibility seems to be a thing of the past. Many of the social sciences want to place people's thoughts, feelings and actions on everything and everyone else, when in fact the Bible tell us that we are responsible for everything we do (Phil 4:8; Col. 3:1,2; Matt. 7:21). We have to realize that we are participants in our lives and not spectators. Everything we think, say and do is of our own volition. One of the common attitudes of low self-esteem is victimization. We feel that we are always the target of persecution: "Everybody is out to get me; that is why I thought, said, or did this or that." Nonsense! We all will face temptations (1 Cor. 10:13) and trials. The Bible says that the more godliness we profess, the more we will suffer persecution (2 Tim 3:12). Yes, we will become the victims of Satan's attacks at times; but we cannot use this as a crutch of unfaithfulness and low self-esteem. Whether or not we are the cause of our problems, we must take responsibility for all of our actions. By doing this, we will begin to grow in our self-image, self-worth, and self-esteem.

R-eframing our thinking has much to do with our perception of things. Imagine if you could see your life in a picture and you were unhappy with the color of the frame. You might despise the picture and hatefully look at it everyday, or you could simply expend a little effort and change the frame. Life is similar to this. We cannot always change the situation, but we can reframe our thinking towards it. You can either see a situation in a positive or negative light. The choice is yours! Reframing your thinking helps you to see the situation in the way God wants you to see it. The apostle Paul talked about his "thorn in the flesh" in 2 Corinthians 12 and about the fact that he prayed to God three times to remove. God made it known to him that, "His grace was sufficient" and that Paul would have to endure these trials a little bit longer (v. 9). The interesting thing about Paul is that he reframed his thinking about the situation and turned it to his advantage. He said:

For my strength is made perfect in weakness.
Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in

distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (2 Cor. 12:9b-10).

Paul reframed a difficult situation and changed his outlook to a positive one. Often, our self-esteem is damaged because of how we look at our situations in life: troubled relationships, financial problems, or poor health. As Christians, we must strive to reframe these situations to our advantage. We must increase our faith and accomplish more in spite of the difficulties and hurdles. As Christians, we are not always given the best situations in life to deal with, but we must work with what we have in order to boost our spiritual self-esteem.

T-ake small steps. The road to spiritual self-esteem is traveled "one step at a time." In our Biblical Problem Solving class, Lonnie Smith would often say, "Start off with baby steps."⁴ The path to both physical and spiritual maturity is made by taking small steps in your progress. We often fail because we "bite off more than we can chew," and we end up spitting it all out and not digesting anything. A lack of patience is often our greatest enemy in building self-esteem. We need to be patient with ourselves, and give ourselves time to grow. My father used to say, "Rome wasn't built in a day," and neither is our self-esteem. We need to be patient with God and let His Spirit work in our lives through the cultivation of His word. The Bible says, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Growth in our Christian lives is crucial to our success in building a proper spiritual self-esteem. The Army used to have a saying: "Be all that you can be." The Lord's Army is similar to this because all of us have been given talents according to our own ability, and we are to use these talents to the best of our ability (Matt. 25:15b). God simply wants us to be all that we can be today.

CONCLUSION

God has created us in His image (Gen 1:26), and He desires for us to have the mind of his Son (Phil. 2:5). Despite our outward material circumstances, or the talents, abilities and gifts we possess; our self-esteem should not be affected by these circumstances. We are who we are because of what God has made us, and that cannot be changed by anyone. If Christians are going to be the "light of the world" and show people that we

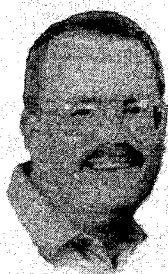
are truly God's people, our spiritual self-esteem will have to be manifested. **START** today by building your self-esteem into what God wants you to be.

ENDNOTES

1. Flatt, Bill, Personal Counseling (Memphis, TN: Flatt Publications, 1991), p. 263.
2. All quotes are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.
3. Flatt, p. 263.
4. Smith, Lonnie, "Biblical Problem Solving" (East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions, 2003).

INDIFFERENCE

MARK S. AITES



Mark Aites is a 1985 graduate of the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions, with additional schooling at Clarion State University in PA. He has been preaching full time 20 years and is in his current work as minister for the past 12 years for the Swartz Creek Church of Christ. Mark has preached in numerous meetings, lectureships, and seminars, as well as being active in television, radio, and writing for newspapers. Mark has been married to the former Diana Mitchell for 26 years. They have four children, Christina, Joshua, Amber and Jonathan. And worthy of special note, Mark is now a grandfather of his pride and joy, Sydney Regan.

INTRODUCTION

On the streets of a city, a newspaper reporter asked a pedestrian, "Do you know what the two greatest problems in America are? The curt reply was, "I don't know and I don't care!"

The newspaper reporter replied, "You got both of them."

Our country is faced with a lot of problems, but the greatest might well be that we have far too many people who do not know or care. It has been said, "Indifference is the invisible giant of the world" (Ouida). Exactly what is it? Webster defines indifferent as, "Does not matter one way or the other, of no importance or value one way or the other, marked by no special liking for, or dislike of something, marked by a lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern for something."

This type of attitude is actually more troubling than those who directly oppose Christianity. The lack of conviction and

disinterest is far more contagious than atheism. When it is found among us, there is great reason for concern as it will spread. Remember the principle that Paul stated to the brethren in Corinth: "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (1 Cor 5:6).

Do you ever wonder why things do not get done? Sometimes it is indeed because of indifference. It has been said: "Love will find a way - indifference will find an excuse" (PULPIT HELPS, Sept., 1990).

DISGUST

It is right and certainly Scriptural to say that our Lord is disgusted with indifference! When Jesus addressed the church in Laodicea:

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent (Rev. 3:15-19).

Notice how much more disgusted our Lord is with the spirit of indifference. "Thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot."

It is easier to reach someone who knows he is lost that he might be restored, than someone who could not care less one way or another. Jesus describes these as lukewarm. Observe the meaning of the words:

1. Cold (*psuchros*) – "cold, chilly." Thayer compares it metaphorically to the Latin *frigidus*, suggesting cold to the point of freezing.
2. Hot (*zestos*) – "to the point of boiling." Hence we see both extremes, freezing and boiling.

Our Lord speaks of being "lukewarm," a word meaning "tepid." Thayer says metaphorically, "of the condition of a soul wretchedly fluctuating between a torpor (an apathy) and a fervor of love." Our Lord vividly describes such as sickening: "I will spue thee out of my mouth." It is in fact not just spitting, but vomiting: Thayer says i. e., "to reject with extreme disgust." It is a graphic expression to show the level of distaste that our Lord has with those who have no convictions or care.

Dante once said, "The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who remain neutral in a time of great moral crisis."

David Riggs tells the story of a ship that was discovered many years ago among the icebergs of the Arctic Ocean, with the captain frozen as he was making his last entry in the logbook. The crew was found, some in their hammocks and some in the cabin, all frozen to death. The last date in the logbook showed that for 13 years that vessel had been moving among the icebergs, "a drifting sepulcher, manned by a frozen crew." A ship found, with a frozen crew, posed as if no one cared.

The church in Laodicea had become a church filled with apathy and indifference. They had, in their richness, become so focused on themselves that they did not care about anything or anybody else. Unless it pertained to them, they did not want to know and did not want to care!

Welcome to the 21st century, as this sounds frightfully like a commentary on the time in which we live. People today harbor the very same attitude. "Unless it effects me, I don't want to know about it. I don't care that it is happening to someone else. It is none of my business."

One writer observed that some believe the church exists solely to pet and pamper them and make them feel good. When it fails to meet that criteria, they become offended and blame the church for not caring. The church does not exist for you, but as

the body of Christ that it may glorify the One who loved it enough to give His life for it. We do not need complainers. We do not need members to whine for lack of attention. Paul admonished the church at Philippi: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:3-4).

DESENSITIZED

Leadership magazine relates the following story:

A young Englishman was in Germany when the Nazis degraded the Jews in the streets. At first he was sick at the sight and rushed down a side street. The next time he felt he could look and stopped for a full minute. The third time he watched. The fourth time, as he stood with the jeering crowd, the sight seemed less revolting. He was becoming, he told himself, "objective." And with this came the realization of his peril. This was not a part of life, a social phenomenon for study. It was the breath of hell (E.M. Blaiklock, *Leadership Magazine*, Winter 1983).

How can one reach such depths that he becomes desensitized? How sad that so many have become callused to the things that go on around us.

One of the most interesting accounts is the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). A portion of the text reads:

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores (Luke 16:19-21).

This rich man feasted daily like a king. The poor beggar, in obvious discomfort from his sores, was forced to survive off

whatever fell from the rich man's table. This rich man was indifferent to the beggar's plight. He went right on feasting, and Lazarus went right on suffering. It is interesting that one writer envisioned the rich man stepping around the ragged figure lying at his doorstep, treating Lazarus as though he was not even there.

Now, we do observe that the text does not say that the rich man kicked, hit, or abused the beggar. Instead his sin was one of indifference, as he simply did not care that another human being was suffering!

There is an interesting account of a woman who found out her husband was a homosexual. Soon after it was apparent, he left her. She said that after the divorce, several of her friends came to her and told her that they knew her husband was gay, but apparently she did not. When asked why they had not previously told her, they said, "We didn't think it any of our business." After hearing this, a noted preacher said that her friends were wrong. And he, himself, said that from that time forward he made a resolution to confront people, a decision obviously not very popular.

It is utterly shocking to hear people echo their sentiments of not caring, and that matters are none of their business. We see this prevalent in the great sins of our time.

- An unborn child is killed every 20 seconds.
- There were over 1,750,000 abortions last year.
- God and the mention of Jesus have become a matter of abhorrence and have been replaced in schools trumpeted with condoms, safe sex, and godless humanism.
- Our society glorifies murder, rape, adultery, homosexuality, nudity, profanity, and fornication through movies and television.
- Churches have reached out to those in immoral relationships and accepted them.
- False doctrine is being preached in pulpits without being challenged.

And my brethren sit back with that all too familiar attitude: since it does not affect me, "It is none of my business." How

would you feel if your doctor examined you, told you everything was alright, and yet, of his own volition, hid from you a debilitating or life threatening disease? What if you questioned him and he said, "Well, I really didn't think it was that serious, and I figured that in time, it would take care of itself." The doctor is not overly concerned because it does not directly affect him. Is that the kind of physician you would want? Regretfully, my brethren have taken the route of the ostrich and have sought to bury their heads in the sand. "If I do not have to face it, it is not real. It is somebody else's problem, after all, I have enough of my own to take care of."

We have become desensitized to sin! Like God's people of old, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD" (Jer. 6:15).

When we get to the point that we no longer blush, that we no longer respond to things with emotion, we are in trouble! If we are going to be content to allow things to go on that are definitely wrong, and we just allow it to happen without uttering a word, then we are nothing more than hypocrites!

DISASTER

You cannot harbor the spirit of apathy and indifference and expect things to turn out well. It is a recipe for disaster!

The Old Testament provides us with an incident where we can see the disastrous effects of indifference. The prophet reveals that God had instructed that the sins of the people were to be written down. The hope was that in written form the people would read of their sins and repent of their evil ways (Jer. 36:3). However, when the scroll had reached the king, we read the alarming words, "And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words" (Jer. 36:23,24).

Even when faced with a crystal clear warning, the king and his servants rejected the truth. They paid dearly for their refusal to listen. The southern kingdom of Judah was taken off into captivity in the land of Babylon (586 B.C.) Even though the prophets foretold it, the people simply did not want to believe it.

It sounds all too familiar. We proclaim the truth that our Lord will return again, and people choose not to believe it. It is as though the things penned in Scripture are fantasy. But our Lord assures us that He does not lie! (Heb. 6:18).

We see the disastrous consequences as well for members of the church, who do not take seriously the fact that their neighbors are lost. The great commission is meaningless. Now, they will, if a house is on fire, try to save those inside, but act as if nothing is wrong as their neighbors slowly work their way into the fires of hell.

CONCLUSION

Until we start caring and stop standing back on the sidelines, the church of my Lord will remain stagnant. Let us not forget the warning which Paul gave to our brethren at the church in Rome. "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:4-5).

PREJUDICE

ED CORNELIUS



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INTRODUCTION

Human beings have been created with the ability to make choices among many things. We are free to choose what kinds of food we like, what colors please us, the kinds of houses we live in or cars we drive. Normally, people consider all the facts and circumstances before making any choice or forming an opinion about anything. For example, in deciding which foods we like, we should consider the appearance, texture and taste as well as the health benefits, before receiving or rejecting the food. This is the mature way of making choices.

Often times people, especially the immature, make decisions about things without benefit of all the facts. For example, many children will not eat eggs, especially over easy, simply because of the way they look. It does no good to encourage them to taste the eggs. It does no good to explain to them the nutritional benefits of eggs. No amount of reasoning will change their minds. To the child, the egg just looks nasty! The

child's mind has been prejudiced against eggs on the basis of its looks.

PREJUDICE DEFINED

Let us first consider some definitions of the word prejudice, which have been gleaned from several sources. These definitions will form the basic background from which this article will take shape.

PREJ-U-DICE (-dis) *noun* 1 A judgment or opinion formed without due examination; a mental decision based on other grounds than reason or justice; especially, a premature or adversely biased opinion. *Synonyms (noun)*: bias, preconception, predilection, *prepossession*, unfairness. A *prejudice* or *prepossession* is grounded often on feeling, fancy, associations, etc. A *prepossession* is always favorable, a *prejudice* usually unfavorable, unless the contrary is expressly stated.²

When we speak of *inter-group* relations, we usually use the term prejudiced to mean a *negative* prejudgment of some group on the basis of its race, religion, or national background. Intergroup prejudice may be defined as an attitude of hostility or rejection based on faulty and inflexible generalizations about a group or category of people. These generalized beliefs are called stereotypes. We presume that all members of a category share the group's objectionable qualities. This kind of prejudice produces fear, suspicion, revulsion and hate.³

Prejudice is a harmful attitude based on inaccurate generalizations about a group of people. The group may be distinguished because they are of a different skin color, religion, sex, age, or any other noticeable difference. In some way, however, the difference is believed by the prejudiced person to imply something negative about the entire group ("They're all lazy, or

hysterical, or pushy"). Not all prejudice is negative in nature...the harm in some attitudes comes from their being based on generalizations that are too positive.⁴

Definition. *Prejudice* is an *attitude* formed prior to or without taking into consideration any examination of objective facts. One example is *racism*, which involves judgments about all members of a race by a member of another race. It is a widespread form of prejudice, common to many forms of human *society*. The same factors that influence the formation of attitudes also influence the development of a prejudice. Associating with people who are racists will encourage such prejudices. Even the mass media may unwittingly encourage maintaining such attitudes.

Stereotypes. A stereotype is a particular kind of attitude. *Stereotypes* are unvarying images of or attitudes about most members of an identifiable group. Stereotypes are simple: The Irish are jovial. Italians are *wine*-drinkers. The Chinese are thrifty and loyal to family bonds. All politicians are crooked. Everyone on welfare is a cheater. All parents are conservative. Stereotypes develop because they simplify our world for us. They allow us, wrongly, to make a first step toward reacting to people.

Discrimination. Prejudice is an *attitude*; discrimination is a behavior. *Discrimination* involves accepting or rejecting someone solely because he or she belongs to a specific, identifiable group.⁵

So, then, in summary, to be prejudiced is to form negative or unfair positive prejudgments' to have an attitude of hostility and rejection toward others based on faulty, inflexible generalizations and presumptions. This kind of prejudiced attitude produces fear, suspicion, revulsion, and hate. A prejudiced attitude is a harmful attitude based on inaccurate information due to a biased

perception of differences. The prejudiced individual usually does not bother to consider facts and is thus led to unfair, unnecessary discrimination.

But to merely define prejudice is not enough. We must learn to recognize the effect prejudice has had, and continues to have, on our communities, the church included.

THE EFFECT OF PREJUDICE ON THE CHURCH

White church, Black church, Oriental church, Latino church, and so on and so on. Many people view this as division or separation among churches of Christ. But can we attribute all separation to prejudice? If not directly, certainly indirectly.

Much of what is perceived as separation is due to culture, language, and the make-up of our communities. For example, many congregations exist because of language barriers. Many, in fact most American Christians do not speak multiple languages. We have come to expect those who move into our communities to learn the English language. But, this is not an easy chore. For most people, especially adults, it takes a great deal of time and effort to become conversant in another language. So, we have seen the emergence of language specific congregations. This is good and is to be expected, and should be encouraged and supported by English-only congregations. Yet, we should be careful not to allow this language difference to grow into division and separation in the church. Fellowship should still exist between English speaking congregations and those who speak other languages.

One solution to the language problem would be for English speaking congregations to reach out to the communities where a language barrier exists and provide worship services and classes in that language with a view toward eliminating the barrier and incorporating those people into the congregation.

Other congregations exist, most notably so called "white churches" and "black churches," based upon what prejudice has done to our communities. Perceived differences in culture in America have brought about the formation of communities based on those perceived differences. The thinking seems to have been that all white people prefer to live with only other white people,

and all black people prefer to live with only other black people. The universal fact is that we all have neighbors with whom we have nothing in common and with whom we would prefer not to associate, regardless of color. Yet, the perceived differences and prejudiced thinking have led to segregated communities, which have in turn led to segregated churches. Unfortunately, it is very difficult for white people to evangelize in black communities and almost impossible for black people to evangelize in white communities. Therefore, black people tend to stick to black communities, and white people tend to work primarily in white communities.

Prejudiced thinking has led most black people to generalize when it comes to white preachers and congregations. Many black people think that all white preachers and congregations are quiet and unemotional, and they perceive this as boring. Conversely, many white people believe that all black preachers and congregations are loud and overly emotional, and they perceive this to be disorderly. The fact is there are loud, emotional black preachers, and there are quiet, conversational black preachers. There are quiet, conversational white preachers, and there are loud emotional white preachers. There are quiet predominately black congregations, and there are loud predominately white congregations. In the final analysis, do any of these things really matter? What really matters is the proclamation of truth! One man proclaims truth loudly and emotionally, another proclaims the truth quietly and conversationally, but truth is proclaimed. The apostle Paul said "What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Phi. 1:18).

HOW DOES GOD VIEW PREJUDICE?

In considering the answer to this question, we must consider at least two attributes of God's character. First, God is righteous. "His work [is] honourable and glorious: and his righteousness endureth for ever" (Ps. 111 :3). A part of the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ was to "declare his righteousness" (Rom. 3:25-25). Since God is righteous, it would be against His nature to prejudge anyone or any thing. God would, then, take a negative view of prejudice in man.

Secondly, God is omniscient. He has knowledge of all things (1 John 3:20). This being the case, God cannot make a judgment without all the facts. God warns man not to make these kinds of judgments. Consider what is said in the following passage:

Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous (Deu. 16:19).

My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons (Jam. 2: 1).

But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors (Jam. 2:9).

I charge [*thee*] before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another [*without prejudice – ASV*], doing nothing by partiality (1Tim. 5:21).

When God gives His instruction to His people concerning any activity or attitude, He declares how He views that activity or attitude. So, then, we must conclude from God's instructions to us that He views prejudice with a decidedly negative eye. God is a righteous judge (Jer. 11:20) and expects no less from His people. "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34), so He demands the same from His people.

Many, in their ignorance of the scriptures, have, by their erroneous doctrines, given the impression that God does show partiality. For example, take the case of Esau and Jacob. In Genesis 25:23 God declared, "and the elder shall serve the younger." This statement, along with that found in Romans 9:13 "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," have led many to erroneously conclude that God chose arbitrarily and thus showed prejudice against poor Esau.

Others believe that, in the same way, God arbitrarily chooses those whom He saves. They believe that Romans 8:29-30 teaches this arbitrary call. Believing this, they see no problem in concluding that others are irreconcilably lost. This view, however, is not compatible with the rest of scripture. For in Acts 10:34-35 we are told: "Then Peter opened [*his*] mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

The fact is, God's call goes forth through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14) to all those who will hear and believe (Rom. 1:16). No, God is not arbitrary in His choices. God is privy to all the facts and information concerning each and every individual from the time of his or her conception to the time of his or her demise. Thus, He is able to know those who will do His will (Jacob) and those who will not (Esau). He is able to know those who will obey His gospel and be saved (Christians) and those who will not hear and obey (the lost).

WHAT CAN CHRISTIANS DO TO FREE THEMSELVES FROM PREJUDICE?

Prejudice is a matter of judgment, or the lack thereof. It is a case of prejudgment or unrighteous judgment. Therefore, each individual Christian must be committed to learning how to judge righteously. Each individual Christian must be committed to keeping the charge of 1Timothy 5:21, which says: "I charge *thee* in the sight of God, and Christ Jesus, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing by partiality." This passage, in its immediate context, refers to how Timothy was to deal with the leaders of the church. Yet, in the broader context of New Testament scripture, certainly this principal must be applied to the Christian's dealings with all men.

Consider what King Jehoshaphat said to the judges he had set in place in Judah as he brought the people back to God; "and said to the judges, Consider what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for Jehovah; and *he is* with you in the judgment" (2Chr. 19:6). Certainly every Christian must be cognizant of this principal. In The New Testament, Christians are commanded:

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam *[is]* in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye (Mat 7:1-5).

Here is an admonition against unrighteous judgment. Let us notice two quotes from Barnes and Clarke:

Mat 7:1 - Judge not... - This command refers to rash, censorious, and unjust judgment...Christ does not condemn judging as a magistrate, for that, when according to justice, is lawful and necessary. Nor does he condemn our "forming an opinion" of the conduct of others, for it is impossible "not" to form an opinion of conduct that we know to be evil. But what he refers to is a habit of forming a judgment hastily, harshly, and without an allowance for every palliating circumstance, and a habit of "expressing" such an opinion harshly and unnecessarily when formed. ⁶

Mat 7:1 - Judge not, that ye be not judged - These exhortations are pointed against rash, harsh, and uncharitable judgments, the thinking evil, where no evil seems, and speaking of it accordingly...By a secret and criminal disposition of nature, man endeavors to elevate himself above others, and, to do it more effectually, depresses them. His jealous and envious heart wishes that there may be no good quality found but in himself, that he alone may be esteemed. Such is the state of every unconverted man; and it is from this criminal disposition, that evil surmises, rash judgments, precipitate decisions,

and all other unjust procedures against our neighbor, flow.⁷

Certainly these quotes should not describe any Christian, for they comprise the very definition of prejudice. The Christian is enjoined instead to "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24).

The individual Christian may rid himself of prejudice by understanding the nature of God's creation. There is no scriptural basis for judging people according to what is erroneously called "race." Christians must understand that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwelt on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Act 17:26).

The individual Christian may rid himself of the curse of prejudice by understanding the nature of the church that Christ built. Notice how the New Testament describes the church:

So we, [*being*] many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another (Rom. 12:5).

Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called [*to be*] saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours (1 Cor. 1:2).

Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we [*him*] no more. Therefore if any man [*be*] in Christ, [*he is*] a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (2 Cor. 5:16-17).

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. 27: For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26-28).

These passages, as well as many others, show the true nature of the church of Christ. Each individual Christian must commit himself to living up to the standard set by Christ. Christians cannot allow false science, false doctrines, false philosophies, or even bad law to pull us away from the truth of God's word.

If the individual Christian is to rid himself of prejudice, he must change his attitude. One method for changing the attitude is persuasion. "Persuasion is any attempt to change an attitude. Four elements are important in such an effort."⁸

1. The source of the persuasion must be considered. For the Christian this is God through His word.
2. The message of the one doing the persuading must be considered. If one really believes the word of God to be all sufficient for "life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3), he will allow the word access to all of his attitudes to bring them into compliance to the word.
3. The channel through which the persuasion comes is of utmost importance. For Christians, this channel is the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 1: 1-2).
4. Finally the recipient of the persuasion must be considered. "There are a number of facts about you that will influence whether some one can change your mind. Your own internal needs and goals clearly have an impact."

In the final analysis, if the source of persuasion is reliable, the message is reliable, and the channel is reliable, the question is: do you as the recipient want to be persuaded to change?

Every Christian must have as his goal, as his main focus in life, a constant, all consuming desire to please God (Ecc. 12:13-14; Heb. 11:6). When this becomes the case,, prejudice will disappear from our lives and therefore from the church.

ENDNOTES

1. All quotes are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.
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THE PROBLEM WITH COVETOUSNESS

LEE G. COLLINS



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INTRODUCTION

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," (Heb 13:5). No one knows for certain who actually penned the book of Hebrews. Of course, we know who actually did the writing was an inspired man of God. There are some very good arguments as to Paul being the one who wrote the book, and I must admit verses such as the one above may allow one to believe such a thing. It just seems very Paul-like in content. Paul is known for saying quite a lot in just a few words, and if that is the case, then this verse screams Paul! So much is said here with the use of just a few words. Whoever the human vessel was, one thing is certain: it is a powerful verse with many great lessons that we, in today's society, should be listening to.

I will honestly tell you that in my life I have heard very few lessons given on the sin of covetousness. Maybe the reason for that is because the meaning of the word is just not as clear as some other things are. Lines become blurry, and if they are not well seen, then misunderstanding is possible. Understanding

covetousness, however, is essential for the child of God. This is a sin, and as with any sin, it needs to be treated with utmost care and understanding lest we be found guilty of it in our lives. Jesus himself says, as recorded by John in John 10:10b, "***I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.***" Certainly, this speaks of our heavenly home, when the children of God will certainly have a more abundant life, but I also believe it is talking about this life as well as the next. We can have a more abundant life here on this earth, a life full of meaning and joy. This life, however, can only be found when living the life God has outlined for us in His word.

As Christians, it is our responsibility to study the life God wants us to live and then live that life to the very best of our ability. God wants us to be a special people, people that are set apart, different than the world. He will take us and make us this way if we allow Him to do so. We, however, have a hard time doing this. We like to be in control, and so often, we simply refuse to let God take us to the place that He wants us to be. This is the only way we can have this more abundant life: to let God have control, to let Him lead us and mold us. If we allow God to have control, He will be able to give us a life that we just cannot imagine, both in eternity and here on earth.

What, you may be asking, does living this kind of life have to do with covetousness? Well, really, it has everything to do with it. You see, this is what the writer of the Hebrews letter is saying. He is making a comment on how we are to live our lives. Conduct, or Conversation in the KJV, is talking about how we live our lives here; the Greek word is *tropos*, and it literally means manner, way, or turn of mind.² James Macknight, in his commentary on the Epistles, states that this same word is "Used by Plato and other Greek writers to denote one's manner of living."³ Living a life without covetousness is not *just* a commandment to apply, it speaks to our character, our very being; it is a way of thinking, a way of training our thoughts and minds; it is a way of life. If we are to be pleasing to God then we must live as He wants us to, which means that we are not to be guilty of the sin covetousness. This is not something that should be taken lightly. It is not hard to see just how God feels about this sin. In the book of Ephesians, we can see that this sin is listed with even sexual sins, "***But fornication and all uncleanness or***

covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints" (Eph. 5:2).

I believe the writer of the Hebrews letter has told us some very important things. Not only do I believe he has told us what covetousness is, but he has also told us how we can take care of this sin as well, or what we can do to fight off covetousness. So, for a few moments, let us look at this sin in more detail. Hopefully, we will come up with a working definition of covetousness, and with that, we will be able to see what we must do to avoid this sin and work to make our lives align with what God wants for us.

THE PROBLEM

As stated earlier, part of the problem that we face with this sin of covetousness is hammering down a workable definition of what it is. To say that it is merely wanting something you do not have is not quite good enough. God expects us to use what He has given us to the best of our abilities. You simply cannot have that kind of attitude in one aspect of your life and then turn around and not apply that to everyday life as well. God expects us to be different than the world, and part of the by-product that comes with being different is that we will do our best in any given situation. For example, God has given you the ability and opportunity to make a certain living. As a Christian, you will do the best you can with what God has given you. That is to say that you are going to look for ways to better yourself and your station in life, not just for your sake but also for your family and for God as well. I truly believe that God wants us to be givers to society and to the Church as well, not just takers. When we better our station in life, the better giver to society and Church we can and should be. Thus, to say that covetousness is merely "wanting something you do not have" is just not a proper definition, it does not go far enough. In the Sixth Annual Shenandoah Lectures, David P. Brown sums up his definition of covetousness with this statement, "It is a greedy avaricious, insatiable appetite that **goes after** things material."⁴

As with many sins, covetousness is a perversion, it is not just wanting, but it is a perversion of wanting. Covetousness, as we usually use the word, is wanting beyond that which is spiritually acceptable. It is putting "things" and the acquisition of those things as a number one priority in our lives. It is loving the

physical more than the spiritual. It is letting those things that are temporary and physical keep us from totally committing our hearts, minds, and souls to God and His commandments. With this in mind, can we then say there is a strong similarity between covetousness and idolatry? I believe we can; in fact, God also said the same thing. In the book of Colossians, God said this through Paul:

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry (Col 3:2-5).

Can we see the similarity and the problem? We **say** God can do all things; we **say** that he knows what is best for us, but do our actions coincide with our words? Do our actions show others that we put our trust and faith in God and God alone, or are we seeking something else, something physical? In Colossians chapter three, Paul likens covetousness to idolatry, and so it is. We can see in just about every case where idols were worshipped instead of God; those idols were worshipped for what they could do for man here on this earth, here in the physical. There were gods of fertility and gods of harvest. The bright stars in the sky we now know as planets were worshipped as gods as well. They were symbols of destiny and good fortune.⁵ All of these things were worshipped for what they were thought to give to man while he was here on this earth.

Is it then hard to see that we have idols today? I believe we can very easily see this is true. Instead of carved images, our idols of today take the form of money, possessions, fame, power, pleasure, and so on. It is the love of these things and more deeply, the love of self or selfishness, which makes covetousness such a dangerous thing. They are the things we put in front of God, things that take us away from where God wants us to be.

WHO IS AFFECTED?

Because we are all physical beings, I believe all of us can look back on our lives and see a time when we were, or even maybe still are, guilty of this sin. I believe that at one time or another all of us have experienced covetousness. In fact, I believe we may be guilty of it more often than we think. You may be surprised to find it in some places where you would not expect. I would even dare say that it is at the heart of why so many of our brotherhood congregations have taken such a dangerous view of doctrine.

Welcome to the age of the "Mega Church"! This is a time in our society where numbers seem to matter the most. We see thousands of people flocking to "so called" religious institutions where the cry of the day is you can live the life YOU want to and still be spiritual. We see hundreds and hundreds of people buying into that theology, and we see the money that is spent on salaries and buildings. We see how books that are written with this kind of theology sell and how the speakers of those institutions are well known. I believe that covetousness rears its ugly head. We covet this so much, in fact, that there are those who will give up on true and meaningful doctrine to have what others around them have, and to be a part of that religious scene.

People have done here what they have always done. They think of themselves first and their lives here in the physical. The full bands, the elaborate buildings, the highly paid eloquent speakers – all of these things are designed to play into the physical being. Unfortunately, what these people fail to realize is religion built on the physical part of who we are is not true religion. Just like the worship of Idols, we simply cannot base our theology on things here on this earth, on things that are physical. Jesus Himself says that true worship is done in SPIRIT and in TRUTH (John 4:24). He says that God is a Spirit and so we must worship in spirit. We must serve in spirit. Whom then are we serving when we base our religion on things physical? Well, the answer is obvious. Since we, mankind, are physical then we are serving ourselves rather than God when we base our religion on the physical instead of the spiritual.

THE SOLUTION

Remember that our "conversation" (KJV), or "conduct" (NKJV), is a way of thinking, an attitude for living, a way of life – so the Hebrews writer is saying that our way of life, our way of thinking, should be one without covetousness in it. Well, how do we accomplish this, after all, are we not physical beings? Well, part of us is physical, but not really the part that makes us who we are. The essence of man is that which cannot be seen or touched physically. It is the inward man, the spirit and soul of a man that makes him/her who he/she is. The problem is that if care is not taken, the outward things will corrupt the inward man. Is this not the problem faced by Paul in Romans chapter seven?

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin (Rom 7:22-25).

We have the ability to fight off the weakness of the flesh, to fight off the want of the physical. God has given us everything we need for this kind of warfare. You see, the solution to the problem is really the same for all sin, and if we can liken covetousness to idolatry then the solution to covetousness is the same as for idolatry. Certainly, God through the apostle Paul, has given this solution to us. In the book of 1 Thessalonians, Paul is commending those people because they have put away the idols that kept them away from God:

For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:9-10).

This is it; this is the solution, turning to serve the Living God. If we set our hearts and minds on turning and serving Him, then those things we covet so much will simply lose their luster. Turning to God will put those physical, temporary things in their proper perspective. Focusing on those things that are eternal will make those things that are temporary unimportant.

Is this not the same teaching Jesus gives in Matthew 22:37, when asked by a young scribe, ***“Which is the greatest law?”*** Jesus replies with, ***“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:36-37)***. If we can do this, if we can turn to God and love Him with all of our hearts, minds, and souls, then covetousness will be put in its place. God, through the writers of the New Testament, is telling us that we are to move from those things that are physical toward those things that are spiritual. Doing that will give our lives a new direction. It will allow us to view the world in a new way; God’s way. It is the reason why Paul was able to say, ***“I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (Phil 4:11)***. He finishes this statement himself with the same teaching, ***“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13)***.

CONCLUSION

Covetousness is so dangerous because it takes us away from where God wants to take us. It takes us away from the spiritual and pays attention to things physical. Throughout the New Testament, God is teaching us how to become more and more like Him. We simply will not take on the characteristics God wants us to have when we are concentrating on the physical part of who we are. The life that God has in store for us is a beautiful life, both here and in heaven. We err thinking that we need all of the physical stuff to make us happy and whole people, we do not! God does care about our lives here on this earth and the physical will be taken care of, but we will never be truly happy if we are running around trying to acquire all of the physical things we THINK will make us happy. We can be truly happy without them because if we allow God to work in our lives, take us to the place He wants us to go, then all those physical things we so desire will be put in the proper perspective. Our love for God and for things spiritual will simply take over our love for those things physical. If we notice again the last part of Hebrews 13:5, ***“For He Himself***

has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," we can see the solution to the problem. First, God tells us to let our lives be without covetousness, and then He gives us the reason. He does not say do not covet AND I will never leave you; He says do not covet BECAUSE I will never leave you. If God is our life, then the question must be asked, "What more do we need or want?" What is there to covet after? We have the best thing we could ever have, and we should be thankful for that.

Jesus has said that with Him we can have a more abundant life (John 10:10). By turning to Him, loving Him with all of our hearts, souls and minds, we will be truly happy, and it is a happiness that will last for all eternity.

ENDNOTES

1. All Scripture quoted is from the New King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted.

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3. Macknight, James D.D. Apostolical Epistles (one volume set), Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, p. 575

4. Hightower, Terry M. (Editor), Biblical Ethics The Sixth Annual Shenandoah Lectures, Brown, David P. Article Thou Shalt Not Covet, Pensacola: Austin McGray and Company, 1991, p. 307

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SECTION IV
NIGHT SPEAKERS

TRUSTING GOD'S PROMISES

GARY MCDADE



Gary McDade and, Sheila have been married for 34 years and have two children, Jared and Jason. Gary is a graduate of FHU (B.A., *Summa Cum Laude*). He began preaching in Rota, Spain, while in the military (1973). He is a writer for *The Spiritual Sword* and participates in the *Spiritual Sword TV Ministry*. He is the director of the annual Spiritual Sword Lectures conducted at the Getwell Church of Christ in Memphis, where he preaches. Gary also works as an Associate (R.R.; I.A.R.) with the Evensky Limited, LLC financial firm in Memphis.

The invitation to have this kind of a part in the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions Annual Lectureship is a great honor. The distinguished Director, James Meadows, has garnered the respect and admiration of countless thousands of Christians across the years of his labors for the Lord. The presentation of his study of the word of God has been of immense value in my own education and expression of the gospel of Christ. The friendship of James and Beverly has enriched our lives. Charles and Jane Brown have been respected friends of ours for more than twenty years now, from the time we labored for the Cause of Christ in Coffee County, Tennessee. Bill Bryant and his late wife, Nancy, worked with the Southaven Church of Christ in Southaven, Mississippi, which is near Memphis and did a great work while there. We continue to mourn her untimely passing into the arms of Jesus. Thank you, for warm reunions and for becoming more closely associated with a work long admired and appreciated.

God has made promises to Christians. They are "exceeding great and precious." Peter wrote, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Pet. 1:3-4a). Please take a moment to observe that (1) divine power is behind the promises of God to Christians, (2) life and godliness are connected with the promises of God to Christians, (3) the knowledge of God provides the means to comprehend the promises of God to Christians, (4) God has called Christians to glory and virtue from which the promises of God to Christians is realized, and (5) the promises of God to Christians are not in some way held in abeyance, but they "are given unto us." "Trusting God's promises" motivates a Christian to fulfill his calling to godliness because as Peter continued, "That by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature," (v. 4b). And, "trusting God's promises" motivates a Christian to turn away from the wicked world "having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (v. 4c). God has made promises to Christians.

Lest these promises be taken for granted, note that these "great and precious promises" exclusively are for Christians. Paul pointed the Ephesian Christians back to their former lives to make them grateful for their present position of acceptability and favor before God when he wrote to them,

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world (Eph. 2:11-12).

The contrast is drawn between being outside of Christ and being in Christ. Outside of Christ they were aliens, strangers, hopeless, and godless. "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ...Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (vv. 13, 19). A moment in meditation on the misery of the past

serves to deepen the appreciation for the immediate manifestation of mercy.

"Trusting God's promises" begins with trusting in God to the point of obeying the gospel because God clearly has told the location where the promise of "all spiritual blessings" may be found, and that is "in Christ." Paul's opening comments to the Ephesians included this statement, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). The Corinthians were assured, "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Cor. 1:20). Twice in one short verse Paul said that the promises of God are "in him."

As the study of this subject proceeds, it should become clear that the promises of God are anchored deeply in the promises appearing to the ancient patriarchs in general and to the patriarch Abraham in particular. And, the comments of Paul in this connection in Galatians 3:26-29 particularly are insightful.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

The promise mentioned here crosses many centuries and according to Moses was:

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3).

The exact means of enjoying that promise of God to Abraham by people living today is for them to "have been baptized into Christ." The reassurance then for those who belong to Christ by being baptized into Christ is "then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." For emphasis, please consider this question and the corresponding biblical answer: When do people become Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise? The Answer: When they are baptized into Christ. Paul wrote, "**Then** are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

When called out of Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham began walking in "steps of faith" (Rom. 4:12). Jesus calls people out of the world today to have abiding confidence in him to lead by his word to the home of the soul called "heaven." As Abraham trusted God, even so must we trust God's Son to guide us to heaven. Jesus once said,

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:1-6).

Jesus asked his disciples to believe in him. He wanted the disciples to have abiding confidence and unwavering trust in him, just as they had in God, the Father. Recently, at the graveside service of a faithful Christian, the preacher comforted the family with these words from the Savior. He illustrated what he thought Jesus meant by drawing a parallel between the devoted decedent and the desire of the Savior from this passage for his disciples to believe in him. He commented,

Think back with me just for a moment to a time now fifty-one years in the distant past about what

was in your husband and father's heart when he asked your mother to marry him. He was asking her to have confidence in him and to trust him to love and provide for her and, if the Lord willed, the family they would make together. The long history of their relationship together, the children and grandchildren with whom they have been blessed, the provisions for the necessities and many of the luxuries of life stand before us today in evidence that the confidence, the trust, the belief that your mother had in your father certainly was not misplaced. If the truth has ever been told you are hearing it today, your husband and father's promise to love, honor, provide, and protect to the very best of his ability was kept. By the same token, beloved, Jesus asks each of us to believe in him as our faithful guide through the many turns and twists of life as boldly he leads us to that tranquil home of the soul at last. And, we rest assured that this trust, this confidence will never be misplaced.

"Ye believe in God, believe also in me."

God promised, "And I will put enmity [hatred] between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). From the dim glow of the starlight age, as Marshal Keeble referred to the Patriarchal Age, God began to unfold the great scheme that would emerge from the depths of his infinite mind in eternity past for the salvation of all mankind through Jesus Christ. The Bible says,

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal

purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:8-11).

The bruising of the head and the heel alludes to the Devil being behind the death of Christ, the bruising of the heel, and the bruising of the head, a fatal blow, would be struck when God raised Jesus Christ up from the dead (Acts 2:23-24; 3:25-26). The seed references in Genesis point to the virgin birth of Christ as taught by the eighth century BC prophet Isaiah in chapter 7:14 and fulfilled as recorded by the apostle Matthew in the opening chapter of the book that bears his name (vv. 20-23). From the first glimmer of the promise of salvation, to the glorious resurrection of the Savior, there stands as the Rock of Gibraltar solid evidence that God keeps his promises.

The promise Jesus made to build his church occupies significant space in the Bible and serves to strengthen the confidence of the believer in the promises of God to see the monumental plan for the salvation of the souls of men unfold across the long centuries of man's sojourn here on earth. Life presents challenges, both positive and negative. Regardless of the unfortunate turn of events a Christian may face, the provisions contained in the promises of God serve to cheer the saint onward accomplishing the purposes of God for his or her life. Even the approach of the end of physical life may be viewed with optimism through unfaltering confidence in the promise God has made through Christ. The apostle Paul certainly viewed it this way, for he wrote words that doubtless have strengthened the saved as the transition into the unseen realm has approached countless thousands of God's people. For example, "According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:20-21). Another passage that breathes life into deflated souls reads,

And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive

you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:16-18).

One of the most endearing thoughts expressed throughout the Bible is "Let your conversation [conduct, NKJV] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5).

The promise Jesus made to build his church is incorporated in statements God made to his servant David as appears in 2 Samuel 7:12-16:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

The fulfillment of these promises may be traced out centuries in time later as the New Testament reveals the Christ to be descended through the lineage of David. The opening words of the New Testament say, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). The day the church was established, the apostle Peter laid great stress on the point that the Jesus whom the Jews had crucified was the royal descendant of David, about whom David himself had written. With the power of his convictions Peter on that occasion said,

For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore

did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [Hades, ASV], neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell [Hades, ASV], neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:25-36).

Since these passages show that God has kept his promises in the past, it is reasonable and right to have confidence that God will keep his promises to his people in the future because without equivocation he has demonstrated himself able to do what he says he will do.

The promise Jesus made to build his church had many details woven into its fabric. The church would be his kingdom and, as just mentioned, as the descendent of David, Jesus would preside as its king. The prophet Daniel wrote:

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they

brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14).

The kingdom would be indestructible or everlasting as Daniel had previously prophesied, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44). As it would have one king, its people would have one name, "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one" (Zech. 14:9). The kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament is fulfilled by the church in the New Testament. Jesus said:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell [Hades, ASV] shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:18-19).

Jesus would not only be its king but also its high priest. Descending as he did through the lineage of Judah, the kingly tribe, and not the lineage of Levi, the priestly tribe, Jesus could never be a priest on earth, and since he is both king and priest simultaneously and permanently, the emphasis rests upon his kingdom being spiritual in nature. He himself said, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36). His throne is in heaven, and so is the citizenship of his people. This point is proven in Colossians 3:1-2, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth..." and Philippians 3:20, "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord

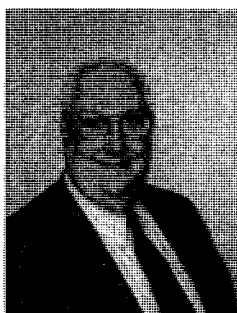
Jesus Christ." Contrary to the popular health and wealth preachers who advocate that "seed faith" monetary gifts ostensibly presented to God through them guarantee health and wealth for the givers, the Bible maintains that the blessings promised to those in Christ are "spiritual blessings in heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3).

The promise of eternal life being made by God who always keeps his promises fills the Christian with hope and final comfort. The disciple whom Jesus loved wrote, "And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life" (1 John 2:25). The Psalmist said, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Psa. 103:12). Robert R. Taylor, Jr. once explained the significance of the direction of the distance from which the redeemed are separated from their sins in this verse. He pointed out that the redeemed are so far removed from their sins as the east is from the west. The Psalmist did not say as far as the north is from the south because if one ascends in a northerly direction he eventually will reach a point where he will begin to descend toward the south and given time continues in a north and south oscillation. But, on the other hand, if a person travels eastward, he always moves in that direction or if he goes west, he always moves westward. Unlike the north and south, the east and west will always be separated. And, that is how far God has removed past sins from the child of God. Eternal life is available in Christ and in his church. Paul wrote, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:4-5). The many members are in one body and the one body is in Christ. Abiding in Christ assures abiding in salvation. The Bible says, "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10). Jesus said:

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full (John 15:9-11).

FRIENDS: HELP OR HINDRANCE?

THOMAS C. MILLER



Tom Miller began full-time preaching in 1965 and since that time has served churches in WV, OH, and TN. He received his education from Ohio Valley College, Davis and Elkins College, Southern Christian University, and the Institute for Effective Church Leadership. He has worked with ETSPM since 1990 and has been the Dean of Academics since 1998. Tom is married to the former Sierra Cabrera, and they are the parents of two sons and three daughters, and grandparents of four grandchildren.

This year's lectureship is devoted to a discussion of life's everyday problems. That designation is appropriate. There are problems, and they do occur daily. Most of us who have lived very long can testify to the truthfulness of Job's observation: "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). This is not meant to ignore the good things that come into our lives, but it is to admit the evident truth that life brings problems.

