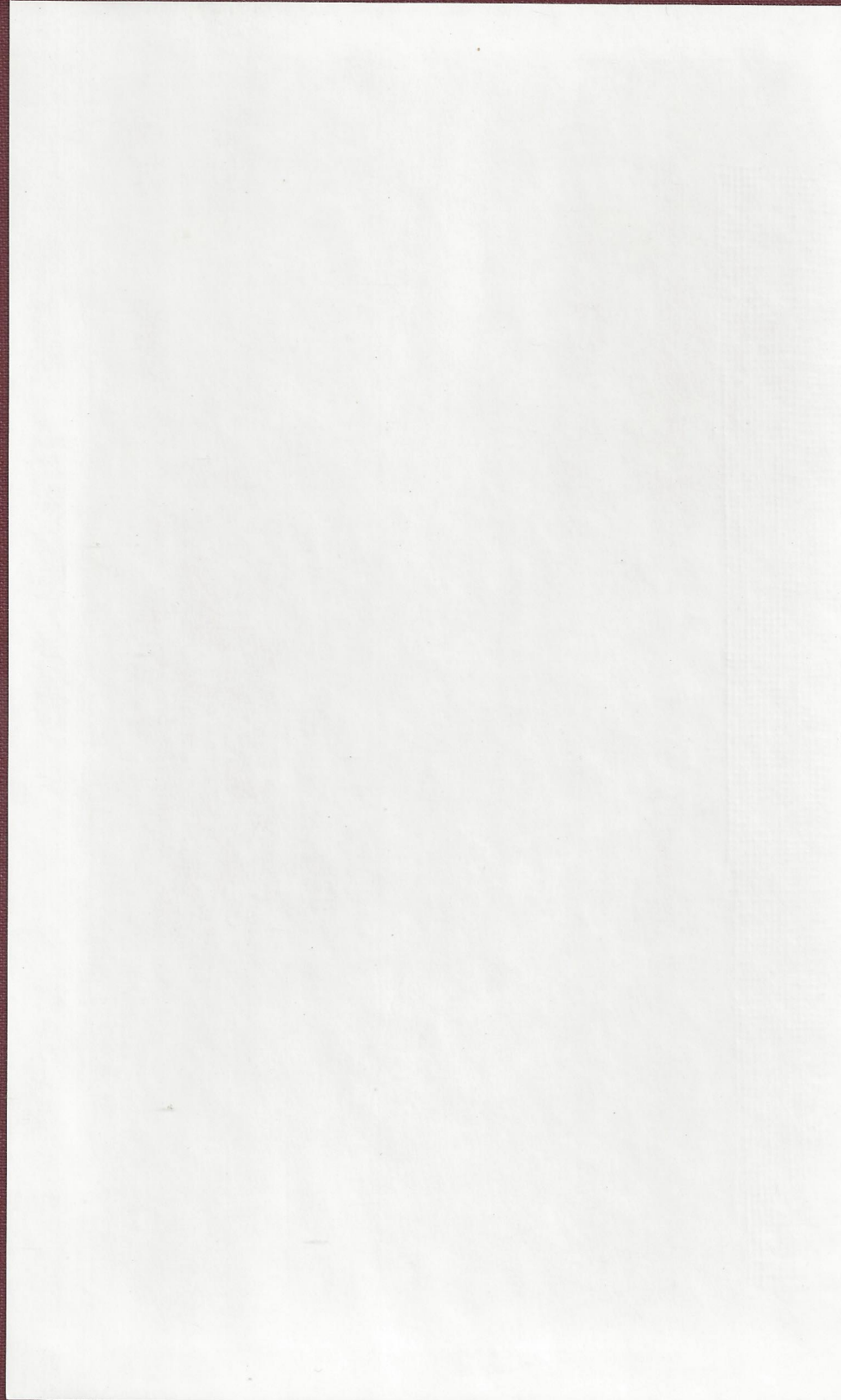


**PRACTICAL STUDIES
IN
CHURCH GROWTH**

2000

The 26th Annual Lectureship
East Tennessee School of Preaching



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2000
The 26th Annual Lectureship
East Tennessee School of Preaching
Knoxville, Tennessee

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A Work of the
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PRACTICAL STUDIES
IN
CHURCH GROWTH

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DEDICATION

The annual East Tennessee School of Preaching lectureship is successful because of the active support of numerous individuals and groups. The year 2000 ETSP lectureship book is dedicated to one of these groups, the Christian women of the Karns Church of Christ.

These godly women consistently give of themselves year after year to help make the lectureship a blessing to many. By preparing and serving noon meals, providing snacks at other times, staffing the foyer tables, greeting guests, selling lectureship books, and by providing lodging and meals in their homes, they make a vital contribution to any success the annual lectureship enjoys. Karns' women are truly Christian women—women of FAITH!

Their **Faithfulness** is like that of first century godly women such as Mary and Martha, Dorcas, Sapphira, Phoebe, Lydia, Eunice, and Lois, to name but a few. Christians who are "good and faithful servants."

Their **Attitude** of service is always evident. An attitude that says, "we do it because we want to, not because we have to." When the decision was made a few years ago to suspend the serving of noon meals, expressions of disappointment were heard. They felt robbed of performing a service of love.

Their positive **Influence** has been a radiating influence for good among all attending the annual lectures. By their willingness to serve, a leavening influence for good is felt.

They have been continuing **Teachers** during the lectures. While others are teaching by word, they are teaching by their example of service. It is noteworthy to remember that when speaking of Jesus the inspired Luke placed doing before teaching in words.

They are widely known for their spirit of **Hospitality**, a virtue often missing among Christians today. Homes have been opened to provide lodging and/or meals for lectureship speakers and guests. As Abraham entertained angels and Mary and Martha entertained our Lord, the ladies of Karns entertain lectureship guests.

Therefore, it is with much pleasure that we dedicate this lectureship book to the Karns women of FAITH!

The 2000 ETSP Lectureship Committee
James Meadows, Chairman
Thomas C. Miller
Lonnie W. Smith, Jr.
Charles L. Brown

PREFACE

Practical Studies In Church Growth should be helpful and challenging to all that desire to see the church grow. During the sixties and early seventies the church went through one of the greatest growth periods (numerically) in her history. There were many reasons for the tremendous growth and many of these are discussed in this series of lectures.

Section I, Practical Studies, will give emphasis to the need of church growth and some essential factors to that end. Ten different speakers will present these lessons. Section II, Special Classes, will involve the thinking of thirteen different speakers. There will be three classes on each of the following: (1) Leadership; (2) Church Discipline; (3) Maintaining Unity; and (4) The Family. Teaching Adults, Teaching Teens, and Teaching Children should help every congregation do a better teaching job. Section III will give emphasis to Youth, The Church as the Bride of Christ, The Pillar and Ground of Truth and The Family of God. The ladies' classes in Section IV will emphasize Good Deeds, Hospitality, Service and Unfeigned Faith. Section V features lessons by some of our students on Conviction, Commitment, Evangelism and Encouragement.

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of so many people in making these lectures possible and in the production and publication of this book. Special thanks go to the following:

The thirty-five men and women who have spent valuable time in researching and writing these manuscripts.

Sara Johnson, the faithful, devoted and caring secretary of ETSP who has applied her great secretarial skills in getting this book camera-ready for printing.

Charles Brown, who has spent many hours proof-reading and correcting each manuscript.

The elders of the Karns Church of Christ: Don Denton, David Duncan, Robert Graham, Stan Hornbaker, Gene Johnson and Dale Mowery, for their oversight of the school and their devotion to the Lord's cause.

Wallace Alexander (and all the employees of Gospel Light Publishing Company, Delight, Arkansas), whose company did a tremendous job in printing and binding this 26th Annual Lectureship book.

We send forth this volume with the hope that it will help churches to grow spiritually and numerically. But good ideas and good plans are helpful only if they are used. May God help all of us to strive to be the kind of people he wants us to be.

James Meadows, Director
Twenty-Sixth Annual ETSP Lectures

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SECTION I

Practical Studies in Church Growth

EDIFICATION

JOHNNY RAMSEY



Johnny Ramsey is a native of Sherman, Texas. He is a graduate of ACC where he served as class president for two years. He has preached the Gospel for 50 years. He preached on TV and radio for 40 years; is the author of 10 books, 25 tracts, and 1000 published articles; has taught in four schools of preaching. He lived in Australia for three years. Has coached football and been a sports editor. He has been married to Iris (Bales) for 47 years. They have four children and nine grandchildren.

The Growth of the church spiritually cannot be maintained without the strength that edification provides. We are taught in Romans 14:19 that things that edify and make for peace should build us up in the most holy faith. Destructive matters consume the people of God and cause us to devour one another (Gal. 5:15). We need to spend much more time developing the fruit of the spirit that the debilitation of carnality will not enter in to nullify our pursuit of heaven.

When we encourage one another in the majestic cause of Christ, we bear one another's burden and thus fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:1-2). Then, the brilliance of Psalms 119:63 comes into focus: "I am a companion of all those that fear thee and keep thy precepts...."

Fellowship in the glorious eternal purpose will mature the lives of all who pursue Christianity. "All this and heaven too" will be our constant motto and joyous anthem!

CAN WE LIVE FOR JESUS?

There are those who teach that it is not possible for human beings to live up to the standard of godliness that Christianity demands.

The Devil would like for us to accept that heresy so as to discourage us from even trying. Do we have certain propensities within us that prohibit a closer walk with God? Did our Creator make us with an inbuilt spiritual deficiency that makes it certain that we shall fail in our pursuit of holiness? Or, are there helps along the way that enable us to glorify the Savior? In the language of Romans 4:3, we sincerely ask: **"What saith the Scriptures?"**

In the beauty of Psalms 119:76-80 we find consolation and joy in the following requests:

1. Thy Judgments are Right;
2. Thy Merciful Kindness Comforts;
3. Thy Law Is My Delight;
4. Thy Precepts Are My Meditation;
5. My Heart Rejoices In Thy Statutes.

Therefore, we ardently sing:

When we look at others
With their land and gold,
Think that Christ has promised us
His wealth untold.

Count your many blessings
Name them one by one.
And it will surprise you
What the Lord has done.

It is challenging to live a life of purity and spiritual integrity, but we get a lot of help from heaven. Notice these benefits and blessings:

Promises
Provisions
Protection
Providence
Power
Prayer
Propitiation

Once these matters are explored in the sacred text we can fully see that Jehovah has not asked us to do the impossible, but rather enables us to follow in the footprints of our Redeemer!

The wonderful promises (2 Pet. 1:3) of the gospel age surround us and encourage us to know that the Lord will never forsake us (Heb. 13:6) and will bless us with all spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3). He will provide us with all our needs (Phil. 4:19) and be with us in all situations (Psa. 91:15). We can look for constant protection from above as long as the world stands (Matt. 28:20) and even for avenues of escape regardless of severe trials and the chicanery of the Devil (1 Cor. 10:13; Psa. 124:8). Providentially, we are in the hands of One who is able to deliver us (Dan. 3:17) and under His wings no harm can befall us (Deut. 33:27).

There is a place of refuge
For every troubled soul...
All the way my Savior leads me,
Gives me Grace for every trial
Feeds me with the living bread....

In the constant protection heaven provides we are continually sustained (Isa. 26:3; 40:31; 58:11), and granted peace and spiritual success that causes us to soar as eagles regardless of earthly problems and human failures.

This power (Heb. 7:16) motivates us to holiness and sanctity that gets the attention of an unbelieving world (Acts 4:13). The tremendous concourse of prayer keeps us close to the Throne of God and gives us confidence (1 John 5:14) that the door of heaven is always open to us (Rev. 4:1) when we ask, seek and knock (Matt. 7) according to the will of God!

The propitiation of the blood of Christ (1 John 2:1-2) has the efficacy to cleanse us and draw us near to the tremendous reservoir of strength that motivates and cheers us on to higher ground. Yes, we can live the life the Bible sets forth because we get so much help from the Savior. May we never turn back!

ALWAYS ALERT

Christians are often warned to beware of false teachers: "Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. 2:8). We are reminded to be always on guard, "That no advantage may be gained over us by Satan: for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). When teachers of

error surround us, we must use "The sword of the Spirit, the word of God" (Eph. 6:17), to offset their nebulous doctrines. A failure to be able to stop Satan's schemes will lead to our ultimate ruin on the Judgment day (Rev. 6:17).

It will not fare well for those who fail to stand up for Truth, while evil men spread error and disdain for righteousness, "But evil men and imposters shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13). John warns us, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out in the world" (1 John 4:1). We must always be on the alert, determined to test all teachings with Scripture and follow only those matters that can be verified by what God has said: "They received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

We must always be alert to the divine maxim that men reap what they sow (Hos. 8:7). We cannot expect good results from evil plans (Rom. 3:8). Eventually our sins will find us out as we are clearly warned (Num. 32:23). There is no way to have a bright future as long as we live in sensual pleasure and diabolical endeavor. We, therefore, should embellish the fruit of spirituality day by day.

Serving the Lord without distraction will grant us joy and peace now, and the hope of a brighter existence on the golden street in glory. Right now, on earth, devoted Christians have a foretaste of things divine. "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches" (Psa. 104:24). May we be wise enough to always alert ourselves to the challenges and opportunities of Christianity. Sometimes we tend to forget that followers of the Lord Jesus Christ have responsibilities that cannot be denied nor transferred to others. The denial of self and sacrificial surrender to the will of the Christ makes us better people and happier pilgrims in the midst of a society that has become thoroughly hedonistic. Those things that pander to the flesh have overwhelmed the majority of earth's billions. Little room for God, or time for the soul, can be found in the lives of many folk. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:12).