The list of the problems that we face daily is long. It includes loneliness, pride, anger, prejudice, temptation, doubt, fear, guilt, grief, and jealousy. All of these, and more besides, have been, or will be, discussed this week.

These evening sessions are designed to explore sources of help in dealing with these everyday problems. It is fitting and proper that we talk about friends in this regard. When we think of friends, we think of biblical examples like Naomi and Ruth, David and Jonathan, Paul and Timothy, and—of course—Jesus and His disciples. And, most of us think of those people who have stood with us and helped us through our times of trouble and difficulty.

Friends are wonderful. Most of us want friends; all of us need friends. Eugene Kennedy, Professor of Physical Sciences in Dublin, Ireland, commented, "The main business of friendship is to sustain and make bearable each other's burdens. We may do more of that as friends than we do anything else."

My assignment for this evening is to discuss friends and whether they are a help or a hindrance to us in dealing with life's everyday problems.

THE SOCIAL PRINCIPLE

To help answer that question, we must consider what I will call "The Social Principle." This principle is rooted in the fact that man was not made to be alone. After Adam was created, and just before he was given the responsibility of naming all of the animals, God said, "It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). When no suitable mate for Adam was found in the animal kingdom, God took a rib from Adam's side and created a companion, a helper, a friend for him. As someone has commented, "God divided man into men—and women—so that they might enjoy the friendship of each other."

Even today, our hearts cry out for human ties. This fact certainly puts a premium upon making good friends. This social principle, as we are calling it today, is the chief channel through which the forces for both good and bad work out their issues of life and death among men.

Biblically, this principle is stated in Proverbs 27:17: "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend." Iron does sharpen iron. We have all been made better than we might otherwise have been, because of the influence of our friends. And, we have all been made worse than we might otherwise have been, because of the influence of our friends. Every time we pick a friend, we are picking a little piece of our destiny.

FRIENDS: A HINDERANCE

Friends can certainly have a negative influence upon us. In this regard, I think of an Old Testament character named

Amnon. His story is told in 2 Samuel 13. Amnon was a son of David's who fell in love with his half-sister, Tamar. He was so troubled by her that he became physically ill.

2 Samuel 13:3 says, "But Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab." This may sound innocent enough until we note that Jonadab "was a very crafty man," and that he was the one who gave Amnon some very bad advice. The wicked plan was that Amnon was to ask his father, David, if Tamar could take care of him during his feigned illness. Permission was granted, and she very lovingly made cakes for him to eat. He took advantage of her closeness and attention to him and forced himself upon her sexually. What a terrible violation of his relationship with his half-sister. What great abuse of her trust and innocence. What a sin against God, his father, his sister, and himself. It is true that Amnon was a wicked man, but it is also true that his crafty friend, Jonadab, helped him to be even worse. Iron sharpens iron; sometimes for the worse.

In the New Testament, the negative influence of friends is pointed out in 1 Corinthians 15:33: "Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits." Our associates, our companions, and our friends can all have a corrupting influence upon us.

The fact that this passage begins with a warning about being deceived is very telling. Obviously, self-deception is possible. How often have we said, "Oh, I'm strong enough to handle it; I won't let him influence me?" Even as a child, I remember seeing this principle illustrated by one person standing on a chair and another standing on the ground. As they joined hands and began to tug on one another, it was easy to see that it is easier to pull someone down than it is to pull someone up.

These two passages—one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament—both illustrate the negative influence friends can have upon us. They also sound a grave warning against easily formed and ill-chosen friendships. As Samuel Johnston, the British lexicographer, observed, "True happiness consists not in the multitude of friends, but in the worth and choice of friends." Solomon warned, "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul" (Prov. 22:24-25).

Instead of helping us as we deal with life's struggles, some friends actually become a part of life's struggles and only add to our burden. I wonder if Job's friends would not fit into this category. Job was certainly facing some serious problems, and he could have used the help and support of his friends. Instead of helping him, they added to his burden. Instead of being true friends, they were judges. They accused him of being a sinner and bringing his troubles upon himself. No wonder he said, "I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are you all" (Job 16:2).

Yes, iron sharpens iron; sometimes for the worse.

FRIENDS: A HELP

It is sad, however, that we most often think of the "social principle" in a negative sense. It certainly has a positive side. Listen again to words of wisdom: "He who walks with wise men will be wise . . . Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man's friend gives delight by wise counsel" (Prov. 13:20; 27:9).

A casual visit to a website, or casually consulting a book of quotations, will supply us with many wonderful descriptions of, stories about, and tributes to the beauty and benefit of friendships. A Joliet, Illinois, church bulletin, edited by Dick Blackford, contained this quote: "Those who are interested in our happiness, concerned for our welfare, rejoice in our joys, weep with our tears; who counsel and cheer us and are ready to aid us; these are our friends."

Dinah Craik, the English novelist and poet, wrote,

Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person; having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but to pour them all out, just as they are, chaff and grain together, knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keeping what is worth keeping, and then, with the breath of kindness, blow the rest away.

Friends have been defined in various ways: "One who multiplies joy, divides grief, and whose honesty is inviolable." "A volume of sympathy bound in cloth." "One who understands our silence." "One who comes in when the world goes out."

Shortly before his death, Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote *Youth and Age*. In this quaint work, he reflected over his life. The most moving line in the book is about friendship. Coleridge said, "Friendship is a sheltering tree."

Truly, friends are a blessing. They comfort us in times of sorrow. They challenge us when we are struggling. They bring out the best in us. They never forsake us. As Solomon said, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov. 17:17).

I am sure this is one reason why God designed the church as He did. It is a place of fellowship and friendship. It is a place where iron can sharpen iron for the betterment of all involved. Listen again to Scripture.

That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually (1 Cor. 12:25-27).

In the book of Galatians, this same writer reminds us of the responsibility brethren have to one another. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ...Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:2,10).

On a personal note, I cannot imagine what my life would have been like without the help and comfort of my friends. They have lifted me up. They have wiped my tears. They have shared my load. They have blessed my life immeasurably. Thank God for friends! And, I trust that in some measure, I have been able to do these same things for them.

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

Sometimes, in dealing with subjects like this, we state the principles and fail to make the application. If friends affect one another for the better or the worse, what does this say to us in a very practical way? What are the lessons we should learn?

First, we must work at developing friendships. The first step in this is surely being a friend ourselves. We cannot expect of others what we are unwilling to give ourselves. Again, in turning to the Proverbs we find such words of wisdom: "A man who has friends must show himself to be friendly" (Prov. 18:24). This is the first rule of friendship.

True friendship is never one-sided. Many people seem to be looking for those who will listen to their problems, help them meet their needs, and stand by them. This is an act of selfishness and can never result in true friendship.

The Golden Rule never goes out of style, and it should apply to our friendships, too. "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). This is not a negative rule of reaction; it is a positive rule of action. It seizes the initiative. If I am a friend, I ask but one question: "How would I like to be treated in this situation?" Then I treat the other person that way, no matter what he says or does. When we treat others as we would wish to be treated ourselves, we have laid the groundwork for friendship.

Samuel Johnson wrote: "We cannot tell the precise moment when friendship is formed. As in filling a vessel drop by drop, there is at last a drop which makes it run over; so in a series of kindnesses there is at last one drop which makes the heart run over."

This is how it must have been with Jonathan and David. In many ways, they were unlikely friends. One was the son of the king, and the other was the heir apparent to the throne, but there was no jealousy. There was that last drop which made them friends, and their friendship was mutual.

Scripture records that Jonathan loved David as his own soul (1 Sam. 20:17). At Jonathan's death, David said, "I am

distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women. How the mighty have fallen..." (2 Sam. 1:26-27). David had lost a true friend, and it grieved his heart.

Second, we must learn to accept the friendship of another and the help he or she can give us. This is similar to what we have just said, but it is an enlargement upon it. To have friends, we must be a friend. But, to have friends, we must let friends be friends to us, also.

Sometimes, I think this is the hardest thing to do—to sit quietly and let someone befriend me. I remember a lady coming to my door after the death of my spouse. She was a long-time friend, and she wanted to take our clothes home and wash and iron them. I protested, and she insisted. I would have been glad to do something for her, but I had a hard time letting her do something for me.

In case you are wondering, she won. Over my objections, she gathered all of our dirty clothes and took them home with her. The next day she returned them all freshly washed and ironed. Though it was hard for me to accept her friendship, I will never forget it.

When I think of this characteristic, I think of Jesus. He was a friend, and He was always serving others. Yet, in John 12, He sat quietly and let a grateful friend anoint His feet with costly oil and wipe them with her hair. In fact, when she was criticized by others, Jesus defended her. "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial" (John 12:7).

Why? Jesus knew her heart was pure. He knew this was a loving act of gratitude. Mary, along with her brother, Lazarus, and her sister, Martha, were his friends. He would accept her act graciously.

Third, we must do the hard work of being a friend. Being a friend is one of the most costly things any one can ever do. A true friend puts himself at risk, but he is glad to do it.

How can we think of this and not think of Jesus? He was constantly putting Himself at risk for His friends. His outgo was

always more than His income. He lived His life in the red. He said what needed to be said, and He did what needed to be done no matter what others would say or do. Remember: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). And Jesus did exactly that; He was a true friend.

Jackie Robinson was the first African-American to play major league baseball. While breaking baseball's "color barrier," he faced jeering crowds in every stadium. While playing one day on his home field in Brooklyn, Robinson committed an error. His own fans began to ridicule him, and he stood on second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered. At that point, shortstop "Pee Wee" Reese came over and stood next to him. He put his arm around Jackie Robinson and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that Reese's arm around his shoulder saved his career. That was an act of loyalty and friendship. It placed Reese at risk, but he took that risk—and he saved the career of one of baseball's greats.

Proverbs points out another requirement of friendship that is often difficult. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov. 27:6). A true friend finds the courage to lovingly rebuke his friend when he gets out of line. It is not because he loves little; it is because he loves much. A friend hurts us by correction today so that we will be better tomorrow.

Was not Paul being a friend to Peter when he rebuked him about his hypocrisy? You see, Peter would eat with Gentiles when no one was looking, but when Jews from Jerusalem were around, he would not eat with them. Paul said, "Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 2:11).

If you know the rest of the story, you know this did not end their friendship. The rebuke was needed and accepted. In this regard, David wrote, "Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; Let my head not refuse it" (Psa. 141:5a).

This says something about the friends we should pick; does it not? We want friends who will fulfill the hard work of friendship. We want friends who will stand at "second base" with us when the crowd is jeering. We want friends who will tell us

what we need to hear and not what we want to hear. As someone has stated, "Pick a friend so pure that it will be hard for you to be false."

Fourth, we must not forget about the little things associated with friendship. Friendship is not all big things; sometimes it is little things. But, these are the things we often forget to do.

I wonder if what Barnabas did for John Mark was a little thing or a big thing. After John Mark turned back on the first missionary journey, Paul did not want to take him on the second journey. But, Barnabas did. "Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who departed from them at Pamphylia..." (Acts 15:37-38). The contention was so sharp between these two friends that Paul took Silas and went one way and Barnabas took John Mark and went another way. Ask Barnabas, and he might say it was a little thing. Ask John Mark, and he might say it was a big thing.

I wonder if what Dorcas did was a little thing or a big thing. Scripture says, "This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did" (Acts 9:36). Ask Dorcas, and she would say it was a little thing to make garments for the widows. Ask those ladies, and they would say that it was a big thing. In fact, when she died, "all the widows stood by him [Peter] weeping, showing the garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them" (Acts 9:39).

If you know the rest of the story, you know that Peter raised Dorcas from the dead. I am sure she returned to doing her "little things" for the benefit of those who needed tunics and garments.

A piece that has appeared in various bulletins is entitled "It Only Takes A Minute..."

- ...to stop and say a few words to the newcomer, that you have passed by, with a quick "hello."
- ...to draw a person who is obviously feeling like an outside into a chattering group.

- ...to make the introduction that may not be necessary, but that will demonstrate friendliness.
- ...to write a note to a person who is ill, or who has lost a member of the family.
- ...to really listen to what a child is earnestly telling you.
- ...to take the trouble to pass along the good things that you know about others.
- ...to build up a person who is feeling low, or seems to be worried or discouraged.

In the course of a few years, the Joe Bayly family lost three of their children. In his book, *The Last Thing We Talk About*, he shares his honest feelings when one of them died.

I was sitting torn by grief. Someone came and talked to me of God's dealings, of why things happened, of home beyond the grave. He talked constantly. He said things I knew were true. I was unmoved, except to wish he'd go away. He finally did. Another came and sat by me. He didn't talk. He didn't ask any leading questions. He just sat beside me for an hour and more. He listened when I said something, answered briefly, prayed simply, left. I was moved. I was comforted. I hated to see him go.

In my own case, I remember those who did "big" things for me when I was dealing with life's everyday problems. But, I also remember—and appreciate—the "little" things people did. I remember the phone calls, the cards, the arms around my shoulder, and the words of encouragement. Come to think of it, these were not such little things after all. They meant so much to me.

Fifth, we must realize that pointing someone to Jesus is the greatest thing a friend can ever do for a friend. He is the "friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24).

Jesus is our best friend, because He is able to understand us and to help us. Some may understand us but are

unable to help us. Some may be able to help us but incapable of understanding us. Jesus can do both, because He is the God-man. As God, he has the divine ability to see our hearts, and as man, he had the human experience that allows us to know that He understands our humanity.

Listen to Scripture. "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16).

And again from this same book: "For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" (Heb. 13:5b-6).

We must remember that friendship with Jesus is a two-way street, too. Remember these words: "You are my friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:14).

CONCLUSION

Friends: help or hindrance? They can be either, and they can be both.

Life is just too difficult to face alone. We need our friends. We must, therefore, choose friends carefully, be a friend ourselves, allow people to befriend us, and do the work—sometimes hard and sometimes easy—that friendship requires. And, above all, we must always point people to Jesus, our greatest Friend.

I close with F. Summer Ettinger's words entitled simply *Friendship*.

The kind of friend you have been to me,
Is the type of friend I would be to thee;
Your faithful spirit, your radiant face
Has added just a touch of grace;
When trouble came and things looked drear,
'Twas then your helpfulness would cheer
Never a murmur, always a smile,

Friends like that are sure worth while;
So gladly a friend I would be to thee,
Yes, the kind of friend you have been to me.

THE CHURCH: A HAVEN IN A TROUBLED WORLD

PHIL SANDERS



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INTRODUCTION

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm *alone*? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three *strands* is not quickly torn apart (Eccl. 4:9-12).¹

From the very beginning God said that it was not good that man be alone (Gen. 2:18), so God made a helper for him. Man is a social being in need of encouragement, comfort and support. However strong he may think himself to be, every man needs the help and support of others. Two people together can do far more than two individuals working separately. This is the principle of synergism, and God in His wisdom employs that

principle in the church. In a world like ours, we need all the wisdom and all the power we can get.

A TROUBLED WORLD

We do indeed live in a troubled world. Christians today face an increasing threat from every side. We face an increasingly wicked world, challenging our very freedoms as Christians. Each year, our culture is sinking deeper into a moral abyss. Television now unashamedly offers offensive language and obscene pictures. Producers, lacking a respect for God or families, have sought to glamorize every sinful relationship possible. Some television programs are willing to cross any moral boundaries for the sake of ratings. Some of our courts have forgotten the laws of God and the definition of "marriage" in their rush to adopt the homosexual agenda. Divorce has become rampant among Christians; they are now just as likely to divorce as non-Christians. "People's religious faith appears to have no impact on whether or not a married person gets divorced."² The threat of multiculturalism and "political correctness" has affected religion in America; some are trying to "hush" the God of the Bible. We are told that Jesus is just one of many options to choose religiously. Even some of our own brethren have bought into the notion that the church is just one choice among many denominations. All of this together coupled with our personal problems, illnesses, and challenges make this world a place of trouble.

Life in this world has always been filled with trouble. When Jacob entered Egypt, he told Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life" (Gen. 47:9). Job said, "Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil" (Job 14:1). Jeremiah faced a life of depression and disappointment as Judah deteriorated into idolatry and immorality (Jer. 10:7-10). Paul could speak of his life:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body (2 Cor. 4:8-10).

Paul later spoke of all his physical challenges and poignantly added, "Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" (2 Cor. 11:28-29).

Many Christians feel this way at times. The stress of life and the constant struggle against sin cannot weigh a person down. The problems we face, however, are not entirely unique to us. We may feel like we are battling alone, but one of the amazing things is that in the midst of the storm there are others facing the same trial. Peter warned, "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world" (1 Pet. 5:8-9). Paul reminds us, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

BRETHREN, WE NEED EACH OTHER

God designed the church to be a family; He is our Father. The Lord Jesus is an older brother over His house, and we are His children. Our relationship to Him makes us related to each other. There should always be among us an attitude of oneness and a sense of belonging. It is a dangerous thing when brethren speak about one another in terms such as "us" and "them." The church of our Lord must not be divided into camps and parties. Paul admonished the brethren at Corinth,

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I

of Christ." Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul (1 Cor. 1:10-13)?

God desires unity, harmony and love between His people. It is a terrible thing to bring division into the family of God; there is no worse sin. There is only one body; and we must learn to get along with each other.

As a family, we should be able to rely on each other at the most difficult moments of our lives. When we hurt, we should find comfort and healing here. When we have sinned and repent, we should find full forgiveness here. When we are discouraged, we should find encouragement and support here. Paul said,

But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it (1 Cor. 12:24-26).

If we as brothers and sisters cannot find help in each other, where shall we go? James warned us,

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself (James 2:14-17).

James wanted Christians to prove their faith by their good works toward their brethren; talking our faith is never good enough. We must show our faith by our works. How unfortunate that occasionally because of our failure to show love, a brother or sister has wandered away from the family, rejecting the Lord and us.

LOVING ONE ANOTHER

There are numerous passages encouraging us to love and serve one another from the heart. About our kindnesses Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25:40). We cannot serve Jesus in the flesh today as they did in the first century, but we can serve Jesus by serving our brethren. The Scriptures urge us to pay attention to each other's needs and to serve one another in love. Here are some relevant instructions from the New Testament:

- Be devoted to one another in brotherly love (Rom. 12:10)
- Give preference to one another in honor (Rom. 12:10)
- Be of the same mind toward one another (Rom. 12:16)
- Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another (Rom. 13:8)
- Let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine not to put an obstacle in a brother's way (Rom. 14:13)
- So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another (Rom. 14:19)
- Accept one another, just as Christ as accepted us (Rom. 15:7)
- Admonish one another (Rom. 15:14)
- Greet one another with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16)
- Through love serve one another (Gal. 5:13)
- Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2)
- With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another (Eph. 4:2)
- Speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another (Eph. 4:25; Col. 3:9)
- Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13)
- Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (Eph. 5:21)
- With humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves (Phil. 2:3; 1 Pet. 5:5)
- Abound in love for one another (1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9)
- Comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:18)
- Encourage and build up one another (1 Thess. 5:11)
- Live in peace with one another (1 Thess. 5:13)

- See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people (1 Thess. 5:15)
- But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13; 10:25)
- Consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24)
- Do not speak against one another (James 4:11)
- Do not complain against one another (James 5:9)
- Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed (James 5:16)
- Fervently love one another from the heart (1 Pet. 1:22); Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins (4:8)
- Be hospitable to one another without complaint (1 Pet. 4:9)
- As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another (1 Pet. 4:10)

God gave these instructions to each of us. It does little good for us to apply these admonitions to others and neglect ourselves. We shall not find the church as we desire it until we ourselves make changes in our own lives. We are responsible to God whether anyone else chooses to be or not.

HOW THE CHURCH BECOMES A HAVEN

The church becomes a haven when Christians live like Christ, love like Christ, pray like Christ, and serve like Christ. The church will never be stronger than its willingness to imitate the Lord. Paul admonished the Corinthians, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). We truly need to have within ourselves the mind of Christ. We must consider the interests of others as more important than our own (Phil. 2:3-5). We must make our congregations places of warmth, forgiveness, belonging, and safety.

Recently, an elder in a congregation got into trouble with the law. He had been caught in a sting operation in another state, where he set up a sexual encounter with a minor. The minor

turned out to be police. The elder was caught red-handed. In deep shame, this elder publicly repented.

A sweet, sixteen-year-old Christian boy and girl became too familiar with each other on a date; and the girl was found with child. With tears and regret, both the boy and girl responded to the invitation and penitently asked for prayers.

A dear sister found herself in handcuffs, being escorted to the police station. Once again she had shoplifted, but this time she got caught. She brought shame on her family, on the church, and on herself.

When people repent and God forgives, we should forgive also (Eph. 4:32; 1 John 4:7-11). People who are spiritually sick need the great Physician and need brothers and sisters who can help them work through their errors and sins. Forgiveness is a great gift, because it helps a man leave where he has been and become what God desires. Forgiving is not the same as forgetting; forgiving is "forgetting against." When we speak of forgiving, sometimes we forget that we are in the ministry of reconciliation. Paul describes God's forgiveness in 2 Cor. 5:17-19:

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Because God no longer holds our sins "against" us, He is able to reconcile with us. Forgiveness is not complete if we hold the sin against a penitent brother or sister and are unwilling to reconcile fully with him or her. I thank God that He no longer counts my sins against me. One of the great stretches in life for us all is to grow large enough to forgive others and not count their trespasses against them.

Jesus forgave rather than condemned the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). Jesus ate with sinners, even though the Pharisees criticized Him for it (Luke 5:29-32). Simon the Pharisee was certain that Jesus was not a Prophet, because He allowed a sinful woman to touch Him (Luke 7:36-39). Jesus did not condone sin but He loved the sinner. He loved people but asked them to "go and sin no more" (John 5:14; 8:11). The grace of God is greater than all our sin (1 Tim. 1:12-16). When fellow-Christians repent and ask our forgiveness, we must not act as the older brother of the Prodigal son (Luke 15:25-32). He did not rejoice at his brother's return; he did not accept him or reconcile with him. We must grow above our own selfishness and forgive.

The church whose elder was caught in the sting asked him (after he had publicly confessed and repented) to worship somewhere else. The church refused to do anything for the sixteen-year-old unwed mother, even though her needs were as great as other young parents. How is this forgiveness? How is this "a ministry of reconciliation"? How is this church a haven from the troubled world? How can we talk forgiveness and practice punishment? As children of God, we must learn to bless those who deserve it and bless those who do not. Jesus said,

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:44-48).

We are to love others just as the Father has loved us. We do not do it because they deserve it, but because we are children of our Father. We forgive because of who we are. If the Father and the angels rejoice in heaven over the sinner who repents, should we not also?

CONCLUSION

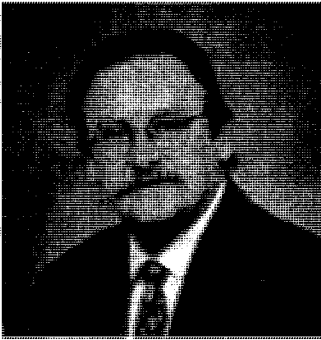
If we are to be the Lord's church, let us imitate the Lord. Let us love like He loved, forgive as He forgave, pray as He prayed, and serve as He served. Sin is the greatest enemy we face, but the grace and love of God can triumph even over sin. May we always grow in our hearts so that we may present the Lord's church as a safe haven for any sinner who repents!