Children of God must ever be alert in the use of their talents if the religion of the Savior is extended in a world gone mad over secular enterprise. Long after the last ball game is over and the crass entertainment craze has turned out the lights, we surely have something far better to pursue. Giving is the heart of the gospel, and genuine love

the motivating factor on earth. To get caught up in future matters and shallow dreams will result in an eternity of regret. A wise Christian never forgets his duty toward Creator and creature.

May we have alert minds always to realize how short life is (Psa. 144:4) and thus spend our time wisely in the pursuit of holiness and virtue. To wander aimlessly through our days, squandering our privileges and wasting our potential, will bring a deep regret when we stand before our Maker in the final hour. Conversely, to have used our moments to glorify the Lord will grant us satisfaction and joy in the sweet bye and bye.

HOW TO REMAIN FAITHFUL

Living in a shameful and rugged world is definitely challenging to Christians. Only the dedicated soldier of the Lord can survive. Evil men seem to be getting worse and ungodliness runs rampant in the streets of our nation. In the whole wide world sensuality is the order of the day. Dozens of our own brethren overwhelmed by sin, return to the gutters of iniquity and wallow in the mire of hedonism. Pandering to the flesh is common while devotion to God is rare indeed. What a sordid climate surrounds us and beckons us to join in the unrestrained folly of evil allurements. An old hymn brings to mind the sweet refuge available to us:

From every stormy wind that blows,
From every swelling tide of woes,
There is a calm, a sure retreat;
'Tis found beneath the mercy seat....

What would we do in these wicked days if we could not lean upon the Savior?

A heart of unbelief was the one sin that plagued the Hebrews as we learn in 3:12 of that rich book of the New Testament. Many were on the verge of apostasy and needed fervent exhortation to remain loyal to God lest they draw back to perdition (10:38). Someone has poignantly reminded us...

Opportunity knocks but once
While temptation leans on the doorbell....

There are several pertinent points that should help us to remain faithful regardless of obstacles Satan erects. Let us be on guard and zealously pursue these golden steps to fidelity:

Keep Our Eyes On Jesus:

When we never focus on Christ we lose sight of the only way to heaven. All others fade into oblivion when we see Jesus (Heb. 2:9 and 12:2) in all His resplendent beauty. Looking back to sin and carnality caused Lot's wife to perish (Luke 17:32). We need to develop spiritual maturity by following the steps of the Lord even though they may take us on a difficult, but rewarding journey. Doing what we like might give us freedom but liking what we do is happiness. And we will find more joy in the Master's cause than elsewhere!

O Lord God, thou hast begun to show thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? (Deut. 3:24).

Never Neglect Bible Study:

When we overlook or ignore the pulsating power of Scripture we rob ourselves of a brilliant life-support. In every area of spiritual advancement we can find practical advice in the Bible. One of the first steps into apostasy is to quit studying the sacred text. When we are too busy to open the good Book we take a giant step back to the world. No one can learn the Bible for us and there is nothing that can build up our integrity and steadfastness like a thorough excursion down the pathway of divine knowledge. Sadly, some folk seem to think that what they learned years ago is enough. Thus, they do not continue to add more texts and a deeper understanding of God's revelation. Apostasy looms just around the corner for those content with past laurels. Past experience should be a guidepost, not a hitching post.

Remember always that education costs less than ignorance.

Be Optimistic:

We should always rejoice in the pleasures and challenges of Christianity. To look for trouble and failure often causes us to find

problems rather than victory in Jesus. Some seem to depart from the gospel before they grow much at all due to a pessimistic approach to life. **Christ will me His aid afford** is the first stanza of a great gospel song that agrees with Romans 8:28 and Psalms 124:8.

He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite (Psa. 147:3-5).

Do not look for problems and pitfalls but rather emphasize the sovereignty and providence of God. Put the Lord first in your life and all your needs will be supplied (Phil. 4:19). Seek the glory of Christ and not your own!

Look For The Best In Others—Especially Brethren:

Associating with devout people can be a very practical aid in withstanding error and apostasy. But when we become unduly critical and look only for mistakes in the conduct of others we lose ground on the road to heaven. Each one of us falls short of our goal of constant righteousness so we need to be charitable in our evaluation of our brethren. When we go through life blaming someone else for our problems we will not mature as 1 Corinthians 14:20 demands. Stressing our own obedience would serve us much better on the highway of holiness. "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14).

Realize The Sorrow Apostasy Brings:

If anyone contemplating departure from Christ would honestly observe the empty vanity of others who have left the church to return to the world they would quickly see how barren apostasy really becomes. No peace, joy or fulfillment abides in the heart of a person who gives up the very best in life for the garbage of mundane matters. Divine words bring this sentiment to light: "Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold" (Prov. 8:10). We dare not give up the sublime arrangement of heaven for the pignen of Satan. Let us go on to perfection rather than departing from the living God!

LIVING FOR JESUS

How would you explain or describe the life of a Christian? There are 21 epistles in the New Testament that are dedicated to this matter. Romans through Jude contain classic data on the subject of Christianity translated into human conduct. We are richly blessed with such clarity of information in practical language for daily existence in the midst of a vile world that is insensitive to holiness and purity. Not many people in our age exhibit a desire to glorify God in the devotional words of Psalms 96:1-2: "O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; show forth his salvation from day to day."

The essence of a life devoted to Christ is a grateful heart that will gladly submit to a daily walk with God (Luke 9:23; Rom. 12:1-2). An old and challenging song reminds us:

I am so wondrously saved from sin,
Jesus so sweetly abides within,
There at the Cross where He took me in;
Glory to His name!

Once we realize how vain and futile life would be without the loving Savior we will seek ways to magnify Deity. The power and grace of the Lord reminds us of this bulwark verse of scripture: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8).

How could we be so foolish as to launch out into a dark world devoid of the sacred light of His marvelous guidance? A compelling hymn captures this sentiment perfectly:

Without Him I could do nothing;
Without Him I would surely fail.
Without Him I would be drifting
Like a ship without a sail.
Without Him how lost I would be!

Perhaps no other Bible chapter better gives the gist of the solid sojourn of the Christian to the degree and depth of the 12th chapter of Romans. This dynamic section reminds us that the followers of Jesus lead a **sacrificial, surrendered, selfless** and **satisfying** life before God and men (vv. 1-8). The high ethic of the gospel system leaves no room for conceit, laziness or retaliation (vv. 9-20). We focus on serving the

Lord and helping those about us (vv. 14-21). Living for Jesus forbids self-pity and mercenary goals. The redemption of the lost becomes our magnificent obsession (2 Cor. 4:13). Trivial matters fade and spiritual emphases naturally engulf our waking thoughts. Producing the **fruit of the Spirit** (Gal. 5:22-23) subdues the carnal activities that overwhelm the vast hordes surrounding us. We are seekers of treasure far beyond silver and gold due to the enormous value of souls.

The rich dividend for the man who truly seeks God's kingdom first (Matt. 6:33) is the glorious improvement it produces in his own walk on the earth. Someone wisely stated: "The highest reward for man's toil is not what he gets for it but what he becomes by it." The peace of God which passeth understanding (Phi. 4:7) permeates the pilgrimage of those who follow Christ even when persecution enters their lives. Any noble endeavor is worth the consequences that such action may bring. It is far better to endure hardship as servants of the One who died at Calvary than to escape tribulation because of cowardice (1 Pet. 4:16).

Living for Jesus may mean that we will someday die for Him. Revelation 14:13 emphatically tells us that will be the epitome of blessedness. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, sayeth the Spirit that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them." As this passage shows, there is just no way that a faithful Christian can lose. These 21 epistles—Romans through Jude—beautifully show us the splendid hope that our Redeemer grants us!

PRESSING ON!

We dare not attempt to prove our positions by restoration guidelines or commentaries written by our heroes but by "thus saith the Scriptures" (Rom. 4:3; Psalms 119:11). What some brother said at a lectureship, workshop or in a periodical has no divine authority to guide the church of our Lord. The Scriptures alone, under the authority of Christ (Matt. 28:18; Acts 20:32), should be our standard always. Although all things that pertained to life and godliness were revealed by the Spirit through the Apostles, it involved a period of nearly 70 years from the time Jesus promised the Apostles that He would send the Holy Spirit. All of the truth was not revealed all at once. That explains why such matters as the eating of meats, Judaism and the return of Christ were not as clear immediately as they now are to us who have full access to all Scripture at the same time. We are indeed blessed to hold in our hands a copy of the whole Bible. The impart of John 16:13, in its

fulfillment, is a genuine benefit to mankind today. Surely, in deep gratitude, we should search the Scriptures (Acts 17:11), study ardently (2 Tim. 2:15) and share the message with others (1 Pet. 3:15). We should fervently sing:

Give me the Bible, all my steps enlighten,
Teach me the danger of these realms below;
That lamp of safety o'er the gloom shall brighten,
That light above the path of peace can show.

Christians should praise God mightily for the revelation of Truth made possible by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles.

In John 16:16-22 the Master taught the disciples concerning His death, burial and resurrection. Of course they did not fully understand the crux of the matter until afterwards. Back in John 2, at the start of His personal ministry, the Messiah had predicted the resurrection by saying: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." His followers thought Jesus referred to the Temple being rebuilt by Herod, but later understood that He spoke of "the temple of his body." In John 16, on the very same subject, our Lord told the Apostles they would soon be saddened by His leaving, but that mourning would soon turn to joy. These words were indicative of the sorrow the Apostles felt when Jesus died (Mark 15:10) and their exuberance when He arose (John 20:28). As Romans 1:4 affirms so these scenes are reflected: **Christ was proved to be the Son of God by power in His resurrection from the dead!** In a well-known hymn Robert Lowry contributes these glorious words:

Death cannot keep his prey
Jesus, my Savior!
He tore the bars away
Jesus my Lord!

Up from the grave he arose
He arose a Victor from the dark domain
Hallelujah! Christ arose!

Christ burst asunder the bands of death; the gates of Hades could not hold Him (Acts 2:24; Matt. 16:18). Truly sorrow was turned to joy!

In verses 23-24 of John 16 we learn a valuable lesson concerning the power in the name of Christ. Paul informs us in the

second chapter of Philippians that our Savior has a name that towers above all other names. In Colossians 3:17 we are commanded to do all things by and through the powerful name of Christ. And in an unsung verse, Ephesians 5:20, we are shown that early Christians prayed to the heavenly Father through Jesus Christ. In John 16:24 these words ring out: "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

This is not a certain formula that will make our petitions miraculous, but a spiritual concept that permeates our relationship with God. All that we do in Christianity is bounded by the authority or power vested in Christ by virtue of His mediating on our behalf (1 John 2:1; 1 Tim. 2:5; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). Because of His death on our behalf the door of heaven is wide open to receive our petitions in every time of need (Rev. 4:1; Heb. 4:16). Praise God for such open concourse with the halls of heaven. When faithful children of God ask, seek and knock (Matt. 7:7) according to His will (1 John 5:14), we can expect a closer walk with our Creator. Let us avail ourselves of the privileges found within the mighty name of Christ. What an abiding consolation it is to know that in the darkest hour the Light of the world—even Christ—is available to us (John 8:12; 1 John 1:7). Yes, Christ brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10). The very One who overcame Satan, sin, death, Hades and Hell has promised that we, too, can overcome and then come over to live with Him forevermore (Rev. 3:21; John 16:33).

In the grand conclusion of John 16 we find some of the richest promises our blessed Redeemer ever gave to His loyal servants. In essence Jesus told the Apostles that He was not alone and they need never be lonely either! Paul, in the last paragraph of inspiration he ever wrote, made it clear that though men had forsaken him under pressure of Roman persecution, the Lord had stood by to bolster him in the midst of trials. It takes courage to be a Christian, but it is certainly worth it! Let us find comfort in the beauty of John 16. Let us follow Jesus home to glory!

I want to live above the world,
Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;
For faith has caught the heavenly sound,
The song of saints on higher ground.

These things help us to keep on the upward way to a place called heaven wherein all things will be new!

ZEAL FOR GOD

The apostle Paul showed the need for ardent zeal when he wrote, "But it is good to be zealously sought in a good matter at all times" (Gal. 4:18). Indifference toward truth will only please Satan. The compelling aura of Christianity demands our very best effort. Negligence in matters divine is far too common in our society today. Living for Jesus ought to produce in us the highest excitement and most loyal devotion. It is beneath the dignity of the gospel for us to be casual about the cause of Christ and the souls of men. An old song backs up the familiar adage: "Anything worth while is worth fighting for." And, so, we sing:

Valiant endeavor and loving obedience,
Freely and joyously now would we bring.

When we are not ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16), we do not fear the schemes of evil men against us. Devotion to God will overwhelm the vagaries of men who have a disdain for holiness and commitment to spiritual values. We dare not allow sinful neighbors to halt our plans of evangelism or to compromise our dedication to the Savior who died at Calvary. We can never turn back to easy street, but we must accept the challenges found in the "desert of sorrow and sin." We shall echo the sentiment of Peter and John found in Acts 5:29, "We ought to obey God rather than men."

When we stand up for God in this severely hellish world, it will build conviction and confidence in our hearts. It will spur us on to greater heights when we really believe, and we will just have to speak up: "But having the same spirit of faith, according to that which is written, I believed, and therefore did I speak; we also believe, and therefore also we speak" (2 Cor. 4:13). A gospel hymn demands our focus:

He is our sun and shield by day,
Our help, our hope, our strength and stay,
He will be with us all the way,
Our God is love.

Zeal for God can be developed by prayer and Bible study, and by personally telling others of the glad tidings of salvation. When we reach out to others and restore some erring brother, it will be a blessing that pays dividends for our souls. How sad is the lethargy and unconcern that pervades the lives of far too many of us in the church today! Let us look deep into our hearts and determine that our enthusiasm for divine matter will be renewed and magnified, in order that

God may be glorified more and more. Someone has given us these powerful words:

No vision and you perish,
No ideal and you are lost.
Your heart must ever cherish
Faith at any cost.