ENDNOTES

1. All quotes are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.
2. See www.Barna.org.

HEAVEN: NO MORE STRUGGLES

DAVID L. LIPE



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INTRODUCTION

The subject of heaven is usually very interesting to those who are old in years, but the subject of heaven can be just as interesting to the young. "The more interest we have in heaven, the better our opportunity of reaching it. The more we know about heaven, the greater our interest will become."¹ Heaven is the reason for all our labor and sacrifice and it is worth our best efforts. There is a song by W. Oliver Cooper entitled "Heaven Will Surely Be Worth It All" that tells about the different struggles Christians will face in life and how great heaven will be if we endure them until we get there.² In this lecture, I will suggest some reasons why we should be interested in going to such a wonderful place.

SOME REASONS FOR GOING TO HEAVEN

First, I am interested in going to heaven because it is a place of great associations. Jesus tells us that God is in heaven (Matt. 6:9). How great it would be to be in the presence of God for

eternity! John says, "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them" (Rev. 7:15).³ Heaven will be a place of rejoicing where all heavenly beings will be worshiping and singing praises to God. Jesus tells us in John 6:38 that he came down from heaven, "not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (cf. John 1:1, 2, 14). Jesus wants us to be with him, or why would he have prayed, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24)? Jesus also tells us not to be troubled because he has returned to prepare a place for us and that he will come back so that we can be there with him also (John 14:1-3). Paul tells us that when Jesus returns, we will meet him in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

Second, I am interested in going to heaven because of the type of place it is. "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). Paul is specifically referring to the gospel message. Surely, it would be true to say the same about the wonderful place God has prepared for those who obey his gospel and remain faithful to him. Humans are not able to describe what heaven is really like because they are limited by time, space, and distance. So, how do we describe what heaven is like? We let God describe it for us. God inspired John to write a good description of heaven, which can be found in Revelation 22:1-5:

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord

God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

John tells us that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4). This is discussed further in Revelation 21:27, when we are told that nothing that is defiling will enter into heaven. These passages all paint a gorgeous picture of heaven for us. Heaven is called the paradise of God (Rev. 2:7). The author of Hebrews writes, "But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" (Heb. 11:16). It will be better than any vacation spot a person has ever had. Can you imagine being in a place like this? It is a place where we will be able to rest. Heaven offers the best rest possible. It is the ultimate place of comfort. Jesus invites us to a spiritual rest when he says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). There is a difference between physical rest and spiritual rest. Those who labor for the Lord will have true rest, which is spiritual, and those who labor for the world may only have physical rest, if they receive any rest at all. Christians should strive for that spiritual rest. If Christians put God's concerns above their own and do what he says to do, then they should have no problem receiving eternal rest. The spiritual rest provided by Jesus to those who answer his invitation is but a taste of good things to come—the rest and glory which heaven provide. John tells us, "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13). As the song says, "Toiling and pain I will endure, Till I shall hear the death angel call."

Third, I am interested in going to heaven because it is the permanent home of the soul. Our souls need somewhere to go because Paul says our bodies wear out (2 Cor. 5:1). "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). Heaven is a place of permanence. Paul tells us that the things we see are temporary, and the things we do not see are eternal (2 Cor. 4:16-18). Paul also tells us that when the Lord comes back, we shall be with him

forever (1 Thess. 4:17). Jesus says the righteous will have life eternal (Matt. 25:46). Peter describes heaven as "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13).

Fourth, I am interested in going to heaven because it is a place of great rewards. Jesus calls us blessed when people persecute us for his sake because we will have a great reward in heaven (Matt. 5:11-12). Peter tells us that we have an incorruptible inheritance waiting for us in heaven (1 Pet. 1:4). Paul says that we have a crown of righteousness waiting for us in heaven (2 Tim. 4:8). Jesus says to, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

Finally, I am interested in going to heaven because of the price that was paid for me to go. How does one get to heaven, and who can go to heaven? Jesus informs us that, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Jesus also says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Thus, Jesus answers the question. He says that you prepare for heaven by obeying the will of God. Those who do not obey God's will cannot go to heaven.

CONCLUSION

Sadly, not all people will go to heaven (Rev. 21:8, 20:10-15). There is a familiar story told of a famous actor and of an aged preacher who were on the same ship. The passengers wanted the actor to read Psalms 23. The actor did so in a flawless manner, so there was a large applause at the end. Then the old preacher read it in a quiet and humble way with hardly an eye dry. The actor said, "I know the 23rd Psalm, but this man knows the Shepherd." Do you know the shepherd? Each person should ask himself the question, "Am I nearer to heaven today than I was a year ago?" As the song says, "After this life with all its strife, Heaven will surely be worth it all."

ENDNOTES

1. Garland Elkins, "The Christian's Hope of Heaven," (Memphis, TN: *The Getwell Reminder*, 10 Jan. 1979).

2. W. Oliver Cooper, "Heaven Will Surely Be Worth It All," *Church Gospel Songs & Hymns*, (Central Printers & Publishers: Texarkana, TX, 1983).

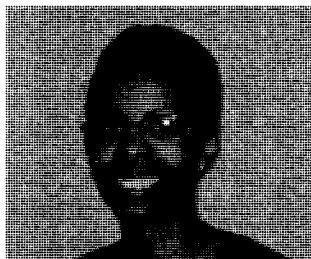
3. All quotes are from the KJV.

SECTION V

LADIES' SPECIAL CLASSES

TEMPTATION

SUZANNE BROCKENBOROUGH



Suzanne Brockenborough obeyed the gospel on July 26, 1995, at the Coconut Grove church of Christ in Miami, FL. Educated in her native Guyana and at Howard University in Washington, D.C., she has taught Bible classes from cradle roll to adult ladies, and has been a featured speaker at Ladies' Day Programs and Lectureships in North Carolina and Tennessee. Suzanne is married to Nelson Brockenborough, preacher for the Catawba Valley church of Christ in Hickory, NC. She presently home-schools their three daughters: Shaye, Sidney and Zoe.

INTRODUCTION

Someone once said that opportunity may knock only once, but temptation will bang on your door for years! I know this to be true. So do you, if you would think about it for a moment. Those of us who have put on Christ in baptism (Gal. 3:27) came up out of that watery grave as new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), born again (John 3:3, 5) and ready to live a new life (Rom. 6:4). In baptism, our sins were forgiven and washed away (Acts 2:38; 22:16), and we were made clean by the blood of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:5). Why, then, do we seem to be caught in an endless struggle between our knowledge of what is right and our desire to do that which is wrong? Yes, we came up out of the water with the same tongue that used to gossip and lie, the same hands that used to steal and strike, and the same feet that were swift in running to mischief; but, did we not change our minds about all that sinful stuff?

In this lesson, we will (1) identify the source of our temptations; (2) examine the differences between one person's

weaknesses and another's; (3) look at the consequences of yielding to temptation; and (4) conclude with some practical suggestions for obtaining strength to overcome temptation.

FROM WHENCE COME TEMPTATIONS?

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (James 1:13).¹ Sisters, let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter – God is not the source of temptation! God may permit trials in our lives for any number reasons:

1. to prove our faith (James 1:2-4);
2. to remind us to depend on Him (1 Cor. 12:7-10);
3. to perfect, establish, strengthen and settle us (1 Pet. 5:10).

God is our Provider and our Protector. He is our Father and our Friend. He is our Helper and our Healer. Yes, God is the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent Creator, but He is the author of neither confusion nor temptation.

On the other hand, there is an adversary - a formidable foe - and his name is Satan. He is the devil, the evil one, the father of lies, the prince of darkness; and he is wicked, wily, crafty, cunning, sneaky, and sly. Satan would like nothing more than to snatch us from the hand of God and take away our inheritance and our hope. But, try as he might, this task is impossible for him. The greatest lie ever told about Satan is, "The devil made me do it." He can no more control you than you can control me.

Well, what is a dastardly devil to do? He reaches into his trusty toolbox of tricks and pulls out ... **TEMPTATION!** You see, if he cannot push me into the lake of fire, he can certainly make it appealing enough for me to take a flying leap in. Oh, it certainly does not start out that way. First, I might take a casual meander around the perimeter of the lake. Next, I find myself peeking over the edge, "just to see." After that, I am feeling comfortable enough to dip my toe in ... just testing. Pretty soon, I am jumping off the nearest diving board. It is like the underlying caution of the first

Psalm: if you are walking in the counsel of the ungodly, you may shortly find yourself standing in the way of sinners and, later, sitting in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1).

James, by inspiration, very aptly describes the insidious nature of temptation when he says, "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:14-15). You see, the road from temptation to punishment must go through the path of desire (lust), down the lane of opportunity (enticement), around the bend of action (sin) and through the gates of consequence (death).

What is a sure way to deal with this problem? The short answer is: Stay at home! Or, take a different route when you go out for a walk. This may all sound so silly and simple, but therein lie the first three laws of dealing with temptation: Avoid! Avoid! Avoid! Was this not the very advice Paul gave Timothy when he said, "Flee also youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2:22)? Run for your lives, my sisters! When you see temptation coming, head for the hills from whence cometh your help. In the telescopic sight of Satan's double-barrelled shotgun, a Christian looks like a walking bulls eye. Why not mess up his target practice?

Of course, some of us will get stuck, like the proverbial deer in the headlights. We see the danger approaching, but we fail to get out of the way. If you find yourself in this situation, gird up your loins. Do not go gentle into that good fight. After all, Satan has fiery darts. How much more, then, should we arm ourselves to deal with temptation? Want to win against the wicked one? Do like Jesus did, and whip him with the Word. Remember, we do not ever have to go this one alone. Oh, what blessed assurance.

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:14-16).

ONE WOMAN'S MEAT IS ANOTHER WOMAN'S POISON

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). Just as I might be prone to acne but your skin has always been blemish-free, so it is with temptation. You might stare a bottle of bourbon in the face without blinking, but I might swoon at the mere sight of a wine glass. You might be unmoved by the mannequins at Macy's, but I might go into debt the minute I walk through the doors at Dillard's. My weakness may be your strength, but be not deceived ... temptations are common to all. Whether it is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life; each of us is susceptible, and none of us is immune (Rom. 3:10, 23).

One of the beautiful features of the body of Christ is the fact that we have each other. God does not need me in order to save you, nor does He need you in order to save me. However, He has put us together in the church for a reason. Since you and I do not necessarily have the same strengths and weaknesses, we can be each other's strength in times of weakness. I think Bill Withers was on to something when he wrote:

Lean on me, when you're not strong,
And I'll be your friend;
I'll help you carry on.
For it won't be long 'til I'm gonna need somebody
to lean on.

So just call on me brother, when you need a
hand.
We all need somebody to lean on.
I just might have a problem that you'd
understand.
We all need somebody to lean on.²

The problem is this: I cannot help you deal with your weakness if I do not know your weakness, and vice versa. Sisters, we have got to get to know each other. This cannot be accomplished if we only see each other every Sunday morning for a few fleeting moments right before and right after the worship

service. And if you are patting yourself on the back right now because you show up every time the doors of the church building are open, think again. In order for us to really get to know each other, we have to get into each other's homes and into each other's lives. That is how we are going to help bear each other's burdens. Moreover, if you do not know my weaknesses, how are you going to keep your Christian liberties from becoming my stumbling blocks?

WHAT SHALL A WOMAN GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR HER SOUL?

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). What is a soul worth? Is your soul worth three bedrooms and two-and-a-half baths or four bedrooms and three baths? Is it worth a Gucci bag or a pair of Prada pumps? Is it worth a position of prominence in the community or bragging rights at the next family reunion? Think of all the things that we often put before the Lord – family, job, money, prestige.

Sometimes, the temptation does not even look like a temptation to us. We have been staring at it so long, our eyes have become accustomed to the way things are: ten extra hours of overtime at the office each week, one more hour of Dr. Phil, one more slice of pie. What is the big deal? It seems like no big deal when we are just starting out, but it takes on gargantuan proportions when we have settled into a lifestyle that takes us further and further away from God. Before we know it, we are hurtling headlong down the path of destruction, and we do not even know how we got there.

Which of us wakes up in the morning, looks in the mirror and says, “I am going to sin today!” Nobody that I know. But we live in a hyper-visual world that screams at us from every television set, magazine stand, and highway billboard. Our senses are under daily bombardment from the gun towers of Madison Avenue, and there seems to be no safe hiding place from the endless barrage of advertising bullets. No wonder we have become almost completely inured to temptation. Satan does not put out a shingle that says “Sin – Inquire Within.” Rather, he

appeals to subtlety as a method of drawing us away from the Lord and enticing us into his den of debauchery.

If temptation were a woman, this is what she would look like: She would be clad in a tight dress, short enough to draw attention but long enough to avert criticism. Her lipstick would be red, scarlet enough to suggest scandal but ruby enough to imply propriety. Her hair would be swept up into a dignified chignon, but a few tendrils would roam free, hinting at an open door to endless possibilities. The list of contradictions goes on and on. After a while, we have become so intrigued by temptation that we are not even aware that we have crossed over the line to sin. The extra overtime at work has left no time to attend worship services. One more hour of Dr. Phil has led to five more hours on the couch each afternoon and strained marital relations because household duties are being neglected. One more slice of pie has blossomed into an uncontrollable weight problem that leaves a sister so depressed, she begins to question the Father's love. Behold, how great a sin a little temptation kindleth!

Is any of it worth losing our souls for all eternity? "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12). Do you not want that crown? I know I do! But the reverse is also true: "Cursed is the man that succumbeth to temptation: for when he is judged, he shall receive the punishment of death, which the Lord hath promised to them that disobey him" (Brockenborough 1:12).

Eternity is quite a bit like the mathematical concept of infinity. Intellectually, we understand what it means; but realistically, it is as hard to grasp as Jell-O. This is where our faith comes into play. We did not witness the creation, but we believe it occurred according to the biblical account. We cannot measure eternity, but we believe the Lord when he reassures, "be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). We know and are convinced of the end of the unrighteous and the ungodly:

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that

obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

Now, for those of us who were once redeemed by the precious blood of the lamb but have fallen back into the snares of the world, how much sorer a punishment ought we to face?

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them (2 Peter 2:20-21).

We must heed Jesus' admonition to "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41). We are all familiar with the saying, "A moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips!" So it is with temptation. Is a moment of pleasure worth a lifetime of pain? Ask the patient in the AIDS ward who ended up there as a result of a one-night stand. The answer is unequivocally, "No!" Beloved, we would all do well to take Tom Miller's advice: "Whatever the situation, why not tie a knot in the rope of faith and hang on for all you're worth?"³

CONCLUSION

(WOMEN AND SISTREN, WHAT SHALL WE DO?)

Practice avoidance. We can elude temptation by learning the warning signs and choosing another direction. Pay attention to all of the "extenuating circumstances" at play during your moments of weakness. Do you get this feeling around the same time every year? Does it coincide with a change in seasons, time of day, time of month, a particular anniversary?

The more we understand about our desires and their triggers, the better chance we have of staving them off. Reframe your thinking and change your desires altogether (Rom. 12:2).

Take up fencing. Dust off your sword and begin sharpening your skills (Eph. 6:17). This is no cat fight. We are wrestling “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). Why go into a battle of such epic proportions with a pocket knife or, worse, a rusty sword that you cannot handle?

Ask for help. Pray. Jesus instructs us to petition our Heavenly Father in this manner: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13). And when you pray, ask in faith (James 1:6). Believe that you can overcome this and act accordingly:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:13).

Seek the counsel of godly friends. There are no real trailblazers among us. We are all walking down the same time-worn paths that have been trampled underfoot by those who have gone before. Get some assistance from someone who has been there and done that!

Stay on guard (1 Pet. 5:8). Limit the devil's opportunities by exercising some self-restraint. “I can” does not mean “I have to” (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23). “Let not then your good be evil spoken of” (Rom. 14:16). “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thess. 5:22).

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to

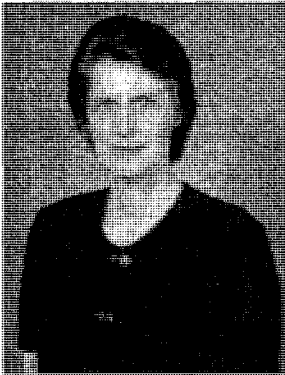
withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (Eph. 6:10-11, 13).

ENDNOTES

1. All quotes are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.
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CONTENTMENT

SARA JONES



Sara Jones is married to Edwin. S. Jones, minister of the Karns Church of Christ in Knoxville, TN, and instructor for ETSPM for the past 18 years. Before coming to Karns, she and her family did mission work in the country of New Zealand. She has been married for 34 years and has two adult children who are married, and a teenage son still at home. Sara is manager of The Evangelist Bookstore here at ETSPM. She home schools her 16 year-old son, teaches classes for the student wives at ETSPM, and teaches children's and ladies' classes at the Karns congregation.

INTRODUCTION

"I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content" (Phil. 4:11). Paul learned to be content whatever his circumstances. He faced prison, shipwreck, poverty, and threats to his life, but nothing could shake Paul's sense of contentment. Paul knew a secret that we sometimes fail to remember. Paul knew that contentment cannot be found in earthly things.

We live in an age of discontent. Mental illness has exceeded physical illness in our society. Our world is frenzied, complicated, and fraught with stress. More than ever before, Americans are turning to psychotherapy, alcohol, drugs, and suicide in their attempts to relieve their discontent. In our society, there is a sense of aimlessness, uselessness, and a lack of meaning or purpose to life that leaves people feeling empty.

WHY IS IT SO HARD FOR US TO FIND CONTENTMENT IN TODAY'S WORLD?

When you were a child, did you ever try to find the end of the rainbow? In the same manner, many people in our world today are searching for something they cannot find. It can be compared to getting on a treadmill and getting nowhere for all your effort.

Almost from the beginning, man has been actively searching for contentment, but man's big mistake is in trying to "find" contentment. Contentment has been likened to a butterfly. The more you chase it, the more it will elude you. When, however, you sit quietly and turn your attention to other things it will come and sit on your shoulder

WHAT IS CONTENTMENT?

Contentment is defined as: "Not inclined to complain, or not inclined to desire something else, satisfied with things the way they are, submissive to circumstances: resigned, accepting." In examining contentment, we must first come to the realization that no person, place, or thing can bring us contentment. True contentment comes from within.

Sometimes we confuse contentment with pleasure. Pleasure comes from external things, but contentment is internal and cannot be bought as pleasure can. Contentment is not something we get directly, but it is a product of living a good and well-adjusted life.

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, got caught up in the pursuit of contentment and happiness. He tried every means that his human mind could think of to bring about pleasure, happiness, wealth, and all the things he associated with contentment, but all his efforts failed.

WRONG PLACES THAT PEOPLE SOMETIMES SEEK CONTENTMENT

Materialism – Materialism is a hindrance to inner peace.
Paul said:

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang" (1 Tim. 6: 9,10).

Solomon said, "A tranquil heart is life to the body; but envy is rottenness to the bones" (Prov. 14:30).

In our society today, this envy is seen in many trying to live beyond their means rather than being content with what they are able to afford. Many people do not practice self-discipline in this area and do not accept their limitations, thus plunging themselves deep into debt, which leads to discontent. It was a wise person who once said, "The pleasure of what we enjoy is lost by coveting more." Once we are caught up in materialism, we never seem to be content. We always want more. Solomon wrote, "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This, too, is meaningless" (Eccl. 5:10).

Many today seek contentment in things, but Paul knew contentment was not found in earthly things (1 Tim. 6:8). The Christian should be able to say as Paul did, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content." We must be careful not to base our satisfaction on comparing what we have with others. As long as we are using this method, we will come up lacking because there will always be someone who has more.

Our contentment should be based on what we have spiritually and not what we have materially. We should never feel inferior or malcontent when we stop to count our spiritual blessings. Putting our faith in the uncertainty of riches will hinder contentment of heart and mind (1 Tim. 6:17-19). If we would have true contentment, we need to focus more of our attention on thanking God for our blessings and less of it on seeking more.

Worldly Pleasures – In our world today, many people mistakenly think they will get contentment by indulging themselves in worldly pleasures such as sexual affairs, alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography, etc. As Christians, even though

we may not be as inclined to engage in these forms of worldly pleasures, we often times do engage in entertainment and pleasures that are not in and of themselves sinful. These things can, however, become sinful when we allow our pursuit of them to take priority over God and his work. For instance, we may take a weekend vacation to an amusement park and then miss church services on Sunday as a result. There is nothing sinful about this activity itself, but it becomes sinful when we allow it to interfere with our commitment to God.

We must always be careful that our desire for pleasure does not take priority over our desire to serve God. Jesus referred to this in the parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-15). This scripture tells us that pleasure will choke out the thing that brings true contentment. Many people today allow pleasure to keep them from growing and maturing in Christ. Paul wrote to Timothy concerning two types of widows: one who puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and ask God for help, and another one who lives for pleasure and is dead even while she lives (1 Tim. 5: 5, 6). We are to always seek God first over pleasure.

Pleasure is not to be confused with contentment. Contentment comes from within, while pleasure comes from without. Our world is filled with laughing, smiling people who are searching in vain for contentment. Behind the mask of laughs and smiles, most of them are unhappy and discontented. They have failed to realize that true contentment comes from having the right relationship with God, not from indulging ourselves with pleasures.

SOME ENEMIES OF CONTENTMENT

Pride – There is no place in the Christian's life for false pride. The wicked have nothing to boast about; and even the godliest of us are still only sinners who have been saved by the mercy of God. Pride is listed as one of the things that God hates (Prov. 6:16, 17). It is the basis for many related sins in the lives of Christians. False pride is pride that focuses attention on self rather than on God. We are told in the Scriptures that those who exalt themselves with false pride are setting themselves up for a fall (Luke 14:11). Though it is important to have the proper self-esteem, we must be careful to keep our self-esteem balanced, so

that we do not get a false sense of self-importance which will prevent us from achieving contentment. The person who is too focused on self to the exclusion of God and others will not be content. God's way to greatness is always through humility. "Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another because God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time" (1 Pet. 5:5, 6).

The opposite of pride is humility. While pride focuses attention on self, humility focuses attention on God and others. True contentment comes from getting out of self and living a life that puts God and others first. Pride is completely contrary to the spirit of Christ.

Worry, Anxiety and Fear – Worry, anxiety, and fear are destructive emotions that start in the mind and can destroy contentment. They divide your emotions; impede your judgment, and your ability to make sound decisions. These emotions can paralyze us and prevent us from taking constructive steps in living a full, contented Christian life. They rob us of our joy and peace of mind.