There is no greater cause than that of Christianity. Zeal for God is a bargain at any cost!

OVERCOMING APOSTASY

The book of Hebrews in the New Testament was written to alert Christians of Jewish background not to leave the Lord under the duress of persecution. Rome was severely opposing the progress of the gospel, and it took courage to be loyal as servants of Jesus Christ. The last chapter of the brilliant treatise of Hebrews gives us certain cures for apostasy and incentives to remain faithful to the Savior.

In the first ten chapters of this noble epistle, we clearly see the supremacy of Jesus set forth. He is superior to the angels of heaven (Heb. 1). He towers above Moses as leader of God's people (Heb. 3). He is a greater deliverer than Joshua (Heb. 4). As a High Priest, He is far above Aaron (Heb. 7). His testament is greater than that given the Jews (Heb. 8 and 9). His sacrifice is greater than that of animals (Heb. 10). And as our forerunner to heaven, Christ serves as our hope, refuge and anchor. In fact, the Master is the personal guarantee of a better covenant that is established upon better promises (Heb. 8:6-13).

In the middle section of Hebrews, we learn that the first testament (the law given to Israel) no longer has power, but it has been superseded by the covenant sealed in the blood of Jesus. Then the last part of Hebrews (chapters 11, 12 and 13) demands loyal devotion and ardent resolve, as we press on and never look back. Apostasy loomed on the horizon, but fidelity to the Savior would have beautiful results.

The finale of the book of Hebrews follows a great list of courageous and faithful folk of Old Testament devotion (Heb. 11). These people, "by faith" did what God told them to do. Men such as Abel (v. 4), Enoch (v. 5), Noah (v. 7), Abraham (vv. 8,17), Joseph (v. 22), Moses (vv. 24-28) and others (v. 32) never wavered from doing the will of God.

These noble ones should remind us to persevere regardless of external circumstances.

In the last glorious chapter of this great book, we clearly see how we can avert apostasy and cling to the blessed victory on the golden shore of heaven.

1. Brotherly love and hospitality
2. Purity of live
3. Contentment, not covetousness
4. Dependence upon God
5. Remembering the constant help of God
6. Reject false teaching
7. Bear the reproach of the world
8. Praise the Lord, never complain
9. Follow Godly leaders
10. Highly esteem the sacrifice of Christ

When these matters gain and keep our attention, Satan will not succeed in turning us from the Lord. May we be wise in our pursuit of godliness.

Spiritual laziness is too high a price to pay for the destiny of those we love.

God's Minute

I have only just a minute,
Only sixty seconds in it;
Forced upon me, can't refuse it;
Didn't seek it, didn't choose it.
But it's up to me to use it;
I must suffer if I lose it;
Give account if I abuse it.
Just a tiny little minute,
But Eternity is in it.

The challenging nature of Christianity is another brilliant thrust that ought to captivate our thinking. Indifference and apathy dare not ensnare us as we realize the Lord demands our best. We must press on to higher ground and nobler endeavors. There can be no tolerance for evil, error or mediocrity. Our approval must always be upon excellence and the mandates of heaven. We must rise above the pettiness of carnality and the shameful conduct of secularism. Christianity is great because it demands our best and rewards us the most!

Edification demands time on our part to expend necessary effort on behalf of building up the body of Christ. On a golden street in heaven it will well be worth our energy. May we never slacken the pace or subdue our concern on behalf of saving souls!

THE BIBLE FOUNDATION FOR CHURCH GROWTH

JOHNNY RAMSEY



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Christ told His servants that they were made clean by the Scriptures (John 15:3). Since the seed of the kingdom is the word of God, the church must hold fast to the Bible (Luke 8:11). Followers of the Savior were begotten by "the word of the truth of the gospel" as we read in Colossians 1:5 and 1 Peter 1:22.

Denominations are built upon human creeds found in manuals written by men, but Christ's church is based upon Christ and the Sacred Text!

There can never be proper church growth apart from the Bible. The message of 1 Peter 4:11 has a clarion call: "If any man speak let him speak by the oracles of God...."

The pillar, bulwark and ground of the truth are the church of the Lord (1 Tim. 3:15). When a congregation is known for expertise in philosophy and secular bombast, it has lost its claim to New Testament Christianity.

Genuine growth, in the sight of heaven, comes not from human promotionalism, but in the pristine beauty of heaven's revealed mandates!

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Christianity means that a person has a goal, a name, a purpose, a friend, an influence and a very bright future. To be a Christian, in the Bible usage of that word, means that I am free, forgiven, happy, anchored, urgent and concerned for others. To follow the Lord is the only way to walk the sands of time on the road to glory. Any other emphasis in life falls short of full joy and depth. There are personal relationships that exist between the Lord and His loyal friends. Notice these words that form the epitome of what it means to be a Christian.

SOLDIER

In a stirring battle with Satan, Christians militantly use the sword of the Spirit as we fight the good fight of faith against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:17). To be sure, this is not carnal combat with physical weaponry, but it is mighty toward God (2 Cor. 10:5), and is capable of making friends for the Lord out of former enemies. Christianity has the power to bring peace to nations, families and individuals. These words remind us of this truth: "Sometimes God calms the raging storm. Sometimes He lets the storm rage and calms His child."

SAINT

The people of the Lord are pure, holy and distinctive (John 15:19). They have been set apart for the Master's cause (1 Pet. 2:9). A Christian will not allow the world to deter him from his march toward heaven. He will be the light of the world and not permit darkness to arrest his progress in spiritual commitment. The Christian's proper attitude is well expressed in the song "Purer Yet and Purer."

Purer yet and purer, I would be in mind;
Dearer yet and dearer, Ev'ry duty find;
Hoping still and trusting God without a fear;
Patiently believing He will make all clear.

DISCIPLE

A "disciple" is a pupil, a learner—one who adheres to the mandates of his teacher. That is what it means to be a disciple, to follow Jesus (John 8:31; 15:8). The power and purpose of discipline is an undergirding virtue of the gospel system. Without it, we would only have chaos in Christianity. Revelation 3:19 proves that God uses chastening as an act of love, designed to make us better people as we correct our lives so as to better serve the Savior. Easy street is the broad avenue many compromisers seek. It takes real effort to be a disciple of Christ. We should never forget the following maxim: "Some people would rather pray for forgiveness than fight temptation!" Too many people reject the value of discipline by always following the line of least resistance.

FELLOW-LABORER WITH GOD

Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were co-workers with the Creator. In Philippians 2:12-13, we have an even fuller statement concerning this tremendous association:

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

To serve the Redeemer is life's grandest relationship! We glory in the cross as we partake in the glory of saving souls and edifying the brethren (Gal. 6:14). Someone has aptly said, "Success is not a destination; it is a road...." As long as we live there will be wonderful work for us to do in Jesus' name. To be a follower of the Man of Calvary makes our days meaningful and productive. And when our work is over we can look forward to the land of rest that will come at the end of our journey:

O land of rest, for thee I sign!
When will the moment come.
When I shall lay my armor by,
And dwell in peace at home?

What is Christianity? It is truly the only life that counts for time and for eternity! May we pursue this magnificent obsession with the zest and gratitude it so richly deserves. Let us sincerely be able to say, "Heaven

holds all to me!" Such hope should motivate us to pursue a closer walk with God.

STANDING FOR TRUTH

Idealists are rare these days. Everything is supposed to be relative and not absolute. The humanists are absolutely positive about their relativity! But the clarion call of truth still demands that we take a definite stand for truth. The only way we can be free is through the liberty Christ provides in the standard of truth (John 8:32-36). The word of God has always been precious (1 Sam. 3:1). No man can really be wise if he has a disdain for Scripture (Jer. 8:9). The words of eternal life flow from Jesus (John 6:68) and help form conviction, as we read in 2 Corinthians 4:13, "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."

This loyalty to divine mandates caused Paul to be set for the defense of the gospel and to publicly affirm and defend truth (Phil. 1:16-17; Acts 17:3). Amos plainly commands God's servants to "hate the evil and love the good." There is a clear line of demarcation between right and wrong: "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). Truth and error are not the same. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30). We must earnestly contend for the gospel and plainly denounce evil (Jude 3; Eph. 5:11).

Sadly, many in the church of our day have forgotten the proper militant stand of the Lord's army. We are in a fight (1 Tim. 6:12), and woe be unto those who "keep back their sword from blood" (Jer. 48:10). We must speak boldly and never turn away from the path of duty (Acts 14:3; Josh 1:7). It is not proper nor fair for so many members of the church to refuse to enter the battle. In Numbers 32:6, we read a haunting refrain: "Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?"

In the famous spiritual song, "True-Hearted, Whole-Hearted," we find words that powerfully express the attitude of courageous soldiers:

True-hearted, whole-hearted, faithful and loyal,
King of our lives, by Thy grace we will be;
Under the standard exalted and royal,
Strong in Thy strength we will battle for Thee.

True-hearted, whole-hearted, fullest allegiance
Yielding henceforth to our glorious King;
Valiant endeavor and loving obedience,
Freely and joyously now would we bring.

True-hearted, whole hearted, Savior all-glorious!
Take thy great power and reign there alone,
Over our wills and affections victorious,
Freely surrendered and wholly Thine own.

With Joshua of old we take a stand for God, regardless of what others may do (Josh. 24:15). In concern with apostolic example we speak the things we know to be true and never allow earthly pressure to dissuade us (Acts 4:20; 5:29). With the burning flame of the precious Word of the Lord in our hearts, we will not compromise the message of salvation (Jer. 20:9). We will not be ashamed to tell the glad tidings even before kings! (Psa. 119:46). Three centuries ago, in John Bunyan's Shepherd Boy's Song, grand words of challenge were given:

He who would valiant be, against all disaster.
Let him in constancy follow the Master.

That reminds us of another shepherd boy named David who boldly told Goliath that he came to the battle in the name of the Lord who would grant victory, in spite of insuperable odds (1 Sam. 17:45-46). When we stand for truth today, we do not fight alone. Whether it be in the arena of doctrinal soundness, moral purity, scriptural worship or personal commitment, we can heartily say with Paul, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). Great servants like Nathan and Micaiah were not afraid to rebuke rulers in high places and we should be emboldened to do the same. John the Immerser and Stephen died because of the truth they proclaimed. Are we willing to stand up and be counted for the cause of our Lord? The poet Byron spoke of "A banner torn but still flying—streaming like the thunder-storm against the wind," and faithful Christians will face formidable foes. However strong the conflict, let us keep the banner of the Son of God flying high. Stout hearts and unbending wills will cause us to sing the song of victory at the last! Let us be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10).

LEADERSHIP

Cream always rises to the top. If ten men were marooned on an island one or two would naturally lead the rest. However, this does not automatically insure proper leadership. Some leaders are corrupt, unwise and self-serving. In 2 Chronicles 28:21-27 we read of Ahaz who fits such a mold. Tragically, he sought the help of enemy nations and curried their favor even to the extent of compromising truth. We are reminded of the failure of Ahaz in verse 21: "But he helped him not."

Yes, in spite of spineless action by Ahaz the heathen ruler would not assist the shallow goals of Ahaz! Israel's monarch even bowed down to the idols of the enemy and sacrificed to them hoping to gain favor from pagan rulers. Did such cowardly action produce desired results? Hear the clarion call of verse 23: "But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel."

Today, when we look to the world for guidance we also do greatly err! In Zechariah 4:6 we see the folly of depending upon our own power and might in regard to success. In Judges 7:2 Gideon learned that relying upon one's own strength will never get the job done. It is through Christ who empowers us that battles are won (Phil. 4:13).

Christ will me His aid afford,
Never to fall, never to fall,
While I find my precious Lord
Sweeter than all, sweeter than all.

Rebellion against constituted authority in our nation and world filters into the church sometimes and wars against Bible teaching concerning "elders, deacons and all the saints" (Phil. 1:1). Elders must lead by example but when they do, it is by and with the authority of "the chief Shepherd and bishops of our souls" (1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4). Godly men who watch for our souls (Heb. 13:17) have a tremendous responsibility. We should be very careful to so live as never to make their efforts more difficult.

There is an analogy in the sacred text between the shepherding of elders and that of the Lord, our Shepherd in the superlative sense. Therefore we sing:

Savior, like a shepherd lead us,
Much we need Thy tenderest care,

In Thy pleasant pastures feed us,
For our use Thy folds prepare.

In Psalms 78:72 we learn a lesson that reminds us of godly, spiritual men who tenderly guide us toward heaven: "So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands."

The spiritual nature of the gospel system demands the very best we have in the church of the Lord. Let us never discourage shepherds of the flock but rather hold up their hands in life's most noble task.

Tennyson had a great reminder, over a century ago, that reminds me of great elders I have known:

Live pure, speak true, right the wrong and
follow the King.

Through the years some of the greatest people I have known have been godly shepherds in the house of God. May we honor them by following the Christ they served and by encouraging young men in the church to qualify for such wonderful and challenging work!

THE CHALLENGE OF CHRISTIANITY

There is no greater challenge than being a Christian. There is no richer reward for one's endeavor than pursuing the way of righteousness. If there were no eternity, no judgment day, no heaven or hell, still the best way to live upon this earth would be to live the life of a genuine Christian. The demands of the gospel make better people of us, and more valuable to those about us, as we strive to walk as Jesus directs: "For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). It is not an easy way though the effort is well repaid.

When Jesus walked this earth, He marked the roadway as one of self-denial: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). The apostle Paul referred to the necessity of bringing one's thoughts and actions into subjection in order to be victorious as a Christian: "Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...I buffet my body and bring it into bondage: lest by any means after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected" (2 Cor. 10:5; 1 Cor. 9:27). Some folk

cannot meet the challenge of the gospel because of their lack of conviction and desire. How sad it is to realize that many who once were loyal servants of Christ have now turned back to libertine existence because of the appeal to fleshly appetites (2 Pet. 2:18).

Let us notice some reasons why the challenge to live the Christian life demands our best, and is so rewarding.

THE POWER OF THE WORD OF GOD

The demanding nature of Christianity is based upon the integrity of the Bible. The depth of the sacred page is beyond the shallow pace of earthly existence, and millions are just not willing to pay the price of stalwart devotion to the Man of Galilee. It takes no effort to follow Satan. But Jesus Christ will accept only the finest devotion, "So therefore whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). It will not work to try to compromise the integrity of the Scriptures to mesh with the lackadaisical attitude of mankind. Jesus made it clear that the message of salvation cannot be compromised. "The Scripture cannot be broken...Already ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 10:35; 15:3).

The message of the Bible provides a richness that demands the best within us! It reveals that God gave His best for us: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Begotten Son" (John 3:16). The psalmist wrote, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa. 119:11). What a consolation the precious Book divine is to all faithful students of its delightful contents. The poet pungently reminds us:

We have traveled together,
My Bible and I,
Through all kinds of weather
With smile or with sign;

In sorrow or in sunshine,
In tempest or calm,
Thy friendship unchanging,
My lamp and my psalm.

THE POWER OF JESUS CHRIST

Christianity is challenging because it is built upon the deity of the Master. Jesus was not just a man.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth (John 1:1-3; 14).

In reply to the questioning Jews, He said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). To unbelieving critics who objected to His claims of familiarity with God, He further stated, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).

Jesus has the words of eternal life (John 6:68), a name above all others (Phil. 2:9) and a glory unsurpassed (John 14:6). To the King of kings we owe allegiance that propels us into a sojourn that people of the temporal world cannot fathom (Acts 4:13). Even Napoleon, in his famous speech to General Bertrand, admitted that "the spirit of Christ overawes me." As another leader of men later wrote, so we believe as well, that our blessed Lord supersedes all rulers, armies, navies and heroes that ever lived in power, splendor and influence.

THE POWER OF EVANGELISM

The impact of Christianity challenges us also because it is promulgated by the great commission and not by some bombastic plan set forth by mankind. The parting words of the Savior prior to His going back to heaven are so simple, yet are so profound. Jesus told the apostles:

Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be condemned (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16).

Jesus sent the disciples into the world with no weapons, no threats. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (2 Cor. 10:3). They had only the message of salvation. But that was enough!

Nothing could have permeated the Roman Empire so successfully as the humble servants of the crucified Nazarene pressing the claims of the Messiah upon that profligate society. The early saints "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4), and soon the message of redemption covered the ancient world as the waters cover the sea!

Truth never dies. The ages come and go
The mountains wear away; the stars retire,
Destruction lays the mighty cities low,
And empires, states and dynasties expire,
But caught and handed onward by the wise,
Truth never dies!

THE POWER OF A PURE LIFE

Christianity demands our very best because it is demonstrated by purity of life. The basic, fundamental values of the religion of Christ can best be seen in His life: "Tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin...Him who knew no sin, he made to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21). It was said of Jesus, "He went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). So do His followers, as they follow His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). The same values seen in the life of Jesus are seen in the dedicated demeanor of fervent disciples of the Lord.

Too many times the world receives a faulty impression of the way of the cross because of our failure to portray the ethics of godliness. In Paul's letter to the Philippians, we learn anew of the intense value and power of a life that magnifies Christ and shares the message of the Redeemer with others (Phil. 1:12-20). Oh, what demands the gospel places upon the devotees of the Savior! There is an enthralling stanza in a seldom used gospel song that ought to ring in the ears of every dedicated Christian:

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,
All His wonderful passion and purity,
May His spirit divine, All my being refine,
Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.

THE POWER OF A LIVING HOPE

Christianity is great because it brings optimism, hope and joy into the daily walk of children of the heavenly Father. Trusting in the Creator (Prov. 3:5) instead of earth's vain trinkets give us the enrichment that only the hope of heaven can bequeath to us. Hope includes faith, but it also is assurance. We have that because of Jesus:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

Christians never look back to a life of sin, but ever press on to the beautiful home of the soul. As parents, we choose early in life to indelibly etch into the mural and fabric of our children's lives that we, "Look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God...look for a better country, that is, a heavenly" (Heb. 11:10,16).

A careful man I ought to be,
A little fellow follows me;
I do not dare to go astray,
For fear he'll go the self-same way.

Let us all rise up to meet the challenge of Christianity. With a firm commitment and deep resolve, we will one day, by the grace of God, when the saints go marching in to glory, join in that heavenly chorus.

CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

Paul preached Christ crucified to the Corinthians and many of those who heard the message of redemption believed and were baptized (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 2:1,2). In Acts 2:41, the day Christianity had its powerful beginning, we read that those who gladly received the glad tidings of salvation were baptized and the Lord added them to the church.

Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus in John 3:5 that a person must be born again of water and of the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of

God. We have a perfect commentary on that passage in Acts 8:12 which says, "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."

It is significant that the first time our Lord mentioned the church, He called it the kingdom also (Matt. 16:18-19). The culminating action that brings us into the church or kingdom is baptism (Acts 2:41; John 3:5). Also, in many of Paul's inspired writings, the church is referred to as the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). Therefore, the synthesis of such teaching can be viewed in 1 Cor. 12:13, "For by one Spirit were you all baptized into one body."

Through the message of the Holy Spirit, the gospel of Christ, God's power to save, the Corinthians had become members of the church Jesus promised to build (Matt. 16:18). Later, in 2 Corinthians 5:17, they were beautifully reminded that to be in Christ meant they were new creatures. It is significant that Galatians 3:27 ties all of these passages together: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

The Holy Spirit guided the apostles into all truth (John 16:13) and the message, thus revealed, convicted men of sin, righteousness and judgment to come (John 16:8). This gospel teaching told the story of Christ's death, burial and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

In Romans six we find a perfect illustration of salvation in the first century and any other age. When a man becomes dead to sin, as he is buried with Christ in baptism, and is raised to walk in a new life, he then becomes dead unto sin and alive unto God and thereby becomes a servant of righteousness. Through the message of the Spirit, as man's body is washed in pure water (Heb. 10:22), the new birth has been consummated. It is, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "The washing of water, by the word."

There are those who look upon all of these passages as technical matters with no spiritual significance. However, throughout the sacred Scriptures we find the blending of God's commands and man's sincere obedience. Noah was commended because he explicitly obeyed "all that God commanded him" (Gen. 6:22). The exact compliment is paid to Moses for the same reason (Ex. 40).

Disciples of Jesus were told to do "Whatever He tells you to do" (John 2:5). Our blessed Savior asks a pertinent question in Luke 6:46,

"Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" Christ straight-forwardly stated in John 8:24, "Except you believe that I am He you shall die in your sins."

In Mark 16:16, belief and baptism are requirements prior to salvation. In Luke 13:3 we are reminded by the Redeemer that repentance is required lest we perish. And in Acts 2:38, on the very day the church became a reality, sinners were told to "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Those who attended to these matters were added to the church by our blessed Lord.

In Ephesians 5, we learn that "Christ gave Himself up for the church." Acts 20:28 tells us that Christ purchased the church with His own blood. He died at Calvary that we might be spiritually tied to Him and bring forth fruit to the glory of God (Rom. 7:4). Therefore, powerfully and gloriously, we bow in deep appreciation for the vibrant nature of Ephesians 3:21, "Unto God be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

By far the most important organism ever established upon the earth is the church of our blessed Lord. No earthly institution even compares to the splendor of the body of Christ. But we must be members of this grand and magnificent arrangement before we can truly gain the benefits heaven intended.

You may buy \$250 worth of warm clothing on a cold winter day, but such a purchase will not bless your life until you get into that which the money purchased. Christ died to bring the church into existence, but that act of grace will not save those who refuse to enter that blood-bought church. Let us obey the truth that gives us joy as we enter into Christ and His church where we can be free indeed (John 8:32-36).

For Christ our dear Redeemer,
For Christ, the crucified;
For the church His blood hath purchased;
The church, His holy bride.

The terms of admission into the Savior's domain are simple and clear. Let us rejoice in the eloquent surroundings of God's love and hasten to be faithful members of that spiritual body, the church, made possible by the blood of the Lamb.

Jesus clearly taught Nicodemus that one must be born again of water and Spirit to enter the kingdom. Acts 8:12 and 8:26-39 demonstrate this arrangement in absolute fashion. The kingdom the prophets saw and these examples of conversion illustrate the divine pattern. Praise God for such simplicity and beauty.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Although many people consider the church of the New Testament unimportant, we find in studying the Bible an inseparable yoking of Christ and His spiritual body—the church (Col. 1:18). In fact, in Acts 8:1 and 9:4 we learn that to persecute the church is tantamount to opposing the Lord. In Ephesians 3:21 God is said to be glorified in the church by Christ Jesus! The church, over which the Savior rules as head (Eph. 5:23) is “the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:20-23).

Paul told the Ephesian elders, according to Acts 20:28, that Jesus “purchased the church with his own blood.” When men obey the teachings of the gospel they receive remission of sins through the blood of Christ and thus are added to the church of the Lord (Acts 2:38-41). Christ has absolute authority over the church; therefore whatever He desires in worship, doctrine, organization or life must be honored. For we are subject to Him (Eph. 5:24).

This is the exact reason churches of Christ do not use mechanical instruments of music in worship. The head of the church said sing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) and it makes sense to do what He tells us to do (John 2:5) and not those things men want to do. We observe the Lord's Supper each “first day of the week” just as Acts 20:7 illustrates.

We have no earthly headquarters and each congregation is self-governing under the guidance of the Scriptures (Heb. 12:23; Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). This makes sense to folk committed to following the Bible and the authority of Christ in the church. Such a position makes the Lord's cause unique in doctrine, design, deportment and destiny. Christ's church, built upon His divine power, must be kept pure and scriptural until our Redeemer comes again (Matt. 16:18 and Eph. 5:27). Let us all study the Bible more.

COURAGE AND CONVICTION

It requires deep loyalty to be committed to God in these ungodly times. We face a world devoid of Bible ethics and spiritual standards. Society is filled with compromise and shallow ideals that war against purity, truth and morality. It takes courage to speak out for the Lord and against the trends of popularity. We do not see many folk, even in the Lord's church, who are willing to manifest backbone in the quest for righteousness.

Can He depend on you?
His blessed will to do.
Will you be found
With the faithful and true?
Can Christ depend on you?

To be accepted by those about us has always been man's desire, and that creates a problem and a challenge for humanity. King Saul failed miserably to obey God and spoke thus of his weakness: "I feared the people and obeyed their voice" (1 Sam. 15:22-24). He was not the first, nor the last, to fall into that trap. Paul reminds us that it is a constant problem: "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). James labels such foolish conduct as spiritual adultery (Jas. 4:4). Truth is of pristine character and cannot be compromised. The conviction which truth demands is well worth the effort.

If preachers, parents, elders and Bible teachers had the steady courage of the prophets of the Old Testament, we could solve most of the problems in the church and in the world of our day. Rather than trying to be popular with their children, parents would always strive to be in accord with the Scriptures in order to turn their offspring toward heaven and away from the carnal appetites and sensual pleasures that never satisfy. Preachers and elders would not be enamored by cathedrals, money and attendance, but rather be devoted to developing the depth and loyalty of members to the soul-searching edification that genuine Christianity produces for time and eternity.

As firm and patient as Gibraltar stands,
So truth, unwearied, waits the era blest,
When men shall turn to it with eager eyes
Truth never dies!

It takes fortitude to teach the old Jerusalem gospel in an age that clamors for ease and comfort and our image among the elite. But the Lord's admonitions to Laodicea and Sardis ought to tell the abject vanity of such putrid emphasis (Rev. 3:1-5). In Genesis 11, we clearly learn what happens to those who strive to make names for themselves!

Let us, like Daniel, "with purpose of heart, cleave to the Lord" as we depart from iniquity; We surely owe to the people of our own day a courageous stand for holiness and godly demeanor: "Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:12). If we could raise up a generation that put the Lord first absolutely, with approval always upon the more excellent way (Phil. 1:10), we could overcome Satan, self and sin and come over to walk with the Lord. May this be our consuming passion.

GOD'S DYNAMITE

Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he had preached the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24). It was the glorious message of the Lord's redeeming love (Rom. 5:8). We have been put in trust with that good news and must not hide it from the lost (2 Cor. 4:3). The fundamental elements of the gospel will always be the death, burial and resurrection of the Savior (1 Cor. 15:1-4). In a precise passage the peerless apostle made three salient and demanding points concerning this matter of the glad tidings of salvation. Concerning this life-giving gospel Paul told the Romans:

I am **Debtor** to preach it.
I am **Ready** to preach it.
I am **not Ashamed** to preach it!

Why? Because Paul clearly proclaimed it is God's **dynamite** to save (Rom. 1:14-16). This powerful and pungent truth blasts sin out of our life-style and replaces it with godliness. It is the divine dynamic that forever transforms our thinking and changes our sojourn upon the earth. Nothing even compares with the Cross of Jesus and its tremendous message of hope.

In the cross of Christ I glory
Towering over the wrecks of time,
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.

If you had ten sticks of dynamite would you keep them near your fireplace or kitchen stove? Certainly not! Should we keep the gospel, God's dynamite, away from sinners who need it or should we not use it freely where it is needed most? Let us get the message of Truth out where the Lord intended and obey Mark 16:15: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." The first-century church went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4) and so should we!

What shall be the end of those who obey not the gospel, Peter asked (1 Pet. 4:17). Paul answered that burning question in 2 Thess. 1:7-9: "They shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord."

Let us destroy sin with God's dynamite, the gospel of the Son of God, lest we, and others, lose our souls on Judgment Day!