Over and over in the scripture, we are told not to worry and be anxious, or fearful:

- Do not worry about your body being killed (Matt. 10:28).
- Do not worry about what you will say in times of persecution (Mark 3:11).
- Do not worry about building bigger barns (Luke 12: 16-21).
- Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, drink, or wear (Matt. 6:25).
- Do not worry about tomorrow (Matt. 6:34).

The apostle, Paul, sums it up when he says, "Do not be anxious in anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6, 7).

Guilt – Another destroyer of contentment is guilt. Some feelings of guilt are useful and lead to repentance. The proper

type of guilt is what makes us feel sorry for our sins; however, guilt can become a problem when we dwell on it and allow it to stay with us, rather than acting on it in a constructive way and getting past it. Mental hospitals are full of those who did not deal with their guilt and then get on with their lives.

Guilt can cause us not to be able to accept God's forgiveness and forgive ourselves. The scriptures teach that God is faithful and just to forgive, but many find it difficult to accept that by putting their guilt behind them and going on with their lives in a constructive way. As a result, they lead lives of discontentment. Judas is an example of this. Rather than deal in a constructive way with his guilt over having betrayed Christ, he went on to commit suicide. Paul and David, on the other hand, are good examples of those who dealt constructively with their guilt. Paul, who persecuted many Christians, after realizing his sin, went on to lead a useful and productive life. David, after realizing his sin with Bathsheba, responded by confessing his sin, praying, asking for forgiveness, and then went on to live a productive life (2 Sam. 11 & 12). These men did not carry burdens of sin around with them for the rest of their lives. They accepted God's forgiveness and got on with their lives. If we are to lead contented lives as God intends, we must learn from our mistakes and get busy with the present (Phil. 3:13,14).

Selfishness – A self-centered person is an unhappy person. An exaggerated consciousness of self focuses our attention inward, until outside interests have no appeal. The result is discontentment. "No man can live happily who regards himself alone, who turns everything to his own advantage. Thou must live for another, if thou wisheth to live for thyself" (Seneca).

Contentment escapes many because they never learn the art of giving. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). The person who learns to give his time, talent, and ability for others will soon notice that he has a peace of mind that is beyond understanding. Jesus gives us the principle for the truly abundant and enjoyable life: "He who has found his life shall lose it; and he who has lost his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39). Contentment will be lost to the person who finds his life within himself, but the person who loses his life outside of himself, in service to God and others will find contentment.

HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE CONTENTMENT?

By Having Good Self-Esteem – People with low self-esteem may appear to be content on the outside, but on the inside they carry feelings of inadequacy, worthlessness, and lack of self-confidence, things that impede true happiness and contentment.

Studies have shown that those with high self-esteem have fewer illnesses, are more content, more successful, and make better decisions. High self-esteem includes feelings of security, significance, and competence, which contribute to feelings of contentment. We tend to focus too much on ourselves. We worry that we are too tall, too short, too thin, or too fat, etc. Jesus asked, "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?" (Matt. 6:27). Worrying and being anxious and fearful about what we do not have, whether physical or material, will not bring us contentment. If there are things about ourselves that we can change or improve, such as our hairstyle or weight, then we should work on those. If there are things that we cannot change, such as our height or coloring, then we must learn to accept those things which we have no control over and be content in spite of them. An acceptance of self is a prerequisite to peace of mind and contentment.

By Developing Habits of Positive Thinking – Negative thinking destroys our ability and desire to be content (Prov. 23:7) and can lead to mental illnesses, such as some forms of depression. We have to put any evil and negative thinking out of our lives and dwell on things that are positive, beneficial, and conducive to contentment.

The apostle Paul mastered the art of positive thinking. He said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). It was this realization that nothing would be placed on him that he could not bear, and no difficulty would arise that he could not handle, which allowed him to live a life of contentment. Thus he was able to say, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (1 Cor. 5:8, 9).

We must not allow the trials of this life to cause us to develop patterns of negative thinking, which can lead to a state of discontent. Christians are to "Think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report" (Phil. 4:8). Although negative thoughts will at times creep into our minds, the main course of our thinking should always be centered on positive and uplifting things. It is amazing what can be accomplished by a good, positive attitude.

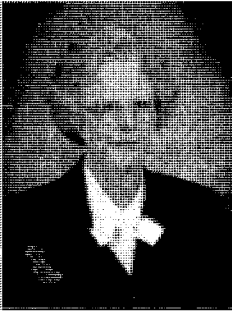
CONCLUSION

If we would be godly, we must learn to be content. "But godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). We should be content because we have our reward in heaven and the promise of eternal salvation (1 Pet. 1:5-11). We should accept each day as a special gift from God. We should live our lives to the fullest, not taking our days for granted but redeeming the time that we have been given.

If you are not content, take time to check your relationship with God. People fail to achieve contentment in their lives because their lives are not right with God. Solomon, who tried everything in his search for contentment, said, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecc. 12:13). To fear and obey God is the whole purpose of man. This is what will bring us contentment here on the earth. True contentment is not found in the external presence of things or circumstances, but in the presence of God. When we get our lives right with God and develop the right relationship with him, contentment will come to sit upon our shoulder.

FORGIVENESS

IRENE C. TAYLOR



Irene Taylor was born in Idaho, the 7th of 8 children, four of whom are still living. She was educated in public schools at Nampa, ID, and FHC now University. Married to Robert R. Taylor, Jr. since September 15, 1952, she is the mother of two: Rebecca (Mrs. Phil) Davis, wife of a gospel preacher, and Tim, a deacon in the Lord's church. She has four grandchildren. She speaks at 8-10 ladies classes each year, at lectureships, and Ladies Day programs and is the author of a book, Pearls of Poetry, a collection of poems. She and her husband are in their 31st year with the church at Ripley, TN.

**Of him that hopes to be forgiven,
It is required that he forgive¹**

Forgiveness is "pardon; inclination to forgive or pardon."² To forgive is not an inborn human trait. It is a **learned** attribute developed by dedicated practice. When one feels he has been wronged by another, the usual first reaction is resentment and a desire to retaliate. How often we hear stated, "I do not get even, I get revenge." Today's society seems obsessed with this attitude. Thus we frequently read of one who takes the life of another after being even slightly irritated. Tempers flair rather than forgiveness flowing.

To develop a heart of forgiveness, one must have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5). Recall to mind the forgiving spirit manifested by our Saviour while He was suspended in agonizing pain as our sin bearer on the cruel cross. He declared, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Was forgiveness instantaneous? Not until repentance took place, a fact to be discussed further in the course of the lesson. The message here is that His heart of love was ready to

forgive when the necessary requirements were met. It is incorrect to assume that forgiveness can be extended while the offense continues without repentance. God does not so forgive us. Neither can we forgive our fellowman until he repents of the wrong. A point here seems appropriate. When an offense has been committed the repentance needs to be made with the one offended. To go to a far off place to express repentance does not make the matter right with the offended person unless forgiveness is also requested of the offended.

A heart of love is required before one can be a forgiving spirit. "We pardon as long as we love."³ Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, exemplified the depth of true love. To be Christlike, we must have a heart with a love **ready and willing** to forgive another when such forgiveness is requested. The statement is sometimes made that "I forgave him once; I will not forgive him again." Note the Lord's teaching in Matthew 18:21-22: "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."

Seven seems to be a term of completeness. Peter likely thought he was being generous to suggest that number.

It is doubtful that Jesus meant to restrict forgiveness to four hundred and ninety times. It is more likely he was teaching that forgiveness should continue indefinitely. If the term should be interpreted literally, surely no person would forgive from the heart an offending brother four hundred and ninety times, and on the next offense pounce on him with wrath and revenge. By then, forgiveness would be a habit and would come very naturally.⁴

In the September 1, 2004, edition of the bulletin from New Philadelphia, Ohio, is the following:

How To Forgive

1. Begin by assuring yourself you have not been seriously injured after all.

2. Count up all the favors and kindnesses that have been shown you, even by the person who has injured you.
3. Begin to list the mercies you have enjoyed at the hands of God which you did not deserve.
4. Offer thanks to God for the spirit of forgiveness with which He has extended you.
5. Begin to offer an honest prayer in behalf of the one who has wronged you.
6. Begin to look for some opportunity to help him yourself.
7. Make a special effort to surprise him with some kindly active service.

As a child I often heard older folks advise, "Kill them with kindness." The wise man of Proverbs says it like this: "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee" (Proverbs 25:21-22).

Having a heart of compassion **ready** to forgive is not the same as forgiveness. The assertion that we should forgive, whether the offender is penitent or not is without scriptural basis. We should more correctly state that one should always stand **ready** to forgive. There are some Biblical requirements that must be met before real forgiveness may be granted. Our Heavenly Father has promised to forgive us our sins. He has stipulated specific requirements that we must fulfill to receive that forgiveness, however. One of those stipulations is that we must **repent** of those sins (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 17:30). Before we can **actually** forgive one who has trespassed against us, that one must repent of his deed and ask for our forgiveness.

Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him (Luke 17:3-4).

To be sorry is not repentance. We may simply be sorry we got caught! True sorrow, godly sorrow, "worketh repentance"

(2 Cor. 7:9-10). "He who has not forgiven an enemy has never yet tasted one of the most sublime enjoyments of life."⁵

We are more Christlike when we can practice the art of forgiveness. In the model prayer recorded in the beautiful Sermon on the Mount given by our Lord we read, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive [also have forgiven-ASV] our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). Ephesians 4:32 admonishes, "And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, **forgiving** one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Emphasis supplied). When we stubbornly refuse to forgive others, we close the door to being forgiven ourselves.

Forgiveness is to be **permanent**. It is not something that is a mere formality only to be forgotten the next time an offense occurs. "One of the great arts of living is the art of forgetting."⁶ This is imperative if we are truly forgiving. Forgetting here does not mean the offense will never again enter one's mind. Rather, it means that the offense will never again be held against the offender. Rational thinking will help one understand the truth of the foregoing statement. Each of us sins many times during our life and we must plead to God for forgiveness. (And are we not grateful He does not have a literal four hundred ninety score card for forgiveness!) When we have repented and received Heaven's forgiveness, our record is cleansed as though the sin did not occur. God will not "throw such in our face" on Judgment Day. When a gracious, compassionate God can forgive and forget our many sins, why should we find it so difficult to forgive and forget those who offend us? Yet many is the time man has declared, "I will forgive but I will not forget." Man has the tendency to want to bring up old offenses from time to time. The parable of the unmerciful servant portrays human nature at its worst. Having just been forgiven of **all** his debt, he refuses to forgive a debt owed him, rather casting the debtor into prison (Matt. 18:23ff). The closing verse of the chapter, reminds us of the seriousness of forgiving others: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do, do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:35).

The perfume of forgiveness can make the aroma of family life so much more pleasant. Though in marriage we are one, we are still individuals with distinctive actions and ideas. In the process of melding two lives into a harmonious unit, offenses

are bound to occur. The mate who holds a grudge over an offense, sulking and refusing to forgive brings an unpleasant "odor" into the home. Likewise, the arrival of children brings further need of the spirit of forgiveness. Children should be **trained** early to say, "I am sorry" when they have done wrong. That **training** will be effective only when the word and example of parents are in harmony. Children learn mostly by observation. Do they see a spirit of forgiveness between and from parents? A daily practice of Matthew 7:12 will enhance any family's harmony: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

When families practice love, kindness and forgiveness, the interaction between the members of that unit will flow more smoothly. There is a principle revealed in Romans 12 that would enhance all relationships, including the family. Forgiveness enables one to live in peace and harmony with those about him/her. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). When that verse is considered, emphasis is usually given to "if it be possible." We should be grateful for that clause, for we all know of those whose dispositions are such that nothing will please or satisfy them. That such people make life more difficult none would deny. However, in a personal study of Romans 12 another phrase stood out, "**as much as lieth in you.**" That means all the problem does not belong to the difficult person! I must have the disposition to be peaceful and forgiving, to be willing to go that second mile and overlook slights.

Think seriously how the spirit of forgiveness would enhance the work of the church. We are plagued with too many who have the attitude of Diotrephes "who loveth to have the preeminence among them" (3 John 9). The contention of Euodias and Syntyche was such that Inspiration directed Paul to admonish them to "be of the same mind in the Lord" (Phil. 4:2). Though we are not informed what caused the contention, perhaps it was personal in nature. Paul recognized that forgiveness was needed. Many church problems are the outgrowth of personal differences. Instead of solving them in a biblical manner, the difference is allowed to mushroom into a brotherhood problem. Suddenly, rather than swallowing one's pride and admitting wrong, those involved demand that others line up on "their" side or face a smear campaign. The difference under discussion has

nothing to do with a doctrinal matter of right or wrong, which must be opposed. It is a matter of a clash of strong personal will. Yet often, great effort is made to "dig up dirt" against any who have the audacity not to agree with a personal stance. Paul and Barnabas had a personal disagreement (Acts 15:36-41). Neither stooped to the low level of casting reflection upon the good name of the other. Instead, each chose a partner and went his separate way, continuing to spread the borders of God's kingdom. The ability to overlook differences of **opinion** would do much to advance the Cause today. How the Lord's church has been hindered by squabbles over personal grievances.¹ Forgiving one another when such differences of opinion occur would derail many hindrances to the Lord's work. Precious energy is being spent harboring grudges which should be spent teaching the lost about the good news of the gospel.

Any study of forgiveness would be incomplete without the examples of forgiveness recorded for our learning. How many of us can stand in judgment beside Joseph of old? His own brethren sold him to the Ishmaelites who then carried him into Egypt (Gen. 39:28). Because he maintained his morality even in the face of Mrs. Potipher's seductiveness and lies, he endured life in prison rather than to sin. God recognized his purity and innocence and turned evil treatment into opportunity for good. In course of time he forgave his brethren, provided food for them, and was reunited with his father. What if he had continued to harbor ill will toward his brethren as many do today? God could not have used him as effectively; the Egyptian ruler could not have trusted him so completely. How many today are closing the door to real usefulness to God because of their unforgiving attitude?

In the parable of the prodigal son, we see portrayed both the good and the bad attitudes regarding forgiveness. When the younger son, whom we call the prodigal, had spent all of his inheritance in riotous living with "fair weather" friends, he came to his senses. He was aware that his father's servants were better off than he so he headed back home intending to ask for a position as one of the servants. He said to his father, "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son" (Luke 15:21). But a wonderful father with a forgiving heart received him back as a son. The father in the story represents our Heavenly Father, eager to forgive us when we repent. But the story does not end happily. The elder brother,

plagued with jealousy, became angry. Forgetting the benefits he had enjoyed in the comforts of home, he resented the rejoicing at the returning of his brother. Question: Which brother more nearly represents our own attitude?!!

The greatest example of forgiveness is, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ. None of us has received the cruel, unjustified treatment He received on the cross. Yet in the midst of His agony He uttered a request for forgiveness for those who were committing the crime against Him. Lest we have the mistaken notion that forgiveness was granted before they repented, turn to Acts 2.

Him, being delivered by determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:...Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, **Repent**, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:23,37-38—Emphasis added).

Forgiveness "demands bigness of heart, a bigness akin to divinity. 'To err is human; to forgive is divine.' Forgiveness is too big for little people. That is why our congregations (and brotherhood-ict) are filled with members who are at 'outs' with others...Forgiveness demands forbearance. The two go together. 'Forbearing one another and forgiving one another'" (Col. 3:13).⁷

"To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; but to return good for evil is God-like --Spanish proverb."⁸ Let us rise above the pettiness of humanity and reach for the forgiving spirit of Deity. "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15).

Forgiveness is not only a sweetener of life, it is an essential for the Christian. It is time that we recognize that, if we

truly have hope of heaven, we must have a heart of forgiveness while here on earth. It is that simple and that serious.

FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is such a soothing word.

It can take away those hurts
That come to each and every one of us
When angry words we blurt.

For when those words are spoke;
More words come back to us.
Before we each one realize
It grows into one big fuss!

If we could but remember
And better hold our tongue,
We could avoid much conflict
And more souls thus be won.

We surely do not want to hinder
The progress of God's work.
Yet, when we divide His children
Into factions, that work is truly hurt.

When we have thus been guilty
Of committing an offense,
We must be willing to repent
And ask forgiveness hence.

If by others we've been offended,
We must have a forgiving heart,
And remember how God forgave us
For the sins of which we're a part.

No problem here on earth can be
Worth losing Heaven's eternity.
So let us practice forgiveness here
Keep our record clean and free.

Irene C. Taylor
September 4, 2004

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FRIGHTENED TO A FRENZY!

TERESA HAMPTON



Teresa Hampton has taught ladies' classes and held workshops across the U.S. and Canada. She has a passion for Vacation Bible School - a secondary passion is her artwork. Teresa has written class books for women: *illuminating Shadows*, *Leading Ladies*, and *Come To The Garden*. Teresa attended FHU, Georgia Military College, and Theological University of America. She taught at Mobile Christian School in Mobile, AL, and at Georgia Christian School. She is married to Gary Hampton, pulpit minister for the Jefferson Avenue Church of Christ in Cookeville, TN. They have two children.

A mother once told of her daughter's first encounter with the all-American camping adventure: Little Hannah had never spent a night in the country before, and she was nervous about the sounds of the crickets, frogs, and insects outside the door of their vacation cabin. Her little voice whined in the darkness, "Mommy, everything buzzes, and I'm afraid."

"Don't be afraid," said her mother. "Remember the angels are right here watching over you."

A few minutes later, the air was pierced with an "Aough!"

"What is it now, Hannah?" asked her weary mother.

"I don't know," said Hannah, voice trembling, "But I think one of the angels just bit me."

Little Hannah is really not much different than many of us – young, old, or in between. Our fears may not be of critters in the darkness, but they are very real and sometimes quite crippling. James M. Tolle described fear as the ‘enemy,’ when he said:

No enemy of mankind has caused more misery and unhappiness than fear. In its devastating destruction and disintegration of personality and character, this major sin of humanity has plunged innumerable souls into a veritable hell on earth. It cripples constructive effort; it produces confused and frantic minds; it results in sleepless, restless nights; it expresses itself in selfishness, thoughtlessness, and greed; it paralyzes the will; it destroys inner unity; it upsets physical health and shortens lives. It is first, last and always a curse and blight on mankind.¹

In this lesson, we will attempt to define this enemy called “fear” and ask some important questions: What fears might control our lives? How do we live with hope in the midst of situations that cause fear? What are some practical ideas that will enable us to overcome fear and trust more fully in God?

There are several definitions of the word “fear,” both in modern dictionaries and in God’s Word. We use this word to describe different emotions or different levels of the same emotion. There is first a reverential awe or fear of God, which carries the idea of deep respect and should not be confused with the “quaking in the boots” type of fear. Passages like Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction,” and Ecclesiastes 12:13, “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all,” speak of the reverence and humbling awe that moves one to listen to God – that type of fear is healthy because it leads one to know the Father.² Knowing God allows us to understand how to please Him.

There is a second type of fear that we usually call “caution,” which alerts one to immediate or unforeseen danger – this is a vital element of human nature that is inborn, given as a method of survival. When we listen to the inner voice of caution, we are putting wisdom and instinct into full operational mode.

When under control, this type of fear enables one to sense danger and take thoughtful action to avert it – Paul used caution when his sister’s son informed him of the Jewish plot to murder him (Acts 23:16-22). He acted with instinct and wisdom to protect his own life.

The first and second types of fear, awe and caution, should be distinguished from the third type of fear, which may be described as “a frightening, an alarm or apprehension.” Many times, we may use the word “fear” to describe each of these emotions. As we read the Bible, we must allow the context to explain the type of fear recorded in scripture. Likewise, in daily living we understand that situations produce different types of fear – the low end, mild caution...escalating to the high end, frozen fear.

For the purpose of this brief study, however, we will focus on the meaning of “fear,” which describes “a frightening, an alarm, or apprehension.” Jesus spoke of this type of debilitating fear when he said, “My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear; fear Him who after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes I say to you fear Him!” With these few words, our Savior reminded us that we waste precious time and energy fearing many physical things in this life, but when we do so we are concentrating on earthly things.

The only fear that matters in the grand scheme of eternity is our fear of Almighty God who, after all, has the power to cast a disobedient one into hell. Jesus goes on in the same passage to remind us that God has control of all things, even the small matters that may give us concern, “Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:4-7).

Fears come in many shapes. Modern psychology even has a term describing fear - phobia, derived from the Greek word “*phobos*.” With a quick visit to the library or Internet, one may discover hundreds of known phobias, from the fear of closed spaces (claustrophobia) to the fear of spiders (arachnophobia). However, this lesson will explore some of our greatest fears from

a general perspective: fear of the unknown, fear of loss, fear of failure, and fear of criticism.

Many people express fear of the unknown through worry or anxiety. Worries or concerns about the “unknown” might involve relationships, financial concerns, physical health, death, and a host of other unknowns. People fear the unknown with regard to the faithfulness of a spouse, their job stability, or the progression of their illness. Sometimes, these concerns grow into full-blown fright and alarm. Fear has been adequately described in the form of the following acronym: **False Expectations Appearing Real – F.E.A.R.**

Akin to fear of the unknown is the fear of loss, which might involve the fear of losing a loved one, losing one’s wealth, losing good health, or losing one’s independence, which could come through the normal aging process or through illness. These are genuine fears that haunt some individuals.

Fear also may come in the form of worry about failure – children may express this during preparation for an exam, or before an upcoming sporting event. But adults secretly battle this fear in many areas of their lives. Success is a marker in our civilized society and is judged by good relationships, excellent job performance, and prosperous living. Consequently, when one anticipates going through a divorce, a job loss, or a financial upheaval, the fear of failure is foremost in one’s mind. Those who take the fear of failure to its extreme often find themselves obsessing about failure and end up creating that which they have feared. Solomon may have been speaking of this phenomena when he said, “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe” (Prov. 29:25).

Closely akin to the fear of failure is another major fear -- the fear of criticism. When framed in a positive way, the “need to please” can be a motivating factor which spurs one to negotiate in a relationship, compromise during disagreements, and more generally make accommodations and become more flexible. Taken to its extreme, however, the “need to please” becomes out-right fear of criticism and, therefore, rejection.

After reviewing these generalized fears that face many people, one must ask this question, “How do we live with hope in

the midst of situations that cause fear? Scripture gives us the threefold answer to this important question: faith, prayer, and trust.

Faith is built upon one guiding foundation, the word of God. Paul said to the Romans, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (10:17). Using this positive approach, the acronym used earlier should be the following: **Facing Everything Armed & Ready -- F.E.A.R.** If we want to know how to combat fear, let us put on the armor of God, which is the word of God (Eph. 6). Our first approach in understanding fear should be examining God's word – what does the Bible say about the "frightening, apprehensive" type of fear?