The Bible is the solid rock foundation for the church of the Lord. May we never forget it!

THE NEED FOR CHURCH GROWTH

EDWIN S. JONES



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Church growth has to do with the way the church survives from generation to generation. If no evangelism, no earthly manifestation of the church. Evangelism is also concerned with whether or not people will be saved. If no church growth, no salvation. There can be no doubt but that there is a great need for evangelism. The only real question that remains is the one that makes inquiry into the specifics of the need. Just what needs to happen for there to be satisfaction of the need for church growth?

THE NEED FOR ANOTHER LOOK

When we see the various ways that evangelism is promoted and defined among us, we ought to wonder why the New Testament does not address evangelism the way we commonly do? Where, for instance, do we find the rhetoric of today in the New Covenant record? Where are all the verses urging us to remember to take the gospel to our friends and neighbors? Where are all the "death bed" stories? And where do we find that inspiration's favorite inquiry is, "If you died tonight would you be lost?" Odd, do not you think, that such things, and many more modern areas of emphasis, are conspicuous by their absence in the Bible?

We need to take another look at the Bible and see what is actually there. Surely we would agree God's word is the very place we would expect to find the plan for evangelism. It is in Scripture that we will learn what we need to do in church growth.

When we leave behind our preconceived notions about evangelism and take a close look at the inspired truths of the Bible, we see a picture of the real need in evangelism. The most basic need we see is not for more programs, better methods, bigger and fancier campaigns, or an increasing reliance on mass media. The main need, the most central component of evangelism, is found in daily living out the tenants of Jesus. It is the daily practice of biblical Christianity that the Scripture emphasizes.

God's goal for the church has always been that Christians would be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). It is therefore no coincidence that the Bible gives us "the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, the measure and stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). We have, consequently, "the mind of Christ" revealed in the New Testament (1 Cor. 2:16).

The "mind of Christ" is, however, not intended to be something that is found only on the printed page. We are to have Christ's mind in us (Phil. 2:5). Paul's prayer for brethren was that they would have Christ dwelling in their hearts by faith (Eph. 3:16-17; cf. Rom. 10:17).

The "process" of this transformation is most significant. We learn in our studies that it is a daily walk with Christ that changes us from the inside out. As we look to the Lord as the model or pattern for our change, we become transformed. "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18; cf. Rom. 12:1-2).

Paul could well relate to this process of transformation for he was a zealous participant: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). Paul practiced what he preached, but we must also realize that the preaching of this process of transformation was central to Paul's message.

In Colossians 1:24-29 we find the apostle relating the plan he used when he worked with newly formed congregations. We are more

accustomed to thinking of Paul as a congregation starter. However, we need to see the rest of the story—how Paul worked to bring congregations to maturity. This methodology is vital to understanding our need for evangelism.

In Colossians, Paul pointed out that Christ “in” a Christian was a believer’s hope of glory (Col. 1:27). Paul saw his ministry to the saved as being one of presenting them “complete in Christ” (Col. 1:28). It was for that very purpose that Paul would “labor and strive” (Col. 1:29).

This plan that Paul pursued with such diligence is reflected in his striking remarks to the churches of Galatia. The brethren in Galatia were being led astray by Judaizing teachers who sought to take them into a legalistic, Old Testament oriented manifestation of Christianity. Paul knew that their only real hope was in bringing them to maturity in Christ. His words still ring with passion, “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). Paul well understood that if the Christian life was to be lived successfully, people had to be brought to maturity. The maturing process would not only provide great preventive medicine against false teachers and false doctrine; it would equip the saints for their work of service (Eph. 4:12).

It is with the positive aspects of Christianity that we find the Bible’s central teaching about evangelism. As we “grow up in all things unto Him who is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:15), one of those “things” is evangelism. As we become more like Jesus, we become better able to relate to the lost in Jesus’ own way.

In taking another look at the way of Christ concerning evangelism, we must be careful to understand the seriousness of reviving this vital pattern of evangelism. We would be most remiss if we saw the value of the pattern for becoming a Christian, organizing the church, and worshipping God, but did not esteem God’s pattern for evangelism. Even as Moses was instructed by God to “make all things according to the pattern” (Heb. 8:5), so we must give “much greater attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it” (Heb. 2:1). There is a great need for the church to return to God’s pattern for evangelism.

THE CHRIST-CENTERED EVANGELISTIC PLAN

The New Testament pattern for evangelism is what the church needs. This pattern centers in personal Christ-likeness. All through the

record of the New Testament the church is constantly and passionately admonished to live in a manner compatible to the nature of Christ. That is what walking in the light and fellowship are all about. "If we walk in the light as He, Himself is in the light; we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son, cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Consider the wisdom of this plan. Who could do a better job with God's work than a person who sought to live like Jesus? Is there a better plan than that? Of course not! There could be no better way. Whether the service to God would involve benevolence, edification or evangelism, the best way to conduct the business of God is to do it as Christ would do it. Jesus' entire earthly mission was followed by a singular devotion to the will of the Father (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10). We cannot do better than to follow His example.

As we come to see the significance of the Christ-centered New Testament plan, we come to see certain well-known techniques in a broader light. For instance, consider the Bible's teachings on Christ as the head of the church (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19; 1 Cor. 11:3). We realize that this means that there is only one head and thus only one church. This is devastating to modern denominationalism, but there is more to this teaching than just what it rules out. There is much that is ruled in.

By thinking about the headship of Christ as it relates to the need for the church to practice biblical evangelism, we can think of a number of applications. One example is how a body cannot function unless it receives instructions from the head. Likewise, the church cannot carry out God's will unless it understands the thinking of the head, Christ. Without a strong connection to Jesus, the church is capable of only spasmodic movements that cannot accomplish God's purpose.

Remember the slogan for the United Negro College Fund, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste"? That memorable phrase has an application to our subject. The church has been given the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) and it is to take up that mind in each Christian (Phil. 2:5). What a waste it would be if Christians looked to themselves and their own devices in evangelism, rather than to the thinking of Christ.

Another thing in this evangelistic rethinking of ours concerns Christ as the master teacher. We readily acknowledge that Jesus is the master teacher, the greatest teacher that ever lived. Are we, however, really using what we know about this in our evangelistic efforts?

When we think of personal evangelism, a number of things come to mind that are associated with various methods. These would include: The Open Bible Study of Ivan Stewart, the Fishers of Men approach, and the film strips/video method developed by Jule Miller. All of these have good things about them and many have been converted through them, but what do we learn from Jesus about methods? Would not we expect to learn something very important about approaches by looking to Jesus?

What we do learn from Jesus is that He did not have any one-size-fits-all method. While He was always seeking to get people to arrive at the same place, His methods were as numerous as the people, circumstances and situations He faced. Is not that one of the main reasons we call Him the "master teacher"?

I realize that Jesus' approach requires maturity and growth before a Christian would be able to go at evangelism in such a flexible way. I also know that the various program methods available can be helpful in getting us to a more confident, mature, flexible approach. However, I also well know that we rarely give priority to the flexible teaching example of Christ. Methods can sometimes get us in a rut. A thing that might help us to grow can even, at times, become a crutch.

Studies have shown that the most effective means of study is one person sitting across the table from another with an open Bible between them. Good, old fashioned Bible studies that use the Bible as the "equipment" most closely approximate the pattern of the New Testament. This approach takes more effort, but it offers returns on the investment. Let us learn from Jesus, the master teacher, about how we can be more flexible and personable in our teaching of others.

ACTS AND EPISTLES

When it comes to learning about evangelism, we all know that the book to go to is Acts, right!? I do not think so. I really do not think that Acts is where most Christians will learn the daily evangelism we have been considering. Let us think about this together. Acts primarily deals with preachers preaching to crowds who are unbelievers, many of whom have never heard about Jesus. Few Christians will preach to crowds who do not know about Jesus. Few Christians are preachers. Not even many preachers commonly preach to crowds of unbelievers.

Additionally, Acts centers on the response of faith that adds a person to the church (Acts 2:47, etc.). Christians can use Acts to marvel at the early growth of the church, to show people how baptism is part of the response of faith in becoming a Christian, and to be encouraged at how God opens doors for the gospel. Christians, however, already know what to do to be saved—they have already done it. What we do not primarily learn from Acts, we do learn from the Epistles. In the Epistles we see how to live before a lost world.

It is the Epistles that develop the Christ-like emphasis we have been developing in this lesson. In the Epistles we learn of the daily walk of faith that is the expression most applicable to the average Christian. It is the character of life that both equips the "person on the pew," and presents opportunities for them to speak a good word for Jesus.

The verse that most readily presents this idea, and therefore the verse I believe most perfectly represents the evangelism emphasis of the Epistles is 1 Peter 3:15. This verse reads, "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence."

First Peter 3:15 shows that it is the responsibility of every Christian to be able to defend their hope in the Lord. The context of this verse shows that such a defense may be required in front of those who are hostile to Christianity (vv. 13-14 and 16). Most brethren today state that they just cannot teach others. Inspiration says we must acquire that ability and that our ability must be able to function in adverse circumstances. We need to give more attention to God and less time for excuses. We need to practice New Testament evangelism.

To reinforce the point about personal responsibility, let us have a look at Hebrews 5:11-14: "Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." This passage pointedly reveals that Christians are to become able to teach within a certain reasonable amount of time. We are to progress from babes in Christ to mature, capable Christians (Eph. 4:14-15; 1 Pet. 2:1-2). No Christian is exempt, all are to "proclaim the excellencies" of God (1 Pet. 2:9). But let us not forget another element of our key text, 1 Peter 3:21. The key of this key text is, "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts."

It is the very process of our personal transformation into mature Christ-likeness that readies us and prepares us for evangelism in the biblical way. The Scriptures know of no shortcut. There is no method, or

apparatus, or machinery that will ready us God's way. It is Christ that transforms us into useful servants as we are conformed to His image. We do not need to be browbeaten, put on a guilt trip, worked into an emotional frenzy, intimidated, frightened or any other such coercive activity to get us to behave like Jesus. If we have in fact come to be like Jesus, proper behavior will be present. It is the natural way of being our Christ-like selves that is the most powerful, personal ingredient in evangelism.

NATURALNESS AND PRACTICALITY

There are two books I have encountered that have put into words some of the biblical principles I have been discussing. One is a book by Rebecca Manly Pippert called Out of the Salt Shaker which emphasizes the naturalness of effective evangelism. The other is Living Proof by Jim Petersen that gives practical understandings to the application of biblical principles. Both books are written by people in denominations, so there are aspects of both that I cannot endorse. Nevertheless, I have found both to be helpful.

Concerning the "naturalness" of evangelism, Pippert rather humorously shows how many people feel that evangelism is not something friends do to friends. She speaks of the unnatural, contrived, and manipulative tactics that many use to evangelize. These things only make people look weird and unnatural, hardly an engaging combination.

Petersen develops the practical side of things and comes up with a very helpful concept he refers to as "mini decisions." Petersen may logically and biblically show that people who make a commitment to Christ are most usually people who have made several smaller steps in that direction before they make the last big step. His list of "mini decisions" are instructive:

- He's okay.
- I'd like to get to know him better.
- I feel comfortable with him. He accepts me.
- I'm going to find out why he's so different.
- It seems that he gets his outlook on things from the Bible.
- He's a Christian, but he's okay.
- Being a Christian sure has its advantages.
- I like his friends. I envy their confidence.
- It might be interesting to look at the Bible someday.

And more mini-decisions:

Once the non-Christian has begun to examine the Bible with us, we can expect a new series of mini-decisions to occur. We might expect him to say, for example:

- The Bible isn't impossible to understand after all!
- The Bible says some important things.
- What the Bible says about life fits my experience.
- Jesus seems to be the key. I wonder who He really was.
- Jesus is God.
- I need to do what He says.
- I will believe in him.

These steps well illustrate how daily decisions lead others toward Bible studies and beyond. By looking back at Jesus and His ministry I believe we will be able to see people going through a variety of individual steps on the way to making a final step of commitment. I believe we can also see in the Parable of the Sower that people's hearts are at different places of development and that most are not ready the first time they hear the gospel to do something about it.

Petersen also develops another useful way of describing a very biblical aspect of evangelism. He shows how evangelists like Paul would go about preaching the gospel and establishing congregations. He likens those congregations to "beachheads." From those "beachheads" Christians would then be brought to maturity and would move out into the surrounding world to win victories for Jesus. The victories would come through the vehicle of their consecrated lives and the sanctification of Christ in their hearts (cf. Acts 8:4).

One last author, a brother in Christ, Flavil Yeakly, has contributed much to the practical application of Bible principles to evangelism. His statistical work has well illustrated a variety of important biblical teachings. Among them:

1. People feel most comfortable and respond most favorably and lastingly to a friendly Bible study where the Bible is the only tool.
2. Manipulative methods lead to resentment and dropouts.
3. Mere transmission of facts leads to little or nothing.
4. A study between friends accomplishes more in the long run than any other approach.

5. Growing churches emphasize the personal, friendship aspects of evangelistic methods.
6. Stagnant churches do little besides give out information in an impersonal manner.
7. Some of the churches that seem to be growing really aren't because they have high dropout rates due to their use of manipulative methods.

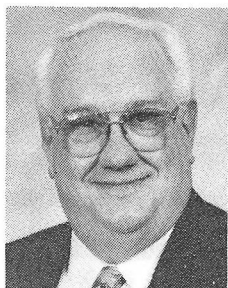
CONCLUSION

Brethren, the need for evangelism is great, but evangelism needs to be understood by first listening to God. The slower, less sensational way of the New Testament is to be chosen over a supposed quick fix that comes from mere men. We of all people, who stand for a pattern theology, we should make every effort to get back to the Bible to learn the old way of evangelism.

"This says the Lord, 'Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it'" (Jer. 6:16a).

THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM OF THE CHURCH

THOMAS C. MILLER



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Hardly anyone would disagree. There is a great and apparent connection between the educational work of the church and church growth.

The late Ira North often said, "As the Sunday school goes, so goes the congregation." In The Madison Story, he wrote, "The church believes with all its heart that the safest, surest way to build a great church is to have a quality educational program."¹ This is a major reason why Madison had a goal of having every person—young and old alike—regularly and actively involved in a Bible class.

It is also evident from reading his books that Brother North saw the educational program of the church as more encompassing than just the Bible class program. That is exactly what we want to illustrate in this lecture also.

John W. Ellas, Director of the Center for Church Growth in Houston, Texas, has observed, "The Southern Baptists have grown from twelfth place in size during the 1940's to the largest denomination in the U.S. by implementing a strategic Sunday school program."² By contrast, Ellas also observed: "... most Churches of Christ have not used the Bible class as a growth strategy."³ Ellas' research did show, however, that growing Churches of Christ have 76% of the number of morning

worshippers in Bible classes and declining churches have 68%. Though this may be considered a moderate difference, the connection between church growth and the educational program of the church is nevertheless established.

Charles Hodge listed "A Strong Bible School" as one of five things necessary to build a church and then observed, "Congregations cannot be stronger than their teaching program."⁴

Quotes like these could be multiplied many times over. When we talk about church growth, we must recognize the contribution of our educational program. The connection is admitted by all.

WHY IS THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM OF THE CHURCH AND CHURCH GROWTH CONNECTED?

To fully understand the connection between the educational program of the church and church growth, however, we must answer the "Why?" question. Why is there a connection between the educational program of the church and church growth? The answer involves an understanding of two principle terms—"education" and "church growth."

The Meaning of Education

We are using the word "education" in this lecture to refer to the whole process by which people are taught, trained and nurtured—including all the means available—so that they may become more like Jesus Christ. Or, as Paul said it, "but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ" (Eph. 4:15).⁵ Truth is what is to be spoken, "in love" is the manner in which it is to be spoken, and Christ-likeness is the goal. This is the process of education and may be accomplished from the pulpit, in Sunday Bible classes, in small groups sessions, and in a number of other legitimate ways.

Colossians 1:28 echoes the same sentiment: "Him (Christ) we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Paul knew the goal of presenting "every man perfect in Christ Jesus" would not happen accidentally. It would occur through education and would involve preaching and teaching, as well as a great deal of effort. That is why he said, "To this end I also labor, striving according to His working, which works in me mightily" (Col. 1:29).

The church, then, can properly be viewed as an educational institution. Writing to Timothy, Paul declared that the church is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). The church holds up and supports the truth. Its purpose is to propagate truth, and that is education!

The Meaning of Church Growth

We are using "church growth" to refer to both numerical and spiritual growth. A quick survey of the book of Acts will show that the church began on the Day of Pentecost with 3,000 charter members and then grew rapidly (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1,7; 11:21).

The same passages which record this growth also show that it was accomplished through education, i.e., through the preaching and teaching of the word. For example, the 3,000 on Pentecost were baptized only after they had been taught. Peter convinced them of their sin, and it was then that they cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:38). They would not have known to ask that question had it not been for Peter's sermon. This is the educational process at work—teacher, students, message, response.

Paul illustrated this process when he wrote: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6). Church growth is always commensurate with the amount of preaching and teaching—or, planting and watering—that is done. Education produces church growth!

But, church growth is not all numerical growth. In addition to that, the church must also grow spiritually. At the same time the early church was growing numerically, the individual members were being built up and strengthened. Following the peace produced by the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, Acts 9:31 says: "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied."

Here the connection is clearly seen between edification and church growth. It is my conviction that spiritual growth produces numerical growth. As people are built up in the faith, they will reach out to bring others into the fellowship of faith. But, how are people built up in the faith? The answer is simple—education!

It is no wonder that Peter wrote: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ . . ." (2 Pet. 3:18). As

people grow in knowledge, they are edified. As people are edified, they produce numerical growth.

When we properly understand "education" and "church growth," we immediately see the connection between the two.

WHAT CAN THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM OF THE CHURCH DO TO PROMOTE CHURCH GROWTH?

This brings us to a discussion of some of the ways the educational program of the church can promote church growth. This is the "What?" question, and is an important consideration. It brings specificity and practicality to the discussion.

Evangelism

Though others on this program will deal extensively with the matter of evangelism, it is worthy of note here that the educational program of the church can be an effective evangelistic tool.

Note carefully the two fundamental truths stated by Jesus in John 6:44-45 and the conclusion that can be drawn from them. First, those who come to Christ must first be drawn by the Father. Second, those who come to Christ are those who have heard and learned the truth. The conclusion is that God draws people to His Son for salvation through their hearing and learning the truth.

This is in keeping with Paul's statement concerning the power of the gospel in Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

How do people hear and learn the truth? How do people come to know the power of the gospel? Is it not a matter of education? Is the educational program of the church not a means of accomplishing this?

A young mother once complained to me about the Jr. High Class her daughter was in at church. The quarter's material focused on becoming a Christian. The mother thought this was placing too much pressure on her daughter to be baptized. I do admit that a particular teacher might place undue pressure on someone to obey the gospel, though I am sure the teacher in this case was not. I would think the

mother should have been happy that her daughter was being taught what it means to be a Christian and what is involved in being a Christian, and that she was being encouraged to obey the Lord.

In his book, How To Build a Great Church, Mac Layton has a chapter entitled "A Great Bible School Is Essential." In this chapter, he writes: "Here is where 85 percent of our baptisms originate. Here is where our precious children are learning the saving gospel, and here is where most of our friends and neighbors learn of Christ and His church."⁶

I do not know exactly what percentage of baptisms originate in our Bible classes—which are an integral part of the overall educational program of the church—but I am sure the number is very high. We must, therefore, make sure that we use them to tell people of God's saving grace and man's responsibility to respond in the obedience of faith to it. We must begin early to instruct people to "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21).

Indoctrination

The educational program of the church also gives us an opportunity to indoctrinate our members, i.e., to pass the faith along. While we are to keep the faith, we are also to share the faith. Paul outlines the process for doing this in writing to Timothy: "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2).

Those who are taught are to become teachers of others, and four generations are listed in this passage. Paul taught Timothy, who was to teach faithful men, who were to teach yet others. To say that we are only one generation away from apostasy is absolutely true.

There is a story told of a little boy who broke a vase, which was a family heirloom. He said to his mother, "Mother, you know that vase in the living room which has been handed down from generation to generation? Well, this generation just dropped it." God forbid that this generation—or any generation—drop the "vase" in regard to passing the faith along to those who follow us!

It is often said that some people would not object if we introduced an instrument of music into our worship or if we began to practice open fellowship. I say with sadness that my observations confirm this. But, where is the problem? Is it not with our educational

program? Whose fault is it if people do not know any better than to say these things? Is it not, at least in part, our fault? Does this problem not result from our failure to lovingly, plainly, and consistently teach the great fundamental truths of God's Word?

Our entire educational program must take seriously its responsibility to make sure that people are rooted and grounded in the faith. Paul says this is accomplished through teaching: "Rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught . . ." (Col. 2:7).

Don Vinzant observes: "The indoctrination will never be accomplished by mere 'touchy-feely' classes, songs and sermons. It requires assisting the newborn convert to be able to eat and benefit from the meat of the word (Heb. 5:11-6:3)." ⁷ Amen!

We must not quit preaching and teaching on such fundamental subjects as "The Oneness of the Church," "God's Plan of Redemption," "The Necessity of Bible Authority," "The Essentiality of Baptism," "Why We Sing in Our Worship Assemblies," and "The Call to Holiness." If we do, we should not be surprised that the next generation no longer holds to these cardinal doctrines.

The cure is both simple and difficult. The church must fulfill its mandate to preach and teach the Word of God in all of its power and simplicity. This is doing exactly what Jesus said to do in the last part of Matthew's account of "The Great Commission" i.e., "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded" (Matt. 28:20).

Equipping the Saints for Service

The educational program of the church also contributes to church growth by helping to equip Christians to serve. This is why Paul said that Christ "gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11). We recognize that some of these offices were temporary and some are permanent, but the purpose of all of them is clear: "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12).

The word for "equipping" is found only here in the New Testament and has to do with putting things in proper working order. Clearly, God wants the church to function properly. This is why members of the body are to be trained to serve and to be of benefit to

the body. Again, Paul wrote: "from whom the whole body joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16). A body that functions properly grows!

But, how does a body learn to function properly? Where are we taught how to serve? Where are our teachers trained? Where are our leaders prepared to lead our congregations? Where are we instructed how to be vessels "prepared for every good work?" (2 Tim. 2:21). Are not these things done—or at least should they not be done—through the educational program of the church? Are not the pulpit, the regular Bible classes, and even special classes and activities all used for these purposes? If not, are not we giving away our future?

What Mac Layton says of the Bible School, we would say of the whole educational program of the church: it "is the church doing what Jesus said to do, teaching all nations . . . teaching the disciples (Matt. 28:18-20)."⁸

HOW CAN WE STRENGTHEN THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM OF THE CHURCH AND CHURCH GROWTH?

There is certainly a clear connection between the educational program of the church and church growth. The educational program can contribute to church growth by teaching the lost, passing the faith along, and training Christians for service. But, this brings us to the "How?" question. How can we strengthen the very apparent connection between the educational program of the church and church growth? What steps should we take?

Understand What the Educational Program Is

First, we must understand exactly what the educational program of the church is. It is the Sunday morning and Wednesday evening Bible classes, but it is more. Those classes give us little more than an hour of instruction time per week. What about the pulpit? What about Vacation Bible School? What about special workshops and seminars? What about Gospel Meetings? What about Ladies' Classes? What about Senior Citizens Classes? What about radio and TV programs? What about Bible Correspondence Courses?

The educational program of the church is the sum total of all the opportunities and means used to bring God's Word to people both in and out of the church.

After stating that the purpose of the educational program of the church "includes the development of the entire personality on the basis of Christian spirit and truth," Henry Speck wrote: "This purpose cannot be achieved in a one-hour session once a week. The church must learn to include every day in its educational program. It must learn to conduct classes of various kinds, both day and night, to meet the needs and possibilities of the people it can reach, as many of them as are needed."⁹ Though these words were written more than twenty-five years ago, I would see no reason why they are not still true today.

It is incumbent upon the church to plan and coordinate all its efforts in regard to educating both members and non-members. Congregations must ask: What are the needs of people, and how can these needs best be met? Leaders must lead, sermons must be preached, classes must be taught, and seminars and workshops must be conducted that will help meet these needs. Members must then attend, listen, participate, and profit. The educational program of the church is a cooperative effort!

Take the Educational Program Seriously

Second, we must take the entire educational program of the church seriously. I am convinced we do not take it as seriously as we should. Many members have a "one-time-a-week" mentality. A significantly higher number of people attend the worship assemblies than attend Bible classes. In many places, Gospel Meetings are on their way out, because it is difficult to even get members to attend. Meetings, workshops and seminars grow shorter and shorter in duration. Do these things not indicate that we are not taking the educational program of the church seriously? Do they not say that we have allowed other things to crowd spiritual matters out of our lives?

Not only is the educational program of the church held in such low esteem by many of our regular members, at least some leaders of the church have the same view. Time is often not spent in planning programs to educate people. Money is often not spent to build adequate facilities, buy good literature, or train better preachers and teachers. If we want our people educated, we must be willing to pay the price!

Elders, I especially appeal to you to make the educational program of the church a priority. Please remember that elders are "to shepherd the church of God" (Acts 20:28), which involves seeing that they are properly fed. Spend more time in elders' meetings talking about souls than talking about sealing the parking lot. Spend more money on education than on landscaping around the building. Sealing the parking lot and landscaping around the building may be important, but others who are not charged with shepherding the flock can do those things.

I maintain that the stakes are too high for a low estimate of our educational program. Again, quoting from Henry Speck: "Until we return to the Bible and relearn Christianity and build into our educational system a program of spiritual and moral training to match our efficient system of physical and mental training, our rate of spiritual and moral illiteracy and our wave of sin will mount higher and higher."¹⁰

The educational program of the church is not a mere appendage to the church. It is the church at work. It is the church doing what God intended it to do.

Recruit, Train, Support, and Honor Teachers

Third, we must recruit, train, support, and honor our teachers. Education begins with teachers. It involves students and curriculum, but it rises or falls based on its teachers. In fact, it is often stated that teachers are 90% of the process. Therefore, we must give more attention to our teachers.

Mac Layton gives three things leaders of the church must see to in this regard: "(1) Bible teachers are given every opportunity to sharpen their skills through teacher-training courses and seminars . . . (2) Teachers are provided the necessary rooms and equipment to do their job . . . (3) Teachers are honored for their glorious work."¹¹

Our attitudes toward teachers and teaching must change. Sometimes congregations will let almost anyone teach in the educational program. Sometimes we are so desperate for teachers that a pulse is the only qualification for teaching and a lack of one is the only way to get out of a classroom. Even good teachers often feel over-worked and under-appreciated. These attitudes certainly do not build a stronger educational program.

There is no greater calling than to be a teacher of God's Word. In fact, being a faithful teacher is being Christ-like. Though known by many titles, He was known as "Teacher" more often than by any other designation.

CONCLUSION

There is an obvious connection between the educational program of the church and church growth. "Christian education is the teaching function of the church. It can be understood only in the context of the church . . . Any church that neglects teaching has lost something indispensable to its nature as a church."¹² If we want our churches to grow, we must build strong educational programs. May God help us to do exactly that!

¹ Ira North, The Madison Story (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1987), p. 23.

² John W. Ellas, Clear Choices for Churches (Houston: Center for Church Growth, 1994), p. 81.