Matthew and Mark gave us a perfect example when they recorded Jesus' encounter with the wind and waves during a storm at sea (Matt. 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41). Jesus and disciples were crossing the sea, when suddenly a great tempest arose. The boat was about to capsize due to the strength of the high waves. In the midst of fear and panic, the disciples found Jesus sleeping soundly in the stern of the boat. They awoke him and asked if he cared that they were perishing? Jesus rebuked the tempest, and turning to the disciples, said, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"

Jesus did not fear because he was the *creator* of the wind and the waves; he did not fear because he implicitly knew that his Father cared for him in all situations; he did not fear because he was confident in the great love his Father had for him and for those with him in the tempest. In contrast, the disciples were overcome with fear because they did not fully comprehend the magnitude of his power and deity, or they would have known to trust Jesus; they were fearful because they did not know that God was in their midst during this frightening situation; and the disciples feared because they were not confident in the knowledge of God's great love for his little ones.

The one "right" thing the disciples did was take their fears to Jesus. This account prompts the question: Is it possible that we, too, when faced with frightening situations, do not fully appreciate the depth and power of our risen Savior, do not recognize his presence among us, and do not remember his

great love for all who belong to him? Do we forget to take our fears to the Lord in earnest prayer?

Perhaps Paul wrote to those who were in similar fearful situations in Rome because he said,

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ...Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Rom. 8:31, 33, 35-37).

Paul spoke from experience, as one who had felt the gut-wrenching pangs of fear! He told the Corinthian brethren, "I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). Paul had been through many situations in which his life, and the lives of those who were with him, was in peril. During the long voyage to Rome and subsequent frightening storm at sea, an angel stood beside him saying, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you" (Acts 27:24). The implication is clear, Paul had been praying for his life and the lives of those with him at sea – God heard his petition and granted his request for his own personal safety and the safety of all the travelers with him.

Paul's victory over fear may be seen in his quiet assurance to the men with him, "Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me." Here, we see the third part of our threefold answer to coping with fear – trusting and relying on God to keep his promises!

These two accounts, as well as many others in scripture, lead us to realize the strength and comfort that comes from the divine three-fold approach to overcoming our fears: establishing a deep, abiding faith in God, removing the burden of fear through constant prayer, and finally relying on God to accomplish his will and purpose in our lives.

We have been able to see that faith, prayer, and trust in God are essential as we face all types of fear -- from the daily bouts of anxiety...to the occasional "deer in the headlights" kind of frozen fear. But one might ask, what are some *practical* ways to apply these coping skills?

Since faith comes by hearing the word of God, we must develop regular times and intervals throughout each day to pause and meditate on God 's word – a daily habit of reading the Bible is essential! Many times, a deeper study of the Bible, in particular the topics that embrace our fears (like death), will bring a sense of calm into our otherwise frenzied lives.³ It is, after all, God's desire for all his children that we have peace, confidence, and assurance. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Those who have conquered lifetime fears readily admit that, in addition to drinking deeply from the fountain of God's word, they draw from the strength and camaraderie of others who perhaps have had the same experiences, those who are older and wiser, or simply those who are more knowledgeable of God's word – bear in mind that this knowledge or wisdom could come from a *younger* person. Paul enabled others to overcome fear when he shared his own struggles and his final strength in adversity, "and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear" (Phil.1:14).

One last practical suggestion in overcoming fear is keeping a prayer journal. Writing our intercessory prayers and prayers of supplication allows us to focus on God. Recording our prayers of thanksgiving enables us to recognize answered prayer and God's hand of deliverance in our lives – this, in turn, deepens our trust in the providential care of the Almighty!

When we allow our fears to take control, they become effective tools used by our enemy, the devil. Fears draw our focus away from Christ, causing us to focus on the physical and temporal matters of life. Robert J. Morgan explains it this way:

When businessman Allen Emery was in the wool business, he once spent an evening with a shepherd on the Texas prairie. During the night,

the long wail of coyotes pierced the air. The shepherd's dogs growled and peered into the darkness. The sheep, which had been sleeping, lumbered to their feet, alarmed, bleating pitifully. The shepherd tossed more logs onto the fire, and the flames shot up. In the glow, Allen looked out and saw thousands of little lights. He realized those were the reflections of the fire in the eyes of the sheep. "In the midst of danger," he observed, "the sheep were not looking out into the darkness but were keeping their eyes in the direction of their safety, looking toward the shepherd. I couldn't help but think of Hebrews 12: 'looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...'⁴

Therein lies the secret to overcoming fear – keeping our focus on the Good Shepherd. Let us follow the pattern left by the apostle Paul (Rom. 8:32, 34, 38-39). We must ever be aware of Jesus' great sacrifice – "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" We must ever be mindful of his presence in our lives – "It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." Finally, let us keep always in our hearts the realization of God's great love – "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." If we follow the example of our Lord and his faithful servant, Paul, God's power will be seen mightily in our lives. Instead of being 'frightened to a frenzy' we will be seen as one who is now "reed from fear!"

ENDNOTES

1. Tolle, James M. *Living Without Fear* (San Fernando: Tolle Publications, 1977), p. 9.

2. All Biblical quotes are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

3. Additional references about fear: Psalm 23:4, 27:1-2, 46:1-5, 118:4-6; Isaiah 35:4; Luke 2:32; John 14:1-6, 27; Philipians 1:14; Hebrews 13:5; 1 John 4:18; Revelation 21:8.

4. Morgan, Robert J. *Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, & Quotes* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2000), p. 297.

DOUBT

ALINDA GADSON



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INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of time and perhaps until the end of time, the sin of "doubt" has reared its ugly head and entered into the hearts and minds of men and women. In the beginning, doubt caused the fall of man. In the beautiful Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were given everything they would ever need because of God's love for them. Man, God's crowning glory out of everything that He had created, made in his own image, walked in the garden, and glorified Him without a care in the world. Trust was present, love was present, peace was present ---and then doubt slithered in. It was the beginning of the end. It was the beginning of man's destruction.

And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die; For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye

shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desired to make one wise, she took the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat (Gen. 3:2-6)¹

Eve discovered to her utter dismay, that it only takes one small seed of doubt planted in the mind to create a lifetime of sorrow. "The Serpent beguiled me, and I did eat" (Gen. 3:13). And for this one moment of doubt, she paid a deadly price, for sin had entered the world. "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception: in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16). Not only did Eve bring sorrow on herself, but because of her sin, Adam was also affected. He took part in the sin by eating of the forbidden fruit; therefore, he was an "accessory to the crime." He was also sentenced by God. "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life" (Gen.3:17).

The "domino" effect of doubt continues to be perpetuated by Satan to this day, and guess what? Man is still falling.

Satan is very cunning. We need to be very careful, for he is just waiting for a chance to get his foot in the door of your minds. Knowledge of God's word is very important in a Christian's life, and we have to constantly be on our guard lest Satan devour us (1 Pet. 5:8). Since doubt was the first sin, it behooves us to learn how it works, so we will be ready when Satan comes (and he will come when you least expect).

The words "doubt" and "doubtful" are synonymous in meaning, according to Webster's Dictionary. To doubt means to be uncertain or undecided, to be uncertain about, to tend to disbelieve, to have a wavering opinion or belief, lack of trust, a condition of uncertainty, an unsettled point or matter. Webster further states that to be doubtful or to have a doubtful mind makes one suspicious. What a sad and tragic situation, to live a life of uncertainty, always full of distrust, suspicious of everything

and everyone. Ask any psychiatrist, and he or she will tell you that doubt is one of the number one money-makers. Once conceived in one's mind, "doubt" can reap havoc, confusion, uncertainty, anxiety, grief, disbelief, distrust, suspicion, faithlessness, fear, unfruitfulness, and ultimately destruction and death. It does not matter where and when doubt shows up, sooner or later it will disrupt and infect the minds of healthy people. If doubt is left untreated, it can spread and destroy everything in its path. However, when doubt is irradiated with the word of God, there is a good chance one can stop its infiltration.

My sisters, I want you to know that a cure for the disease of "doubt" has always been here: **God**. He is the antithesis of doubt, **HE IS TRUST AND BELIEF. THE CURE FOR DOUBT IS FAITH**. Faith irradiates doubt and stops its growth. The absence of faith is the beginning of doubt. Thank God there is hope! You can lose those seeds of doubt that plague your life. You no longer have to be uncertain of anything. God is here, and he has laid out a plan for you and me. If we choose to follow it, we can enjoy a life of freedom from doubt.

If you are a doubter or if you are of a doubtful mind, you can be of no use in the Kingdom of God, which is his church (Matt. 16:14-19). Those who are doubters are unfruitful and God has no use for them.

Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, **LET NO FRUIT GROW ON THEE HENCEFORTH FOR EVER**. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away! Jesus answered and said unto them, **VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, IF YE HAVE FAITH, AND DOUBT NOT, YE SHALL NOT ONLY DO THIS WHICH IS DONE TO THE FIG TREE, BUT ALSO IF YE SHALL SAY UNTO THIS MOUNTAIN, BE THOU REMOVED, AND BE THOU CAST INTO THE SEA; IT SHALL BE DONE. AND ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER YE SHALL ASK IN PRAYER,**

BELIEVING, YE SHALL RECEIVE (Matt. 21:18-22).¹

Faith, of course, implies obedience to God's wishes, not simply acting on our own. Faith is belief in God. Jesus trusted God even in his darkest hour. This does not mean that he did not have human feelings of fear or uncertainty, as evident in his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-42). But Jesus knew that even in his fear of death (MY SOUL IS EXCEEDING SORROWFUL, EVEN UNTO DEATH...Matt. 26:38), there was no doubt about his purpose. He did not want to die, his Spirit was willing, but his flesh was weak (Matt.26:41). Removing all doubt in a final leap of faith, he prayed "ABBA FATHER, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE UNTO THEE; TAKE AWAY THIS CUP FROM ME; NEVERTHELESS, NOT WHAT I WILL, BUT WHAT THOU WILT" (Mark 14:36).

When we have doubt in our lives in any way shape or form, we are in essence saying, "I do not believe God is true to his word, and no matter what I am going through, my mountains will not be removed. I am going to handle it my way." Therein lies doubt's open door.

We, as women, experience a wide range of uncertainties in our lives. In this lesson, we will address (1) what those doubts are; (2) the spiritual, physical, and mental illnesses doubt can cause; and (3) how we as women of God can overcome this debilitating disease through practical application of God's word.

DOUBT'S CLOSEST FRIEND: FEAR

In today's society, women have had to assume more areas of responsibility than ever before. In times past, everything was cut and dry, a woman's place was in the home, women were the caregivers of their children, women did the cooking, the laundry, etc. That was then, and in many instances, it still is the case. Today, women may still have these roles, in addition to many non-traditional roles. In many households, women are the primary bread-winners. Their careers have changed; they are raising children without fathers; they are now single mothers. Families are not like they used to be. Many things pull us as women in different directions, often times filling our lives with uncertainties and fear, causing us to lose faith. Doubt creeps into

homes unnoticed many times because we are so caught up with the designs of the world.

One of doubt's closest friends is "fear." Fear is the absence of faith. Fear loves statements like, "I cannot raise my children without their father," "I am not good enough," "I do not have enough money," "Not me, I cannot do that as well as her," "I deserved that beating he gave me," "I cannot go on," "It is not worth it," "I am too scared to try that," "I am not as intelligent as you are," "I am too old," to name a few. Fear is real, and we must recognize that it exists before we can conquer it. Most fear today is psychological. Knowing the breeding ground for fear (which is doubt) does not cure fear. Fear is Success Enemy No. 1. It stops people from capitalizing on opportunity; fear wears down physical vitality; it actually makes people sick, fear causes organic difficulties, shortens life; it closes your mouth when you want to speak. Fear-- uncertainty, lack of confidence—explains why we still have economic recessions. Fear explains why millions of people accomplish little and enjoy little. Fear is a powerful force. It will keep you from living an abundant life in Christ. Worry, tension, embarrassment, panic all are a part of fear. We can cure the mental infection of fear--the best friend of doubt--the same way we cure a body infection—with specific, proven treatment. Go to the word! What does God say about the situation? Accept it, then act toward overcoming your fears. Action cures fear. Keeping your eyes on Jesus cures fear. Believe you can overcome your fears, and you will succeed. Only you can do it. An old saying that I have carried with me through the years says, "If it is to be, it is up to me," with God's help. Two of my favorite "doubt bustin'" scriptures are: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). And we know that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). These scriptures of affirmation can help you to loose the chains of fear from your life. Another scripture that epitomizes how faith triumphs over fear is found in Matthew 14:26-32.

And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, BE OF GOOD CHEER; IT IS I; BE NOT AFRAID. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come

unto thee on the water. And he said, COME. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O THOU OF LITTLE FAITH, WHEREFORE DIDST THOU DOUBT? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.¹

Keeping your eyes on Jesus (faith) is the key to eradicating doubt and fear. Of course, you have to act on what he tells you. Faith is action. You not only have to believe you are free from fear, you have to take whatever steps are necessary to overcome the fear. When Peter began to sink, it was because he took his eyes off Jesus and was concerned with the storm that was around him. Only when he locked eyes with Jesus and **reached** for him, was he saved. He knew Jesus was his salvation.

Doubt has more close friends--distrust, suspicion, and unbelief, which like fear, leave tragic effects on our lives; failed relationships, stress, low self-esteem or self-worth, bad nerves, spiritual paralysis, unfruitfulness, and even death. When we allow fear to invade our lives, (1) It prevents us from doing the will of God (Matt. 25:25-30). (2) Fear will cause us to become as dead men (Matt. 28:4). (3) Fear renders us useless. God told Gideon, "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead" (Judges 7:3). There is no place in the kingdom of God for the fearful. We are locked in the heat of battle with the wicked one; and in this battle, we will be called upon to stand, fight, endure, and conquer (Eph. 6:10-20). We cannot endure if we are sick. (4) Fear brings defeat (Prov. 1:24-32). (5) Fear can lead to death (Rom. 6:23). Suicide has become the 10th ranking cause of death in our nation, with some 20,000 committing suicide each year. One young girl who had attempted suicide, when asked why she wanted to do so, replied, "I was afraid to go on living."⁴

OVERCOMING DOUBT LEADS TO AN ABUNDANT LIFE

As women, we face a lot of challenges in life that we are just not mentally prepared to overcome. A renewed faith in God can help us overcome doubt and unbelief. To overcome doubt and have an abundant life in Christ we must: (1) Put our faith and trust in God. Remember faith is the foe of doubt and fear (Prov. 3:25,26; 29:25; Ps. 56:11; 2 Tim. 1:12). (2) Never take counsel of your fears (Phil. 4:13). (3) Rid yourself of sin. Sin and fear are inseparable (Rom. 14:23; Prov. 14:34). The psychiatrist cannot get rid of your guilt, but the blood of Jesus can. (4) Engage in purposeful activities. God cured Elijah's doubt by giving him a purposeful task (1 Kings 19:1-4; 15-18, Acts 11:22-24).

Once you have overcome doubt (and believe me, you have to persevere), (1) An abundant life is yours (John 10:9-10). (2) Eternal life is yours (John 10:24-28). (3) Peace of mind is yours (Phil. 4: 6-9).

You can have an abundant life:

I AM THE DOOR: BY ME IF ANY MAN ENTER IN, HE SHALL BE SAVED, AND SHALL GO IN AND OUT, AND FIND PASTURE. THE THIEF COMETH NOT BUT FOR TO STEAL, AND TO KILL, AND TO DESTROY: I AM COME THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE LIFE AND THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE IT **MORE ABUNDANTLY** (John 10:9-10).¹

You can have eternal life:

Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I TOLD YOU, AND YE BELIEVED NOT: THE WORKS THAT I DO IN MY FATHER'S NAME, THEY BEAR WITNESS OF ME. BUT YE BELIEVE NOT, BECAUSE YE ARE NOT OF MY SHEEP, AS I SAID UNTO YOU. MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE AND I KNOW THEM, AND THEY FOLLOW ME; **AND I GIVE UNTO THEM ETERNAL LIFE; AND THEY**

SHALL NEVER PERISH, NEITHER SHALL ANY MAN PLUCK THEM OUT OF MY HAND (John 10:24-28).¹

You can have peace of mind:

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. **And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding**, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things (Phil. 4:6-9).¹

Disbelief is negative power. When the mind disbelieves or doubts, the mind attracts "reasons" to support the disbelief. Doubt, disbelief, *the subconscious will to fail*, the *not really wanting* to succeed, is responsible for most failures. **Think doubt and fail. Think victory and succeed.** Power to overcome doubt is yours, the power of the Holy Spirit (which moves in you expressly) is yours. He will guide you to all understanding, and He will keep your heart and your mind as He sends His comfort to you during your trials and tribulations. Doubt cannot enter into heaven. Jesus died so that you may live. Be an over comer! Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). I believe this beyond a shadow of a doubt.

CONCLUSION

I would like to leave you with these words that were attributed to Nelson Mandela, and my favorite poem by Edgar A. Guest.

"OUR DEEPEST FEAR"

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond
measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that

most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. You are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within you. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fears and doubts, our presence automatically liberates others.

Nelson Mandella

"IT COULDN'T BE DONE"

Somebody said that it couldn't be done,
 But he with a chuckle replied
 That maybe it couldn't, but he would be one
 Who wouldn't say so "till he tried."
 So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin
 On his face. If he worried, he hid it.
 He started to sing as he tackled the thing
 That couldn't be done, and he did it.

Somebody scoffed: "Oh, you'll never do that;
 At least no one ever has done it."
 But he took off his coat and took off his hat
 And the first thing he knew he'd begun it.
 With the lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,
 Without any doubting or quiddit,
 He started to sing as he tackled the thing
 That couldn't be done, and he did it.

There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,
 There are thousands to prophesy failure;
 There are thousands to point out to you, one by
 one,
 The dangers that wait to assail you.
 But just buckle right in with a bit of a grin,

Then take off your coat and go to it;
Just start in to sing as you tackle the thing
That cannot be done, **and you'll do it.**

Edgar Guest

ENDNOTES

1. All quotes are from the KJV Bible.
2. Webster's New World Dictionary & Thesaurus, 1996 by Simon & Schuster, Inc.
3. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible by James Strong, USA
4. Heart Diseases and Their Cure, Wendell Winkler, 1972, pages 54, 62, 64, 65, and 66.
5. The Magic of Thinking Big, David Joseph Schwartz, Ph.D., 1959, 1965 by Prentice-Hall, Inc., pages 15, 39, and 51.

STRUGGLES WITH CHILDREN

KATHY POLLARD



Kathy Pollard was born in San Diego, CA. She is married to Neal, and they have three sons. She received her AA degree in Liberal Arts from Faulkner University and currently works with Neal at the Cold Harbor church in Mechanicsville, VA. Kathy has taught small children, teen girls, ladies' classes, seminars, and retreats, and she has published articles in *Christian Bible Teacher* and the *Gospel Advocate*. She has made mission trips to Ukraine and Tanzania and greatly enjoys working in such efforts.

Bill and Jenny have been married for almost a year. They are sitting side by side in the doctor's office, holding hands and periodically looking at each other as they wait for the test results. Finally, the nurse walks in and says, "It's positive. It's very positive." Jenny gasps and throws her arms around Bill's neck. She starts crying and Bill says over and over, "I can't believe it. I just can't believe it. Wow! We're going to have a baby!" They both start talking and making plans as they drive to Walmart to pick up the prescribed iron and prenatal vitamins. They grin broadly as they tell the good news to the pharmacist, the check-out lady, and anyone in between who will listen. As soon as they get home, they call both sets of parents and congratulate them on becoming grandparents. They each have happy visions of what it is going to be like to be a family. It is going to be great!

How long do you think it took for Bill and Jenny to realize that parenting is not as easy as they thought it would be? Maybe it happened six months after the baby was born, when Jenny still had not enjoyed a night of uninterrupted sleep. Or maybe it was when her second child was born, and her two-year-old started acting up because he could not understand why things changed.

Or perhaps it did not happen until Bill and Jenny had three children, all old enough to play sports. Maybe they were trying to balance a crazy schedule, while at the same time dealing with questions like: Why do our children fight with each other? How can we get them to clean up after themselves? How did they all get to be so completely different from each other? Or maybe it did not happen until their children became teenagers, and the questions became a little more difficult: How can we ensure that our children will remain faithful? How do we explain why some other Christian families engage in activities that we will not allow our children to participate in? The day Bill and Jenny found out they were parents, they started on a journey, a journey that would last for years and years and be full of successes and failures, questions and concerns, and hopes and fears.

All parents have been given one simple-sounding task: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6, NKJV). But every parent soon learns that this task is fraught with challenges. According to Luke 2:52, Jesus grew intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially. Parents struggle to give their children the same well-rounded upbringing. Let us look at some of the hurdles to overcome when trying to raise a heaven-bound family. Some of the problems come from within the home, and some come from without.

OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

When we see commercials, magazine ads, and billboards all around us promoting sinful activities, it may be tempting to want to whisk our families away to a secluded spot somewhere where we can safely raise our children in a sheltered cocoon. The environment we live in is rampant with ungodly behavior. No matter how diligently we try to protect our children, the world's activities will seep into the home. This challenges our job of bringing up our children "in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). There are three areas of worldliness in particular that make parenting more difficult.

Materialism. A song that came out about fifteen years ago sums up the attitude of the world we live in: "I want money...lots and lots of money. I want the pie in the sky. I wanna be rich." Surrounded by successful, affluent individuals, enjoying the luxuries of American living and being bombarded by

commercials pushing the latest in fashion and technology, it is no wonder that our children are swayed by the lure of the dollar. How often have parents felt pressured into buying their sons and daughters what the rest of the neighborhood kids are flaunting? Trying to keep up with the Jones will necessarily send a message of an importance of material status that our children will inherit and exhibit as they enter into the adult world themselves.

Or, sometimes parents want to ensure that their children have the things they were deprived of when they were growing up. If parents are not careful, children can cultivate a greedy desire for wealth and all the pleasures it can buy at a young age.

Materialism, or any other threat, really only becomes a problem if a solution cannot be found. God has given us a guide for living containing inspired advice, answers, and recommendations. How wonderful that we can go to His Word to find out what He suggests is the best approach to parenting!

From the Bible we learn that the sin of materialism is nothing new. The children of Israel were defeated in the battle at Ai all because of one man's greed. Achan saw some beautiful clothes, gold and silver, and wanted them so badly that he took them and hid them, even though he knew he was disobeying God. Achan's task had been to help destroy the city of Jericho, but he became distracted by the dazzle of wealth even though God had warned against that very thing! The cost of that sin was great. Not only were the Israelites defeated at Ai, but Achan was stoned and burned, along with his sons, daughters, animals, and possessions (Joshua 7). The rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-24) and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) are some New Testament examples of those who also struggled with materialism.

To prevent our children from developing the love of money, we can teach them the eternal truths found in God's Word concerning the dangers of materialism. There are multiple lessons to be studied that will help open their eyes to what is of real value in life.