³ Op. Cit., p. 82.

⁴ Charles B. Hodge, Jr., A Biblical Study of Church Growth (Dallas: Gospel Teachers), p. 18.

⁵ All quotations are from the New King James Version.

⁶ Mac Layton, How To Build a Great Church (Searcy, AR: Resource Publication, 1987), p. 169.

⁷ Jim Sheerer and Charles L. Williams, editors, Direction for the Road Ahead (Chickasha, OK: Yoeman Press, 1998), p. 112.

⁸ Op. Cit., p. 169.

⁹ Henry E. Speck, Jr., The Church's Educational Program (Abilene: Sweet, 1963), p. 22.

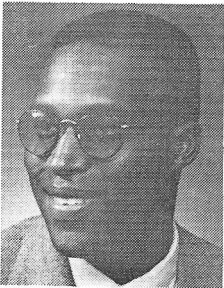
¹⁰Op. cit., pp. 20-21.

¹¹Op. cit., p. 173.

¹²Eleanor Daniel, John W. Wade, Charles Gresham, Introduction to Christian Education (Cincinnati: Standard, 1987), p. 26.

BENEVOLENCE

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Church growth is essential to evangelizing the world and conforming the church in Christ's image. There are several works that accomplish church growth. This lecture will discuss the work of benevolence. There is one sure principle in order for the church to be distinctive and to evangelize the world, it must have a benevolent spirit. In other words, the church must be a giving people.

God has always intended for his people to be a giving people. There is a need to restore the benevolent spirit. The objective of this discussion is to encourage Christians to exercise benevolence in their lives and the church to collectively be more benevolent. This lecture will cover three major areas: Benevolence and the children of Israel; Benevolence in the Example of Jesus Christ; Benevolence and the New Testament Church.

BENEVOLENCE AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

Open Hearts and Open Hands

The children of Israel were considered to be a giving people because God redeemed and blessed them. The motivation of Israel's

liberal giving was based on God delivering them from bondage. "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee..." (Deut. 15:15). What was the motivating factor of Israel to be benevolent? It was being thankful. Thanksgiving causes us to be benevolent. The principles have not changed for Christians today. We ask the questions why in some congregations individuals are not giving--the reason is they are not thankful. In Deuteronomy 15:7-14 we read God's command to Israel concerning being benevolent:

If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother. But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely send him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth.

Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought, and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land; therefore I command thee saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land. And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee thou shalt not let him go away empty. Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress; of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing today.

There are several principles from Deuteronomy 15:7-14 that are given concerning being benevolent. The first step is having the right heart. Notice in verses 7, 9, and 10 the word heart is used: "Thou shalt

not harden thine **heart**," v. 7; "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked **heart**," v. 9; "Thine **heart** shall not be grieved, v. 10...." The heart must be right in order to give. What has hardened the hearts of some today? I believe there are two factors: (1) An unthankful heart, (2) Materialism.

The second principle of benevolence is found in verses 7, 9, 10, and 11. The children of Israel were not to shut their hands from their poor brother. In Deuteronomy 15:11 it states, "thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land."

The third principle of benevolence is to give liberally. Deuteronomy 15:12-14 is concerning the freeing of the slaves after six years of service. God commanded Israel to give out of their flock and out of their floor and out of their winepress of that which God blessed them. Giving liberally has always been a part of God's work and he wants his people to do the same. In James 1:51: "let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." The Greek renders an open hearted and giving God.

The fourth principle of benevolence was a way of life. It was not something one could turn on and turn off. The book of Leviticus focuses on holy living. The children of Israel were commanded also to leave a portion from their harvest and vineyard for the poor and stranger. "And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field...And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger," Leviticus 19:9-10. There are other references that convey the same principle. They are: Leviticus 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-21; Ruth 2:15-16. Deuteronomy 24:19-21 makes mention of not only the poor and stranger, but also the fatherless and widows. In Ruth's account she would represent the poor, fatherless, widow and the stranger. In these few verses of scripture from the Old Testament we must conclude that: The giving God expects His people to have a giving heart, an open hand and liberal attitude motivated by the blessings of God. The children of Israel grew not only inwardly, but also through their benevolence that caused others to know God.

BENEVOLENCE IN THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

He Went About Doing Good

Jesus Christ the fulfillment of the Old Testament would give us a

fuller understanding of benevolence through His life and teachings. Acts 10:38 sums up Jesus' life: "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power **who went about doing good**, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him." Jesus' life was active, doing good things to others. Matthew recorded ten deeds that Jesus performed in chapters 8-9. Jesus demonstrated having a benevolent Spirit. Matthew 9:36 states the motivation of his good deeds: "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."

The church must identify with Christ's benevolent spirit. Many accounts through the gospel have people believing on God due through Christ's benevolent work.

JESUS' TEACHING

To sum up Jesus' teachings on benevolence: Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

There are several accounts where Jesus teaches principles for being benevolent. First, the conversation with the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-22). In verse 16, the rich man asks Jesus "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Jesus, in verses 18-20, lists some things the man can and cannot do. The rich man answers Him in verse 20, "All these things have I kept from my youth up: What lack I yet?" Jesus, in verse 21, tells him if he will be perfect (complete, well rounded) "go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven...." The story has a sad ending. The rich man after hearing Jesus "went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions."

There was a top priority Jesus wanted this rich young man to know. Benevolence is part of the spiritual life. The rich man characterizes some Christians today who attend all the services, live a good life, but lack the benevolent spirit of Christ. Would it not be sad if our souls are lost because we had the attitude like this rich man. The Pharisees and scribes were in the same situation. Jesus calls them hypocrites because they kept the ceremonial things of the law, but neglected the weightier matters of the law, mercy, faith, justice and love (Matt. 23:23 and Luke 11:42).

Another teaching of Jesus was about Himself. "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a

ransom for many (Matt. 20:28, NAS). There is no benevolent work compared to Christ giving His life for us. The motivation for having a benevolent Spirit is Christ. Paul said, "the love of Christ constraineth us," 2 Cor. 5:14. The judgment teaching of Christ found in Matthew 25:34-46 clearly emphasizes the importance of being benevolent. Jesus speaks to those on the right hand as blessed. Why would those on right hand be blessed? Beginning in verse 35:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger and ye took me in; Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord when saw we thee.....

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

The Cobbler By Edwin Markham

One night the cobbler dreamed that the next day Jesus was coming to his humble shop. He got up early the next morning and went to the woods to gather green boughs to decorate his shop in order to receive so great a Guest.

He waited all morning, and the only thing that happened was that an old man shuffled up, asking to rest. Conrad, the cobbler, saw that his shoes were worn through, so he brought the man in. "I'll give you a new pair," he said and put on the old man the sturdiest shoes in the shop before sending him on his way.

He waited through the afternoon and the only happening was that an old woman under a heavy load of firewood came by. She was weary and, out of compassion, Conrad brought her in and gave her some of the food he had prepared for the Christ. She ate with relish for she was very hungry. And, refreshed, she went on her way.

Then, as the shades of night began to fall, there came into his shop a lost child, crying bitterly. Conrad was annoyed because it was necessary to leave his shop in order to take the child home.

Returned, he was convinced that he had missed the Lord. Sadly he lived through the moments as he had imagined them: the knock, the call, the latch pulled up, the lighted face, the offered cup. He would have kissed the hands where the nails had been, washed the feet where the spikes had entered. Then the Lord would have sat with him, and they would have broken bread.

Conrad cried, "Why is it, Lord, that Your feet delay? Have You forgotten that this was the day?"

Then soft in the silence a voice he heard:
"List up your heart for I kept my word.
Three times I came to your friendly door;
Three times my shadow was on your floor.
I was the beggar with bruised feet;
I was the woman you gave to eat;
I was the child on the homeless street."

There is one story that harmonizes Jesus' life and teachings. It is the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The Scribe asked Jesus who is my neighbor. This was to justify whom he chooses to do good. Jesus tells the story of the man that was beaten by robbers. Afterward the Levite and Priest passed the wounded man. Here the Levite and Priest would represent the religious Jews of Jesus' day. In this story they are lacking the benevolent spirit. These men just looked and passed by. How do people see the church? Do we look and pass by, or do we do as the Samaritan. He stopped, tended to the wounded man, then found a place that could take care of him. This is the spirit of Christ. Jesus finally tells the scribe to do likewise.

There are three points brought out in Luke 10:25-35 that convey the spirit of benevolence. In verse 33, the Samaritan saw him and he had compassion on him. In verse 37 it is said, that he shewed mercy. These three principles described the Christ and His mission. It should also be a description of the Lord's church toward each other and all mankind.

BENEVOLENCE AND THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Sowing and Reaping

The New Testament covers a large range of principles and concepts toward benevolence. We have seen it in the children of Israel and then in the life and teachings of Jesus. This section will discuss principles of benevolence and give New Testament examples how benevolence contributed to church growth. There are several scriptures which we can view. The first is Ephesians 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." We often talk about the work of the church in saving souls. But there are good works the church must engage in to accomplish our mission. In the sermon Jesus preached he said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). In Titus 2:14: "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Good works are required in Christ, but what are these works? The New Testament gives several references to the work of benevolence. In Hebrews 13:15-16, we are to praise God continually, but in verse 16 it states, "And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (NAS). We see in Hebrews 13:15-16 a sacrifice of praise and service. James 1:27: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." The word visit renders "ministering to a need." First John 3:17-18: "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him, My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." These verses are taken from Deuteronomy 15:7-11. Galatians 6:10: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." "Distributing to the necessity of saints, given to hospitality" (Rom. 12:13). These verses and many more stress the good works of the church through benevolence.

Sowing and Reaping

Sowing and reaping are associated with giving and blessings that God gives to those that give (2 Cor. 8-9). The giving was pertaining

to the saints in Jerusalem. The principle can obtain to other works of benevolence. "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6). The principle of benevolence has with it liberality. In 2 Corinthians 9:10 are found the results of sowing: "Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness." Here we see God blesses the work of benevolence. The church grows internally and externally.

The book of Acts, in chapters 2,4,6,11, gives us examples of benevolence and church growth. The early church after Pentecost stayed in Jerusalem and continued in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). But there were those that came from far away needing physical things to live. We find in Acts 2:44-47 the first account of the church demonstrating benevolence:

And 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, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

There are several points we can learn from the early church:

1. No one went without (v. 44). They had equality. The local congregation's visitation program should emphasize meeting the needs of each member.
2. The church was unselfish and willing to give up some of their possessions (v. 45).
3. They continued to worship God (v. 46).
4. They did things with joy.
5. The result of their benevolence caused favor with all the people. The church grew through the gospel and benevolence.

In Acts 4:32-37, the same attitudes of benevolence resulted in the church growing in unity as a part of church growth. Acts 4:32: "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." A congregation that is

benevolent also is strengthened within. There is no time for divisions and factious groups.

In Acts 5:1-11, God's punishment toward Christians who lie about their giving. In verse 11, "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things."

In Acts 6:1-6 – Division and murmuring occur when members are neglected. Also understanding balance in benevolence and preaching.

V. P. Black in his book Giving Our Way to Prosperity lists several points, taken from 2 Corinthians 8-9. The church at Macedonia:

1. Came out of poverty; not out of the plentitude of their wealth.
2. Their willingness exceeded their ability; instead of their ability exceeding their willingness.
3. They were urged to be allowed to give, rather than being begged to give.
4. They gave the greater gift (themselves) first; and the lesser gift (money) second.
5. The value of the gift is reckoned not by the amount given, but by the degree of willingness, cheerfulness and sacrifice exhibited.
6. Increase comes not by keeping, but by giving; the way to get more; the way to lose is to keep.
7. They regarded giving not as a privation to be avoided and evaded; but as a blessing and privilege to be coveted and cultivated (Black).

CONCLUSION

The Old Testament, the life and teachings of Christ and the New Testament church have given principles, concepts and commands to be benevolent. There is no way a congregation of God's people can grow apart from benevolence. The church grows inwardly and grows numerically when every member is active in the work. We need to remember the words of David in Psalms 116:12: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" The answer to that statement: "Do good to others."

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MISSION WORK

BILL NICKS



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The church is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15b¹). The truth will always be the truth, whether or not the church upholds it (John 17:17). But the purpose of this lesson is to show that mission-minded churches are more lively, grow more steadily, and are more likely to stand firmly for the truth than those not interested in fields beyond their own borders. It is also to show the biblical basis of missions and how evangelism is accomplished, as well as to show how mission work contributes to growth of the churches.

It is hoped that this will demonstrate the value of mission work and give us all incentives to look more unto "the fields white unto harvest" (John 4:35).

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR MISSIONS

The world needs the church because salvation is in it (Eph. 5:23). It is only the blood-bought body which Jesus saves (Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:7). The church is His Way (John 14:6). Paul said, "After the Way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers" (Acts 24:15). It is the "new and living way which Jesus dedicated for us (Heb. 10:20).

The church is the result of evangelism (Matt. 28:18-29; Mark 16:15f). On the day of Pentecost, the first after the resurrection of Jesus, Peter and the apostles preached Christ as the crucified and risen Lord. Multitudes heard, believed and obeyed the gospel (Acts 2:22-41). They were added by the Lord to the church of which Jesus, now in heaven, became the head (Acts 2:47; Col. 1:18). Therefore, it is the will of God that the pure gospel be preached, churches established in the world, and those churches be edified (Eph. 4:15f). The church is the "launching pad" for evangelism. The Lord commanded us to GO (Mark 16:15). While going, "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19f). Notice it was an ongoing process, from generation to generation, due to the charge, "teach them whatsoever I commanded you." The church was according to "God's eternal purpose" and was to exhibit the "manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10f). We understand the Bible to be a missionary message from Genesis to Revelation. The seed of woman (Christ) was to bruise Satan's heel (Gen. 3:15). Through Abraham's seed, all nations were to be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). The church is the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah 2:1-4 and Daniel 2:44, since God is "no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34f) and the gospel went to all nations, both Jew and Gentile (John 10:16).