1. Every thing comes from God. All that we see is His. He is just allowing us to enjoy and use all the

- physical blessings found on earth (1 Tim. 6:17; James 1:17, 18; Col. 1:16; Rev. 4:11).
2. Material things are temporal and will one day be destroyed. They will not matter to us in eternity. Invest instead in good works. Learn what has true value (1 Tim. 6:7, 17-19; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 2 Pet. 3:10-12; Matt. 6:19-21).
 3. Money does not guarantee happiness. Often, it brings sorrow (1 Tim. 6:6-11; Matt. 19:22).
 4. Greed is a sign of a weak and divided heart. It will prevent a man from serving as an elder. It shows one's desire is set on the carnal instead of the spiritual (1 Tim. 3:3; Matt. 6:24; Rom. 8:5-13).
 5. *Wants* and *needs* are not the same. Learning to recognize the difference will help one keep a healthy balance when enjoying the comforts with which God has blessed us (Matt. 6:25-33; Phil. 4:19).

If our children are taught these lessons in the home, they will see through the deceptive nature of materialism and learn to recognize the priceless blessings that come from living a life of faithful contentment (Phil. 4:11).

Entertainment. There is nothing wrong with amusements or diversions in moderation, of course, but our children are exposed to various forms of entertainment on a daily basis: television, movies, videos and DVD's, radio, CD's, Gameboys, X-boxes, internet, etc. It is ironic that there is even "the entertainment world." Does that describe your home? Does a good bit of your income go toward accumulating or engaging in various forms of fun? If so, then watch out for that ugly little monster that possesses children sometimes and constantly grumbles, "I'm bored. Entertain me." (Would it be too harsh to reply with something like, "The world does not revolve around you, so make yourself useful?")

Children who are indulged by being constantly entertained grow into adults who reject the ideas of service, commitment, and sacrifice. For example, why would they want to give up a perfectly good Saturday (perhaps their only *play* day) just to go door knocking or attend a lectureship? Yet, these are three of the values the Bible commands Christians to develop in order to please God. Again, there are lessons that we can teach

our children so that they can escape the world's addiction to entertainment.

1. God expects His children to make His kingdom a priority. That cannot happen if the majority of time is spent pleasing self (Matt. 6:33; 16:24).
2. The Christian's life is one of willing sacrifice and joyful service to God and others (Rom. 12:1; Gal. 5:13; Heb. 9:14).

Not only will excessive entertainment skew a child's perception of priorities, but a good bit of the entertainment that is available promotes unwholesome, ungodly ideals and activities. Which leads us to our next threat...

Societal Values. You may not have realized how scary this world could be until you had children. All of a sudden, your eyes were opened and you feared the wicked and the cruel, the potential traps, and the lies that your children could swallow. You cannot even go to a grocery store or gas station without seeing society's love of sex, alcohol, tobacco, and the lewd and crude. (Did you know that there is a section called "Suggestive" in the greeting card aisle, right at a child's eye level?) The most popular prime-time television shows are indicators of what the world now accepts (think "Will and Grace" or "Desperate Housewives"). Our children are growing up in a society that encourages immodest dress and premarital sex. Abortion and homosexuality are common, household words. There are very few good public role models. And Christian values are portrayed as being awkward and old-fashioned.

Oftentimes we may ask, "What is this world coming to?" But *never* in the history of mankind has society's values harmonized with God's will. If you find that hard to believe, just reread the book of Judges (or the entire history of the Jews, for that matter).

The challenge is to make sure our children do not start living like the world because "every one else is doing it. What's the big deal?" Again, there are lessons we need to teach them from a young age to ensure that the Word, and not the world, is their standard.

1. Man's thinking and reasoning is flawed. Only God's wisdom can safely direct us (1 Cor. 3:19; Prov. 1-4).
2. Following the crowd and going with the majority will lead one down the wrong path (Matt. 7:13,14).
3. Our society embraces the popular and pleasurable. It is unstable and only reflects current whims. God's Word stands forever, and He never changes. In Him we can place our confidence and from Him we can draw security (Mal. 3:6; Prov. 16:20; Isa. 40:8; 1 Pet. 1:23-25).
4. Christians are not of the world and should not think like the world (Rom. 12:2; 1 Pet. 2:9-11).

Materialism, entertainment, and societal values are just a few of the outside influences that threaten the souls of our children. The world is one of Satan's most effective mediums. It seeps into our homes, no matter how tight a barrier we put up. Parents know that they must train their children by influencing, guiding, and molding. The problem is the world is doing the same thing! Whose voice is louder? To whom are our children listening? Whose voice do they hear from the most? No wonder God commanded parents to instruct their children throughout the entire day (Deut. 6:5-9)! We must be diligent in defending and protecting the precious, impressionable minds of our children. If not, we may bring up a bunch of children who, like Demas, love this present world (2 Tim. 4:10).

INSIDE DETRIMENTS

Not all struggles with childrearing come from outside influences. Sometimes, the threats originate right inside the home. Not only must parents keep out the bad, we must also surround our children with good. We have the huge responsibility of being a Godly role model. We are always being watched by little ones. What kind of example are we setting for them? There are some areas of weakness that cause problems in parenting.

Lack of Discipline. It takes discipline to discipline! Nobody actually likes to do it. Not only does it make us feel like the bad guy but it is hard work. It would be so much easier just to give in, overlook, or excuse. And sadly, that is exactly what many parents are doing. What a terrible and costly mistake!

There could be several reasons why some parents do not discipline their children. If both parents work outside the home, they may feel that they do not want to waste any of the short time spent with their children in the evenings on anything "negative." Maybe some parents believe that a child will respond better to ONLY praise and encouragement. Or perhaps parents simply lack the commitment (or energy) it takes to discipline consistently.

But listen to what the Bible has to say about discipline:

1. It will remove foolishness from a child (Prov. 22:15).
2. It is an act of love (Prov. 13:24).
3. If it is not done early in life, the parents will be responsible for the child's destruction (Prov. 19:18).
4. It will not have negative effects on the child and will save his soul (Prov. 23:13,14).
5. Although it is not enjoyable at the time, in the end it yields the fruit of righteousness. It also causes children to respect their parents (Heb. 12:7-11).

Neglecting to discipline your children, for whatever reason, will be the source of many struggles throughout the time they are under your roof. And, when your children become adults they will face unnecessary challenges because they were not properly equipped. If discipline is something lacking in your home, or if you feel you do not know *how* to discipline, there are several things you can do to make things better. Ask advice from older, experienced parents (Titus 2:4). Study the Scriptures and pray for guidance and wisdom (Prov. 2:1-6; James 1:5). Take advantage of the many biblically based books written on the subject of discipline in parenting.

Although it takes effort and will be unpleasant, practicing discipline will ultimately make both parents and children happier.

No Godly Standards. In Micah 6:8 a question is asked, "What does the Lord require of you?" In the same verse the answer is given, "To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." God has always told us what He expects of us. As parents, have you sat down with your children and told them what is required of them? Do you have standards that you expect everyone in the family to uphold? Do you have set rules by which children must abide?

When the word "standard" is used in the Old Testament, it refers to a banner that was usually used in battle (Jer. 4:5,6). It was held high so that the troops could see it from afar. This accomplished three things: it told them they were in the right camp, it boosted their morale to see their colorful banner waving, and it led them in the right direction. Every family needs Godly standards to keep them on course and to unite them in purpose.

Successful businesses, organizations, and schools usually have mottos. What is your family's motto? It needs to be something a little more specific than just hoping to get by each day without getting into trouble or on each other's nerves. A family without definite standards will be a family without clear direction, goals, or stability. With thought, care, prayer, and planning, parents can promote Godly standards for their children to follow. It does not have to be complicated. Sit down and write a list of spiritual guidelines for your family. A good place to start would be to memorize a passage that summarizes the motto you have chosen for your family. For example, "For this is God, Our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death" (Psa. 48:14). Then, follow up by telling your children that your family will always consult the Bible first for direction or answers to questions. This will become a standard that your children come to expect and naturally practice.

Poor Example. Parents can spout Godly standards until they are blue in the face, but if they do not practice them themselves then they are wasting their breath. "Do as I say, not as I do" is a faulty way to parent. Children are not blind or ignorant. If they are getting that message, they will soon lose respect for their parents and for the standards.

Parents cannot just post a list of Christian guidelines and hope that is all it takes to lead their children in the right direction. They must *live* the guidelines. Children are going to retain so much more of what they see practiced than what they hear preached.

Christians are told to be good examples for others (Matt. 5:16; Phil. 3:16,17). Christian parents have an awesome responsibility because we know that we are being watched and emulated. Paul said, "Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ" (1

Cor. 11:1). Can we say that to our children? If they follow our example, will they be imitating Christ? If parents set a poor example for their children, they will be held accountable for their negative influence. They will also have many trials and verbal battles to endure as their children get old enough to recognize the inconsistencies.

Misplaced Priorities. Satan knows how easy it is to distract parents from their purpose. The time we have our children at home is short and fleeting. We cannot afford to lose sight of that. We cannot allow trivial matters to distract us from what is really important. We must not become so involved in outside events or efforts that we steal precious time from our children. How many times have you been told something like, "Enjoy them while they're young. It goes by fast!" Standing around at graduations or weddings, you will surely hear from a tearful parent, "It seems like just yesterday we brought Junior home from the hospital!"

It is so important that parents keep their focus, that they keep their eyes on the goal. We must make bringing up our children in the Lord a priority. Do you know what your priorities are? On what do you spend the bulk of your time and money? What do you pray about most often?

Not only must we concentrate our efforts on childrearing while we have them at home, but we must teach (by example) what should be important priorities in a Christian's life. God expects us to put Him first (Matt. 6:33). Our children must see us making that practical by being involved in the works of the local church, serving others, and sharing the gospel. That is true Christian living (Gal. 2:20)! Parents can daily pray that their eyes will be open to what is truly important in life.

Children are wonderful blessings from God. They bring so much joy to our lives. They are priceless gifts that we are only taking care of for a little while, but then must turn them back over to the Lord. It is not easy being a parent. There will be struggles and challenges, and lots of them. But with God's help, we can successfully bring our children up to be faithful servants in His kingdom.

SECTION VI
STUDENT SPEAKERS

SELF-CONTROL

JOE NEAL



Joseph Neal was raised in Sparta, TN, by a loving Christian family. He attended Tennessee Technological University as a psychology major until moving to Knoxville, TN. In Knoxville, he attends the ETSPM, with graduation set for February 2005. After graduation, he hopes to find a congregation to work with as an Associate Minister or Youth Leader.

Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness of God (Romans 6:12-13).¹

Self-control is made up of two words that most people today enjoy discussing extensively. Living in a self-satiating society, we love to talk about ourselves. Singers croon the words, "I want to talk about me." Comedians jokingly use the phrase, "But enough about me, what do you think about me?" We are concerned about ourselves. Talking about self is always a pleasing topic, just as long as it pertains to me. Yet, self is not the only concept upon which we are closely focused.

Society today is obsessed with control. This is clearly seen in the ever-present strife within the home. Look into a family's living room, and one can see the over-powering evidence of the individual's struggle for control. Behold the television remote control. This modern convenience can bring out the

selfish animal in us all. Be honest. Husbands, imagine you have looked forward to coming home and watching a football game and your beloved wife is watching a special program about sewing. What happens? Someone must give up control of the remote for there to be peace. We like to have control.

Something strange happens when these two words are placed together. Self is something I love talking about. Control is something I strongly desire. However, self-control is looked upon with disdain. It requires both a giving up of control and selfish gratification. "It no longer tickles my ears." "It steps on my toes." Despite one's carnal longing, self-control calls for discipleship and discipline. Christians must remember that living for Christ requires a putting aside of self and putting on the nature of Christ. For the Christian, self-control is equivalent to Christ-control.

WHAT IS SELF-CONTROL?

The biblical principle of self-control resonates from Genesis to Revelation. From the Garden of Eden to the coming Garden of Eternal Bliss, believers are required to make discipline and self-government their walk of faith by submitting control to God. In the New Testament, the Greek word "*egkrateia*" is translated as temperance or self-control. "*Egkrateia*" denotes power or lordship, which expresses the power and lordship that one has either over oneself or over something.² The thought communicated is that: the believer gives lordship to God and allows Him to determine right and wrong behaviors through His Word. The standard of moral ethics then resides in God and not man. However, the motivation of man's submission must too be under God's reign. For example, Paul writes in Galatians that he has been crucified with Christ. The life that he now lives is under the lordship of Jesus. That life is motivated by the fact that Christ gave up everything for him. Self-control signifies accepting God's power is greater and relying on that power to overcome temptation and sin. The power relies in God, yet I still have a responsibility to lay hold of that power through diligence and training.

Perhaps, the most vivid definition of self-control is painted by Paul in 1 Corinthians. Paul compares the Christian life to the training of professional athletes, as seen in the Isthmian games.

Physical training was an important part of Greek education and centered in the gymnasium. Foot races were held in the stadium, which was a distance of about 200 yards. The Greek stadia accommodated spectators on the grassy slopes each side of the flat running surfaces.³

In his training, an athlete had to develop good habits that would result in achieving the goal. That concept can even relate to individuals today. If you want to run a marathon, you need to lay aside habits that can stand in your way. How many marathon runners do you know who smoke cigarettes? That habit will limit the runner's ability to take in oxygen and ultimately could cost the race. If an athlete is willing to make life-altering changes to receive a perishable reward, how much more should we as children of God sacrifice to be with Him?

WHAT SELF-CONTROL IS NOT?

Since we have looked at the definition of "*egk्रेia*," we need to examine the abuses of the same. Many individuals adopt a cantankerous view of self-government that is not only misguided but robs from the Biblical understanding of lordship. One faulty view is based on an individual's reliance upon himself or herself instead of relying upon God. There were certain Jews that practiced exactly this. Jesus accosts the Pharisees for their self-righteous hypocrisy.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
For you clean the outside of the cup and dish, but
inside they are full of robbery and self-
indulgence...So you too appear righteous to
men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and
lawlessness (Matt. 23:25, 28).

Their trust depended upon their own "righteousness" and not upon God. In Galatians, Paul addressed Christians who wanted to go back to a law that constricted them to do's and don'ts. He urged them to realize that the Old law could not save them, for

they are transgressors. Faith in God is the only source of redemption and accomplishment. The prophet, Jeremiah, admits that man cannot even direct his own steps. If he cannot walk by himself, how can he justify himself?

This concept of self-restriction is not limited to Jewish thought. "*Egkrateia*" is used in Greek philosophy as the avenue to becoming an ideal free man who is under control of no one, save his own restrictions. Philo highly esteemed self-control and stated that it was expressed in restraint specifically to food, sex, and abuses of verbal communication.⁴ The philosophers known as Stoics relied wholly upon logic and self-will to attain the level of ethical perfection.

Even where the social aspects are similar, the motivation was totally different. Christians ideally, act benevolently not merely on fulfillment of obligation of a common kinship with the universe, but because they have learned self-sacrifice and active love through God and Christ. The goal of humanity is self-liberation, and this goal is attainable said Neoplatism. Stoics did not know the God of love and mercy.⁵

Paul fights this heresy in Colossians, as he attempts to show the weaknesses of the immersing concept of incipient Gnosticism.

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world do you submit yourself to decrees such as, 'Do not handle, do not touch, do not taste!' (which refer to things destined to perish with use)-in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence (Col. 2:20-23).

There were Christians in the first century who had forgotten about giving their lives over to God. They were trying to save themselves by their own legalistic regulations. There are

“Christians” today who try to leave God out of their redemption plan and try to be good enough to get to heaven.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF SELF-CONTROL:

There are many people throughout the pages of Holy Scripture who demonstrated excellent self-control. There are also many radiating examples of where self-indulgence can lead. In Proverbs 25:28, we see an example of just how vulnerable a person lacking self-control can be. The imagery of a conquered city with broken down walls illustrates the weakness and destruction that has overcome them. Such desolation also characterizes the man who allows selfishness to overrun him. Examples from the lives of men and women help us see this principle more clearly.

In Luke, we see Jesus in the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Having not eaten for forty-days, Jesus is starving and weak. For most of us, these times are the hardest to overcome self-indulgence. Jesus turns down the temptations, and He victoriously proves that He is in control. He overcame desires of flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. That is the best definition of self-control for he relied on the strength of the Father's Word over His own flesh.

Of course, for every instance that an individual is faithful in utilizing self-control, there are some of us who are slow to learn. In 2 Samuel, we see King David indulging in lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. He was definitely out of control. First of all, pride has removed him from where he is needed. He is supposed to be out with his men, but He is the King so he gets extra privileges right. Secondly, he sees Bathsheba and lusts after her. Thirdly, he commits adultery with her and the lust of the flesh stains his soul. David was not trying to please God by his actions. He was trusting in himself that everything would be all right. Yet God, through the prophet Nathan, shows him clearly his lack of self-control.

HOW DO I GET SELF-CONTROL?

The Biblical principle upon which the Christian ideal of self-control is based is this relationship the Christian occupies as belonging to Christ in his whole person.⁴ For what he does, it is

not for himself but for Christ. Peter talks about the Christian graces and notice how the phrase fits together. "His divine power has granted us everything pertaining to life and Godliness...and in knowledge add self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance" (2 Pet. 1:3, 6).

Self-control comes from knowledge. Where does knowledge come from? There is but one source, God. When you apply the Word of God to your life, you will be willing to hand everything over to Him. When a Christian does that, he or she is practicing self-control. It is a daily dying to self and living to Christ.

WHY DO I PRACTICE SELF-CONTROL?

The primary reason for submitting your selfish decisions and desires over to God is strictly because of all He has done for you. Through His sacrifice, you have been given the opportunity to be made holy.

Secondly, self-control is crucial in maintaining your faith and ultimately decides where you will spend eternity. Paul states that he runs the race of life with discipline as not to disqualify himself from the reward that lies ahead. He also gives advice to Timothy to give attention to himself and his doctrine to ensure his salvation.

Thirdly, my self-control affects my brother's eternal soul. In Romans, Paul addresses the problem of letting my preferences get in the way of my example of Christ-likeness. Why should my freedom send another child of God to Hell? I must strive to live my life in a way that exalts Christ and edifies my brother.

Finally, my self-control affects the proclamation of the Gospel to the lost. In Colossians, Paul writes to the believers that they must conduct themselves with wisdom towards outsiders to provide opportunity of saving their souls. When Christians suffer lack of self-control, they can bring reproach to their Lord and become a stumbling block for someone becoming a Christian.

CONCLUSION

Self-control is exercising submission to God in all things. It is servant-hood through daily decisions. Christ shows us clearly

how one must utilize self-control by relying on the Word of God as our strength. Despite what some say, self-control is not a checklist religion. I have a responsibility to God, others, and myself to humbly seek after God's ways. When I make Jesus my Master, I let him have control of my life. No longer do I have to worry as long as I continue to submit to my Master and Lord.

ENDNOTES

1. All Scripture is taken from the NASV unless otherwise stated.

2. Kittel, Gerhard. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), Vol.2 p. 339-342.

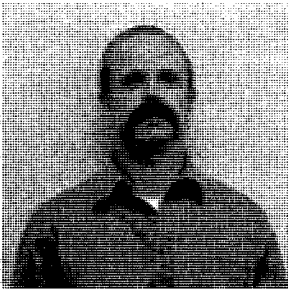
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5. Ferguson, op. cit. p. 294.

WORLDLINESS

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INTRODUCTION

The word “worldliness” is not found in the Bible. As used by most people, “worldliness” has a reference to some specific activities of a recreational nature, against which they hold certain oppositions. The word “worldliness” is from the root word “world” and “is a sphere or cosmos of evil, an order which is opposed to God, and to whose pursuit those who abandon the Lord have dedicated themselves.”¹ Worldliness is being like the world; it creeps into man’s heart and causes him to put his interest before God’s interest. In 1 John and the Gospel of John, where more than half the occurrences of cosmos in the New Testament occur, the focus is no longer on the world perceived as creation, but now the emphasis lies upon the world as people who have turned away from God to deceit and delusion. “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”(James 4:4).²

CAUSES OF WORLDLINESS

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of

the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:15-17).

A Christian has to face the problem of "living" in the world without "being" of the world. The dictionary says that worldliness is, "Being addicted to gain and temporal pleasure" and that being worldly consists of being "Dedicated to this life and its enjoyments and advantages." This divides a man's will from God's will, making his actions incompatible with his spiritual goal, because he allows selfish interests to usurp the place of God in his life. Therefore, worldliness is sin!

What we are faced with in the church today is that so many things that are worldly, are not wrong within themselves. Yet, when one places them before God, then it becomes wrong, and sin enters the picture. Worldliness stands in opposition to God, and leads men to love this world more than God. Many would have worldliness to refer to things that are just inherently wrong, which are listed in Galatians 5:19-21:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

This does not seem to be the most dangerous part of worldliness. Most can honestly say, "I have never done anything like that." But the major problem with worldliness is when one unconsciously cares about oneself and dethrones God.

It is of great importance for the Christian to understand the world and what the Bible teaches about it. As we live in this world, we must at the same time, be denying the ungodly and worldly lusts which are so much a part of it. Jesus said, "No man

can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). To allow "worldliness" to influence personal behavior is to prevent the Christian from the possession and development of the mind of Christ. Paul taught the Philippians to look upon "the things of others" rather than upon their own things (Phil. 2:4). In contemplation to this statement, Paul then said, "Let his mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5). This mind cannot be accomplished by the Christian chasing after the world.

THE FIGHT AGAINST WORLDLINESS

The Apostle Paul wrote to Titus, his own son after the common faith: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (Titus 2:11-12). "Sober" translates the Greek word *sophronos*, which belongs to a group of words with similar roots that have the meaning of "reasonable, sensible, and prudent."³ It expresses the attitudes of sound mind, self-discipline, self-control, sensibility, and rationality. Living soberly, therefore, means that one should have his/her life under control of the mind.⁴ Righteous translates from the Greek word *dikaios* was originally on whose behavior fitted into the framework of his society and who fulfilled his rightful obligations toward gods and his fellow-men, his observance of such obligations serving to differentiate him from the unrighteous.⁵ Understandably, *dikaios* is a common term in the New Testament with a wide range of meaning. It appears over 75 times and can be translated as righteous, just, equity, acquittal, and innocence.

Although the New Testament was not totally unaffected by the Hellenistic concept of *dikaios*, the Septuagint was the primary source of direction for the New Testament writers. *Dikaios* is first and foremost a relational term – specifically describing man's relationship to God. The righteousness expected under the New Testament is to be a righteousness based on God's terms. In the gospel accounts, the writers reveal the Lord's true intent regarding righteousness. It is God's righteousness which must first be sought "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). Paul said,

"By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left" (2 Cor. 6:8).

The Christian life should be qualified, characterized armed with righteousness. Godly is used to translate the Greek word *eusebos* is an adverb derived from the word *sebomai* which means "fall back before" or "shrink from" out of fear or respect.⁶ It implies that one should step back from his own selfish pride and desires, and reverence almighty God in everything we do or say.

OVERCOMING WORLDLINESS

The sin of worldliness is a constant problem facing the church. As long as Satan remains the prince of this world, there will be temptations and those who fall prey to his temptations. Christians must not allow him to get the upper hand. The Christian is in the world. Jesus said "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from evil" (John 17:15). We are in the world, but we are not of the world because we have been "called out of it" in a spiritual sense (1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 2:14). Christians must live in the world. Churches must live in the world. But neither individual Christians nor churches can afford to let the world into their lives.

Worldliness is one of the greatest enemies of the church today. Let us recognize it as such and take the proper measures to combat it. Christians can live fully in this present world and enjoy rich and rewarding days without surrendering to the world or forsaking faithfulness to Jesus Christ. We must proclaim that God is present and active in this world and that he is at work sustaining, redeeming and transforming his creation. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it."

The test of worldliness is overcoming it. Love for the world will destroy one's love for God and love for God will destroy love for the world. The more one loves God, the more he loves the things of God. To love God one must know God (1 John 2:13-14). Christians must realize that this world will pass away. Peter says:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat (2 Peter 3:9-12).

The Christian must also realize that the one who does God's will abides forever. God's will is based and motivated by his love for man, which he created. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God's will is always good, perfect and acceptable. "And we know that all things work together for good to those that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Withstanding the world finally becomes a matter of faith. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). Gods says that a person that does his will, will abide forever. Christians have to remember that physical death cannot destroy the relationship with the Lord. There is life after death in HEAVEN!

ENDNOTES

1. Guy N. Woods, Commentary on The New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1973), p. 238.

2. All quotes are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

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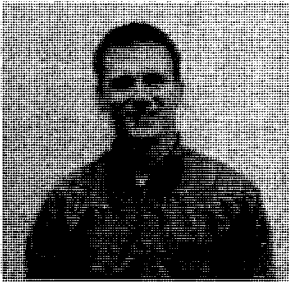
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OVERCOMING JEALOUSY

BLAINE KELLY



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INTRODUCTION

For the adult Christian, there exists a temptation to dismiss or trivialize certain categories of sin. We can subconsciously deceive ourselves by supplying a “greater than” or “less than” sign when comparing different sins. If the world were to give various sins an “evil rating” and list them from greatest to least, the list *might* look something like this: (1) Murder, (2) Adultery, (3) Stealing, (4) Lying...If the list were to continue, where would jealousy rank?

God does not rank sin (James 2:10-11; 1 John 3:4).¹ Without a doubt, He established the world in such a way that some sins result in far more damaging and lasting consequences. However, the spiritual consequence of all sin is death (Rom. 6:23). When Paul describes the “debased mind” that does “those things which are not fitting,” he lists covetousness and envy alongside sexual immorality, murder, and hating God. He also mentions many other sins that do not even receive a blush today

(Rom. 1:28-31). In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul gives the following warning:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, **jealousies**, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, **envy**, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**²

Such divine attention to jealousy demands man's attention as well.

JEALOUSY AND THE CHRISTIAN

Jealousy is a big deal to God, and it should be a big deal to us. However, we can mistakenly categorize jealousy as a temptation that applies only to the less mature. Jealousy makes itself most apparent through the lives of the very young: the jealousy that leads a little girl to snatch her best friend's new baby doll. We can also view it through the eyes of teenagers: the boy who, in a moment of envious rage, starts a fight with his ex-girlfriend's new love interest. To minimize jealousy to only youthful situations would be simplistic, short-sighted, and self-deceptive.

The existence of jealousy in one's heart is not dependent upon his situation in life. It is a sin that can overtake anyone, regardless of age, race, gender, or social status. I doubt any person has escaped the grips of jealousy over an entire lifetime, and some are probably tempted by it everyday. Jealousy is so difficult to pinpoint because it manifests itself through various means. One can be jealous of another due to possessions, wealth, prestige, popularity, career, education, beauty, intelligence, ability, power, leadership, etc. History, literature, and sports reveal that jealousy does not only occur among individuals—it can also be a collective experience (e.g., Hatfields

& McCoys; Montagues & Capulets; Yankees & Red Sox). Unfortunately, the church often contains bitter envies among families within a congregation or between entire congregations. Consider the following situations:

- Successful marriages often receive scorn from less contented husbands and wives – “They really can’t be *that* happy.”
- Bright, talented, and accomplished children experience occasional jealousy from their peers, but they often see it more in the parents of their peers.
- A man qualified to be an elder is loved by all until he is selected to serve. Upon his selection, every decision he makes and every step he takes are meticulously scrutinized.
- Many congregational divisions have occurred due to jealousy over opinions and not for the sake of the truth.
- Sometimes congregations of “mature” brethren will air their grievances with one another in a very public setting. Does this serve the benefit of the kingdom or our jealous desire to look right?

Preachers can be especially notorious for their jealousy. Some preachers speak frequently on lectureships but others get “snubbed.” Preachers who possess special eloquence, humor, or biblical knowledge are labeled as “showoffs.” Especially popular preachers are inappropriately labeled for “loving the praise of men more than the praise of God.” Still other prevalent preachers receive the unmerited disfavor of being labeled as “liberal” or “unsound” simply because their messages are received with gladness. Popularity in the pulpit does not a liberal preacher make. As James says, “My brethren, these things ought not to be” (James 3:10). The one place where jealousy should be absent is within the body of believers! This should especially be exhibited by those who proclaim the good news of Christ.

If the root of jealousy was unearthed and exposed, it would be identified by one word: “different.” Humans become jealous when some one or some thing is different from ourselves or our experiences. Any time someone is different than us, we

feel threatened. We often give the subconscious impression that we want others to be just like us. If they are different from us, then something must be wrong with them, because there is definitely nothing wrong with us! Such should not be the perspective of a Christian. Instead, we should be comfortable with our own Christian identity and accept that some differences are actually beneficial to both humanity and the church (1 Cor. 12:12-24).

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF JEALOUSY

Throughout the Bible, jealousy overwhelmed men who had, or were intended to have, a very close relationship with God. The Old Testament especially reveals this truth. The beginning of sin was rooted in man's desire to be omniscient like God (Gen. 3:5-6). Cain murdered Abel because the younger brother offered a superior sacrifice (Gen. 4:3-8). Jacob's sons nearly killed their brother for the (disproportionate) love his father showed him (Gen. 37:4). Israel raised up a king for itself, not because of God's will for them, but out of their desire to be powerful and mighty like the surrounding nations (1 Sam. 8:19-22). David conspired and killed as a result of his envious lusts (2 Sam. 11). Adonijah's jealousy nearly split the kingdom and led to his own death (1 Kings 1-2). Bitterness over their ancestors' pasts undoubtedly fueled hostile relations between Israel and the descendants of Ishmael, Esau (Edomites), Moab (Moabites), and Ben-ammi (Ammonites). The entire Old Testament reveals that God's people were cut off because of their desire to experience the immorality, politics, and materialism of the world. Do God's people reflect such jealousy today?

In the New Testament, jealousy most frequently displayed itself in the Pharisees' dealings with Jesus. They envied His influence and His popularity among the people (Luke 5:29-30; 7:36-39; 15:1-2), His power to perform miracles (Matt. 12:22-24; John 11:45-50; 12:17-19), and His ability to teach the Scriptures (John 7:14-32; 45-49). In the end, their jealousy of His Messiahship and authority prevented their salvation.

Even among the Apostles, jealousy needed tempering. Judas coveted the money that Mary used to praise Jesus (John 12:4-6). Additionally, at the very end of his time with Jesus, Peter had yet to completely overcome his jealous tendencies:

Then, Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me" (John 21:20-22)

When we jealously concern ourselves with the lives of others, Jesus still says, "What is that to you? You follow Me."

HOW TO OVERCOME JEALOUSY

We should recognize the following four principles that can assist the undoing of jealousy:

1. God Gives Me What I Need

Jealousy can first be overcome by recognizing that God gives me what I need. Over and over again, the Scriptures remind us that we have a Heavenly Father. A father's primary responsibility is to provide for his children, and there is no better father than the Eternal One. The United States has been provided with more material blessings and spiritual protection than any society in the Christian Age. What a spoiled people we have become! We have lost the ability to distinguish between our needs and our wants. How many vehicles, changes of clothes, and forms of entertainment do we "need"? Because of all of our "needs," millions live in extreme debt. A preacher-mentor of mine once brought to my attention that only in the United States are the "poor" obese. How many other societies can boast such wealth?

Even amongst such prosperity, we have been convinced that we "need" MORE of something, we "need" something

BIGGER, we “need” something BETTER. “Keeping up with the Jones’ has certainly reached extravagant heights in the 21st century. The marketing schemes of our consumer culture have successfully preyed upon our desire to maintain an image of success and wealth. Adults spend countless hours every week reading magazines, surfing websites, and watching talk shows that obsess over the lives of celebrities. Why do we do this? Do we envy their lifestyles? Teen-oriented movies, music, and clothing are marketed less on the quality of the product and more on their popularity or trendiness. Much of our culture’s spending is a result of “everyone else is doing it.” If you carefully observe advertisements and commercials, you will quickly see the close friendship between jealousy and materialism.

Additionally, we have been granted the freedom to worship. Early Christians met secretly and risked their lives just to be with their brethren. We can do so openly and without fear but often neglect this great privilege. Maybe if these freedoms were removed, we would have greater zeal to worship God and less of a desire to conform to the world.

Acknowledging that God gives me what I need will quench all my jealous tendencies. All the riches of this world pale in comparison to the spiritual blessings God has provided. As the psalm says, “Christ’s Love is All I Need.”³ When we truly appreciate God’s grace and live with gratitude, we will never desire those things we do not have. Beyond the considerations of this world, God assures that He will always be with us. This promise alone should lead to our contentment (Heb. 13:5-6). Paul knew the formula for contented living, and so can we (Phil. 4:4-13; 1 Tim. 6:6-19).

2. *God Gives Me Bearable Trials*

A jealous heart sometimes results from adversity. During physical, financial, familial, emotional, or even spiritual crises, we are tempted to consider our lives in comparison to others. We say such things as, “Look at Mrs. No-trials. She has never had to go through anything like this. Why do I?” Or we might say, “Mr.

Moneybags doesn't know how good he's got it. He probably doesn't even know what it's like to set a budget."

We make a fatal flaw when we employ such thinking during adversity. God does not intend for our trials to result in our jealousy. Instead He intends for them to result in greater dependence on Him and growth of our own character (Job 42:1-6; Rom. 5:3-5; James 1:2-4). Instead of looking outward, we are to look upward. God has assured us that we will never be tempted more than we can bear, so we never have any reason to be jealous (1 Cor. 10:13).

3. *God Gives All Christians Something to Contribute*

In my opinion, the unsung hero of the "Parable of the Talents" is Mr. Two Talents. Mr. Two Talents could have made one of two excuses that are commonly made today. First of all, he could have looked at the five-talent man and said, "Why can't I have five talents?" On the other hand, he could have thought, "Since this other guy only has one talent, why should I be expected to use two?" But he did neither. Instead he took his two talents, used them, developed them, and brought a profit back to the master. Even when the master took the unused talent from the lazy servant and gave it to the wealthiest servant, Mr. Two Talents maintained his meekness. Where would the church be if more of us emulated the two-talent servant?

Paul highlights that while some members receive greater attention in the church, the unrecognized ones are more necessary. Sadly, some members fail to appreciate the necessity of their own contribution OR the contribution of others. Both of these failures can be rooted in jealousy. For far too long, Satan has convinced us that some talents are too meager to benefit the church. However, Paul says that the success of the church actually depends upon those so-called "weaker" members (1 Cor. 12:14-23). When we put aside jealousy over titles and talents, the church will do more good and reach more lost souls.

4. *God Gives Me Energy to Use for Him*

Both the Hebrew (*qinah*) and the Greek (*zelos*) words for “jealous” are also used to indicate “zeal.” Both are intense interests—One is positive, the other is negative.⁴ What does this tell us? The energy that drives jealousy is not inherently evil, but how that energy is used determines the rightness or wrongness of it. Instead of burning with envy over my brother’s possessions or his situation in life, I need to burn with zeal for God and His will for me (Jer. 20:9). If I exhaust my energies for God and His righteousness, then I will have nothing left to spend on evil (Matt. 6:33). When I have exchanged Satan’s jealousy for God’s zeal, then I am on my way to far better relations with both my fellow man and my Father in heaven.

If God gives us all these things, why should we ever be jealous?

ENDNOTES

1. All Scripture citations and quotations are from the New King James Version.

2. All emphasis mine.

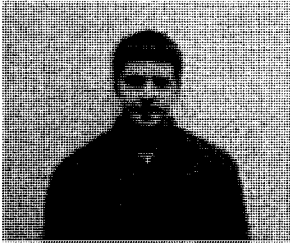
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ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

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On that day, when evening came, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him. And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark 4:35-41).

Christians often feel like the apostles did in that boat that night. As we look at the world around us, we feel the winds and the storm pounding down on us, and our boat is beginning to sink. We see the dangers surrounding us and lose sight that Jesus is with us in the boat, riding out the storm the whole time. We feel like Jesus has abandoned us and left us all alone. We

forget to put our faith and confidence in Him to protect us and save us from the storm. And after the storm has died down, we need to be reminded by Him of our weaknesses, the importance of strengthening our faith, and the need to put our complete trust in Him to save us.

THE WORLD AROUND US

When we survey our world today, there is a great storm that is raging around us. Our world is characterized by doubt and fear. Since the attacks of 9/11, we have been on a heightened state of alert. Every day, there are potential threats that bring the possibility of another attack. Our economy has been in a downward spiral, and workers face the possibility of losing their jobs. The moral and ethical standards of the world are dropping at an alarming rate. Because of this, we see the widespread practice and acceptance of sin and the looking down upon those with any moral standards. The educational and intellectual world has championed science and evolution and considers any system of faith as being unempirical, ignorant, and closed-minded. Post-modernistic thought has championed the idea of relativism in which there is no absolute truth or standard of truth that can be known. Truth is relative only to the individual, changes from individual to individual, and cannot be applied to anyone else. The religious world is also characterized by doubt and confusion. There are so many systems and practices in effect today that people in the world are confused about who to trust or believe. Our world is characterized by doubt and fear. We are left feeling like a people without faith, holding a dim candle of hope in the face of despair.

THE REALITY

While we like to think sometimes that our modern world has problems that are new and complex, in reality the world has not changed from Jesus' time. The Christians in that time were living in a world that was much scarier than ours today. They faced persecution and death from the hands of the Jews. Many of those Jews who converted to Christianity lost everything they had because of their conversion. They also faced persecution and death from the Romans, who saw Christianity as a threat and tried to stamp it out. The moral standards that existed in their day make our society look very moral and righteous. It would cause

us to shudder just to think of the indulgences and brutality that existed among the Romans in that day and age. Truth, or the idea of truth, was nonexistent (John 18:38). Widespread religious and paganistic practices were kept by all (Acts 17:16-23). When we look at the evidence, our problems pale in comparison to the problems that the first century Christians faced.

When we take this into account and consider that the Bible was written to Christians in the first century who faced problems bigger than ours, we should be left with confidence. We are told that the Bible is complete and sufficient for all our needs (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The teachings and principles found in it can help us meet any challenge that comes our way. We are also told that Jesus is the great I Am and is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8; John 14:6). Jesus is always with us by our side, helping us in our times of need. Through God and His word, we can face a world of fear and doubt and can be fearless and confident. God has not left us alone or without hope. Let us then look to God's Word and turn to Jesus to gain confidence of our salvation.

THE BIBLE AND JESUS

In many of the latter epistles, the theme of assurance or confidence of salvation is dominant. In the letter to the Hebrews, many of the Jewish Christians were experiencing doubt and were contemplating leaving the faith and returning back to the safety of Judaism. The writer encourages them by reminding them of the greatness of the gospel that they had heard and obeyed (Heb. 2:1-4). He reminds them of their relationship as sons to God and brothers to Christ (Heb. 2:10-13). He informs them of the superiority of the New Covenant and the salvation that is offered through it (Heb. 9). He encourages them not to lose hope and tells them that Christianity is a continuing journey of faith that Jesus has already successfully taken and by doing so, has left for us an example to follow in His footsteps (Heb. 10:32-12:3).

James wrote to those in his epistle who, because of some trials that they were enduring, were resting on their laurels and not practicing their Christianity. He tries to give them assurance by asking them to examine their faith in order to make sure that it was working the proper way (James 1:19-27; 2:1-17; 3:13-18). He tells them that their assurance comes from their

works of love and kindness toward one another (James 1:27; 2:18).

Peter wrote in his first letter to those who were facing severe persecution at the hands of the Romans because of their faith. He assures them that their sufferings prove the genuineness of their faith rather than destroying it (1 Pet. 1:6-9; 4:12-14). They can have confidence in facing their persecutions because God is protecting their souls and because Christ suffered and was glorified by God (1 Pet. 2:21-25; 3:13-4:11). Because Christ was glorified through His sufferings, they will in turn, after enduring their sufferings, be perfected and established by God (1 Pet. 5:6-10).

Peter's second letter and the epistles of John were written to Christians who were in desperate need of assurance and confidence of their salvation. False teachers were beginning to arise, and many were following them, leaving the remaining Christians wondering about their status in the body. Peter gives us a good description of the false teachers and the motives behind their actions (2 Pet. 2; 3:3-4). He gives them assurance by reminding them of what they had previously been taught and to continue to follow in that doctrine (2 Pet. 1:5-12; 3:1-2).

John wrote to Christians who were facing incipient Gnosticism. The Gnostics were boasting about the possession of their special knowledge and the fact that their Christian counterparts were ignorant and unlearned of these beliefs. They proclaimed that they were the only ones that could "know." John writes to the Christians in order that they might truly know and reminds them that they have known all along (1 John 5:13; 2:7, 21). He tells them that they can have assurance because of their confession of Jesus, the confession of their sins, and because they were keeping the commandment to love their brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 1:9; 2:1-11; 3:23-24; 4:2-3, 7-8, 15-21; 5:2-3).

The Bible provides us a wealth of information on how to have assurance of our salvation. Let us now look to how we can put these principles into practice in our lives today.

PRACTICAL WAYS OF DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE IN OUR SALVATION

The first thing we can do to help us have more confidence in our salvation is to understand the nature of faith. We must understand that faith is a growing process. Often we look at all the failures and shortcomings of our lives and think about how much more we could and should be doing. Because of this realization, we think that we cannot be saved because we are not doing enough. First of all, we must realize that we can never do enough to earn our salvation. Our salvation is based solely upon the grace of God and not on our earthly works (Eph 2:8-9; Rom. 3:23-28; 4:1-8). We are sinners and will never be perfect. But all the while, we can be assured of our salvation by the continual practice of our Christian beliefs and by faithfully confessing our sins (1 John 1:5-10). Although we will sin and fall short of God's glory, we need to be constantly striving to walk with God and letting our lives be characterized by Christ and not by sin (1 John 3:4-10; 5:18; 1:7).

The apostles are a good example of a growing faith. Many times in the gospels the apostles are said to believe and profess their belief in Jesus (John 1:49; 6:68; 11:14-15; 20:24-29; Matt. 14:33; 16:13-16). Does this mean that at other times they did not believe or quit believing in Jesus? No! It means that their belief and faith were growing. As they spent more time with Jesus and continued to witness His works, their faith grew. Many times they were rebuked for their faith not growing (Matt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20). They totally missed the point on many of His teachings and did not fully understand the nature of the Kingdom until His ascension (Acts 1:6; Luke 19:11; Matt. 18:1; 20:21). They even deserted Jesus when the soldiers came and took Him. Peter, one of His closest friends, denied Him three times (Mark 14:50, 66-72). Jesus, however, continued to love them, teach them, and work with them until they were to the point that they turned the world upside down through their faithfulness and preaching of the gospel (Matt. 24:14; Acts 17:6). Jesus can do the same thing with our lives today if we allow Him. If we strive to put our hearts and our lives before God in service to Him, then over time, we will mature and our faith will increase.

It can also be helpful if we are able to look at our shortcomings and doubts in a positive manner. We commonly

think that doubt and confidence are polar opposites when they are really just opposite ends of the continuum. Doubt has some belief and, by fostering and nurturing that doubt, it can grow into confidence. We can also, instead of looking at our faults negatively, look at them from the aspect of change. It is important for us to realize our shortcomings and take the appropriate steps to correct those faults. If we never realize our weaknesses and remain blind to them, then we will never grow and be able to mature into complete Christians.

Another practical way of fostering confidence in our salvation is through God. James 1:16-17 tells us that, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." If God is the source of our salvation, then it would naturally lead us to Him for assurance of that salvation. We can be assured of our salvation through the development our relationship to Him. As we walk with God and become more knowledgeable of His nature, we can have a great sense of assurance. We can see in God that His purpose and His promises never change (Heb. 6:13-18). He loves us and has purposed that we should all be saved (Rom. 8:28-30; 2 Pet. 3:9). He was willing to do whatever it took to bring us back to Him out of our sinful state (John 3:16-17; Rom. 5:5-11). The Bible is the wonderful story and demonstration of God's love toward man and the plan of salvation that was carried out from the foundation of the world through Jesus. Through God, His gift of Jesus, and His promises to the faithful, we can have confidence. The Hebrews writer tells us that this knowledge is the anchor of our soul:

In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil (Heb. 6:17-19).

Our knowledge and understanding of God is our anchor that holds us down in life. We can have great confidence and assurance in our salvation by knowing and trusting in God.

We can also have assurance through our actions. By displaying Christ and His love to the world in our everyday life, we can have confidence. Jesus said that, by following in His example of love, "all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). This is one of the most practical ways of knowing if we are saved. If we love people like Jesus loves them, then all men, including ourselves, will know that we are Christ's. In James 2:14-17, we are told that one of the ways of showing that our faith is alive is by doing good things for one another. We are a people that are created to love and to do good works (Eph 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 4:19). The greatest litmus test for our salvation is whether we are loving people like we should be (1 John 2:7-12; 3:11-21; 4:7-21).

Also, by following Christ's example, we can know that we are saved. God has saved us and shown to us what He wants us to be (Rom. 8:28-30). If God tells us that those who are saved are like Christ, then our Christlikeness is essential to our knowing that we are saved. Christ came to pave the way for us (Heb. 12:2; John 14:1-7). He came to reveal to us what Christianity is. Therefore, we are able look at the example of Christ, walk in His footsteps, and pattern our life after Him. The key then is our transformation. As we look at Christ, we are transformed into His image and become a true follower of His (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 2:20; Matt. 16:24). If we are practicing what God has called us for, then we can know of our salvation.

Our knowledge of our salvation is of great importance to Christianity. This knowledge will either hinder us or help us along the way. We will never be effective if we do not have confidence in ourselves and in what God has revealed to us. While we live in a sinful world, we know that we can be saved from it. God has not left us without hope, and we know that Christ is coming again for those who are faithful. Let us then put our trust in God and have the utmost confidence in our salvation.