Where did Jesus tell us to go? "Into all the world" (Mark 16:15). The following thoughts motivated my family and me to West Africa in 1955:

I have been preaching the gospel 12 years in my country for three churches, have established two new churches and held meetings in seven states. Some other brethren have left home for lands across the seas. This is where the vast majority of lost souls are. It doesn't seem right for all of us to congregate here. We need to scatter with the gospel. We have too many lifting the light end of the log. We have only 6% of the world's population and over 90% of gospel preachers are here.

I resigned from my work in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. We had just completed a new building in the heart of town. I started out raising support. In two weeks a church in Port Arthur, Texas, heard we were ready to go and they were ready to support us if we would raise our travel and car expense support. This church was in debt \$200,000 on their building and some did not want to launch out on world evangelism.

One of the elders convinced the church that the Lord would not help them pay off that debt if they did not do something to get the gospel into Africa. He said, "If we are following his plan, He will help us." In five years they added another African missionary who came over to help us. In a little over ten years afterwards, they sold their building and built a better one in a better location and are still moving along well. This demonstrates how the Lord blesses a church that wants to send workers into fields that are ripe unto harvest.

Such faith multiplies Christians in other parts of the world. We began a training program of young African men of two years duration, with on-the-job training as well as classes. We teachers would give class work for half a day, then take students with us on appointments in the afternoon and on Sundays. By this process, in about five years time, the number of churches among the Iboes of Nigeria grew from thirteen to over 400 congregations. We believed that if men were properly trained, they would take the light to their people. Now, in all of Nigeria, not among Iboes only, but in all the tribes, there is an estimated 2200 churches, with many thousands of Christians. Some experts predict that in the year 2020 churches in Africa will outnumber those in the United States of America.

HOW EVANGELISM CONTRIBUTES TO CHURCH GROWTH

The one grand mission of the church, so far as its outreach to man is concerned, is saving souls (Luke 19:10; 2 Tim. 1:15; Mark 16:15f). The church is God's agency to do it (Matt. 16:18f; Eph. 3:9-11). There are two methods to accomplish this task:

1. *In word:* The pure, unadulterated gospel must be preached publicly and from house to house (Tit. 2:7f; 1 Pet. 4:11; Acts 20:20,26). If we do not hold to the scriptural pattern, nothing else matters (2 Tim. 1:13). If we diligently strive to follow God's plan for the planting and building of pure New Testament churches, He will help us in the accomplishment of this task. If not, regardless of how apparently successful we may be, in actuality, we are building on the sand (Matt. 7:23-27).
2. *In deed:* The work must be planned, but no plan is good unless it is carried out. This involves living exemplary lives (Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 4:11). Jesus set the example because "he went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). He taught by word and deed that "a servant is not greater than his Lord; neither one that is

sent greater than he that sent him" (John 13:16). He sacrificed Himself for us and expects us to serve Him sacrificially. We must give liberally of time, money and service (Eph. 5:15f, 2 Cor. 9:7, 1 Cor. 16:1f).

The church needs sound elders with vision who will send men and women of "like precious faith" into the fields, some to virgin fields where Christ is not known (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Rom. 15:20). If the local church is not strong enough to support a missionary family, it can join with another church, or churches to see that their needs are met and encouragement given.

When the Jerusalem church was scattered abroad, the result was that more preaching was done away from Jerusalem, for "they that were scattered abroad went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). Just as it takes sowing the seed in the natural world to produce the harvest, it is equally true in the spiritual realm that the word must be sown in order to produce and to edify churches (Luke 8:12). Paul had no bad thing to say about the church in Philippi. They were a mission-minded church that had fellowship with him "from the first day until now" (Phil. 1:5). He was confident "that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ" (vs. 6). While Paul was in Thessalonica, the Philippian church "sent once and again unto my needs" (Phil. 4:16). The fact that their efforts to spread the gospel would mean "fruit that would increase to their account" (vs. 17), is a strong indication that God would bless the growth of a church that is spreading His word by sending missionaries into the needy fields.

The church must be ready to meet the challenge of the hour like Joshua (Josh. 1:7f). By strength, courage, faithfulness, knowledge and complete obedience, he in six years by God's help overthrew six nations and began the division of Canaan among the 12 tribes. The church today is faced with great challenges. Two world wars, Korean, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Bosnia and Kosovo wars are completed. We now have glasnost and perestroika, the relaxing of relations with Russia. Doors are open which may not always be open, "and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9). We will no doubt always face godless atheism (humanism), materialism, non-Christian and perverted Christian religions, and religious indifference. The church is growing, but forces of evil are also on the march, among which are homosexuality, abortion, immorality and child abuse. It is still the duty of the whole church to preach the whole gospel to the whole world. Untold missions are still dying untold.

We will not sow the seed until we see the need. We must have a deep concern for the lost. It should move us to think of men around us dying without hope (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Jesus was concerned for the lost and we follow in His steps (Rom. 5:8, 2 Pet. 3:9, 1 Pet. 3:21). If we appreciate the fact that we have received reconciliation to God through Christ (2 Cor. 5:8-11), we will want to share this glorious privilege with others. "Unto whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48). The gospel is a "treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7). Though we are like frail, breakable clay pots, we have this treasure to take to others "that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves" (2 Cor. 4:7b). We must never forget that it is the message, not the messenger, that is important to God. What is important to the messengers is their commitment to take that message. Paul said, "I suffer all these things: yet I am not ashamed; for I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 2:12). Paul had committed his life to God and believed God would protect him, because in turn, God had committed unto him the gospel, as He has unto us also. If we realize we are "debtors" (Rom. 1:14), we will be glad to teach others, knowing that the Christ we will not share, we cannot keep. Let us remember: the Great Commission is ongoing, from generation to generation (Matt. 28:18-20, 2 Tim. 2:2).

HINDRANCES TO MISSIONS AND CHURCH GROWTH

One of the hindrances to modern missions is **materialism**. Many are overloaded with debts on houses, cars, appliances and other bills. This prevents preachers from going, and elders from including missions in the budget. It prevents those who should be the backbone behind mission work from giving liberally of their means. We must be willing to do without some things in order to get the message of Christ to the world. Should the kingdom not be first? Or is it that we have forgotten Matthew 6:33: "Seek ye **first** the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all **these things shall be added unto you.**"

My family never invested in a house until I was nearly 50 years of age. We now, at 80, have a home paid for, and we are now glad we spent out youth, the golden years of life, in mission work. We were not cumbered with debts when we left for the African mission field.

Another hindrance to mission work is parental selfishness, and childish fears. If Abraham had feared to leave home when called out of Ur of the Chaldees, he would never have become the friend of God

(Gen. 12:1-3). Parents often are fearful for their children, even after they are grown and have their own children, to leave the greatest country and live in an inferior environment. This selfish attitude prevents many preachers and their wives from going. Remember, Jesus left a superior and came down to an inferior environment for our sake: "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). While it is true that some should not go due to health, or psychological reasons, preachers and their wives should consider it is usually as safe elsewhere as here, sometimes safer. My father and mother did not discourage us from going, but still were afraid of the dark continent and its dangers. But he was killed in a traffic accident here and we were safe there with our children. We cannot escape risks whether here or there. Calm your fears, and GO! God will bless you for your desire to take His message to lost and dying men. "Is it true you are a missionary?" asked a lady of Otis Gatewood. "Is it true you are not?" replied Gatewood. Being a missionary is the distinction of being a Christian, not merely for those having a "bent" in that direction. Let us always LIFT HIM UP.

How to reach the masses, men of ev'ry birth
 For an answer, Jesus gave a key,
 "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."
 Oh, the world is hungry for the living bread,
 Lift the Savior up for them to see, Trust Him and do not doubt the
 Words that He said, "I'll draw all men unto me."
 Don't exalt the preacher, don't exalt the pew,
 Preach the gospel, simple, full and free.
 Prove Him and you will find
 That promise is true, "I'll draw all men unto me."
 Lift Him up by living, as a Christian ought,
 Let the world in you the Savior see,
 Then men will gladly follow Him who once taught,
 "I'll draw all men unto me."
 Lift Him up, lift the precious Savior up.
 Still He speaks from eternity,
 "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."
 --Johnson Oatman, Jr.

THE GREAT INCENTIVE

Though we cannot earn salvation since it is a free gift of grace (Rom. 6:23), yet mission work has its rewards. We have the promise: "Take heed to thyself and to thy teaching. Continue in these things; for

in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16). In saving others, we save both them and ourselves. No one can go to heaven alone. He must take someone along with him. What a blessing to reach thousands of heathen people with the gospel and lead them to Christ!

Shall we whose souls are lighted with wisdom from on high,
Shall we to men benighted the lamp of life deny?
Salvation, O, salvation, the joyful sound proclaim.
Till earth's remotest nation has heard Messiah's name.
--Reginald Heber

When we engage in mission work, we have the joy of knowing we are pleasing to God, since we are keeping His commandments. It was God's purpose to "sum up all things in Christ," and to "work all things according to the counsel of His will; to the end that we should be unto the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:10-12). "Unto Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations forever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:21)

Another blessing is the knowledge that we are helping to make real history on our planet. So much that is read in the daily papers is trivial, but the conversion of human beings, whether in our country or abroad, are events that pervade eternity. God is pleased with our working with and loving the unlovely, the diseased, the poor and the distressed (John 9:35ff). If the Lord in His lifetime had compassion on men who were ignorant, diseased and with all kinds of sickness, scattered as "sheep not having a shepherd," we can be assured that we are following in His footsteps when we have compassion on men in their ignorance and distresses. The gospel is the remedy and the church has the responsibility to take that which is the panacea to all ills.

Another reward here on earth in mission work is in seeing the scriptures more clearly. It became more clear to me that we needed to do more benevolence work when I saw people with tropical ulcers, eye tumors, hernia, malaria, encephalitis and all kinds of diseases. This motivated us to begin the Nigerian Christian Hospital since we were in an area where there was one doctor to about 175,000 people (compared to our 1 in 600). Being able to help people get over Asiatic flu by simply giving them about a dozen aspirin and advising them to go to bed, along with two aspirin every four hours, and being able to bring people to the hospital for amebic and bacillary dysentery, and see them recover, knowing without treatment they would die in a short time. We still have in operation a 100-bed hospital equipped with children's, men's and

women's wards, and a maternity ward, with doctors staggering time from the U.S. to help two resident doctors. Nurses also have come from the U.S. to help in this great work. And all is done to glorify God and His church, and the gospel is preached daily to both out and inpatients.

Another blessing is the joy in seeing churches cooperate to get the gospel to these far-flung areas. We have the people and the materials and the equipment to do the work. Such unity and togetherness in bringing about great mission efforts in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean is surely a thing of beauty to behold. It is also a great thing to see brethren cooperate to get the gospel into untaught areas of our own North and South America.

To me, it was a joy to see the young churches in action. It was a joy to work with men of Africa who dedicated themselves to taking the light to their people after they were trained in gospel teaching. To see these young churches catch the spirit of evangelism and go out in groups to establish other churches was a thrill. I will always appreciate brethren like Stephen Okoronkwo come to us as a lad of 17, and develop into strength after his training. He became a teacher and now is principal of a school with over 300 students whom he and other Nigerian teachers are training in Aba, Abia state. There are many others who could be named of whom he is representative. We trained over 300 men during the period I was there from 1955-1974, and I was able to go back on many short trips through 1988 and see the work growing steadily from year to year amid difficulties of war and inflation, and military governments that were oppressive.

In Trinidad, it was my pleasure to spend seven years training men in the Trinidad School of Preaching and Teaching. Likewise we were able to see men like Thaddeus Bruno, Winston Clark, Jr., Terrence Regis, Dominic dos Santos and others develop into great preachers of the word who are still doing great work in the Caribbean. To live to see these great men preach the gospel with power and strength and faithfully proclaim the word is truly rewarding.

But the greatest reward of all is eternal in nature. The greatest incentive is the thought of being with Christ throughout all eternity (John 14:1-4). "Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake and for the gospel's sake, but he shall receive a hundred fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29f).

The story is told that a missionary had been away from home for many years. On returning home, he noticed that no one was at the plane to meet him and welcome him home. He made this remark to a friend, who reminded him wisely, "Well, you're not home yet. Your welcome is yet to come." He was referring to Matthew 25:23. "His Lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Once an artist was called upon to describe with art the picture of a dead church. Some thought he might build an unpainted shack with boards missing, but instead he painted a beautiful cathedral-type building with arches, wide foyer and beautiful pews in an auditorium that was spacious. But out in the foyer was a black box marked, "for missions." The box was covered with cobwebs all around. This depicts the status of churches that are interested in no one beyond their own borders. Selfishness to keep the support inside our own city or county will stultify the growth of any church. It is true that the plan of Jesus was for the gospel to spread from Jerusalem to Judea, but also to "Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world" (Acts 1:8). We cannot be satisfied for the gospel to go only to people of our own color, language or nation. We must "lift up our eyes to the fields that are white unto harvest" (John 4:35). "Then saith he unto His disciples, The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest" (Matt. 9:37f).

¹ All quotations are from the American Standard Version of 1901.

GUARDING AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS

CLAYTON WINTERS



Clayton Winters was born near Mountain City, TN. He is married to the former Vivian May, and they are the parents of three children, Evelyn, Sandra, and David. He began preaching in 1951. Since that time he has served a number of congregations, but for 35 years has been with the Erwin Church of Christ. He received his formal education at Milligan College and Immanuel School of Religion near Elizabethton, TN. He is the author of a number of books, tracts, and workbooks and has participated in the Biblical Viewpoints TV program since its inception more than 20 years ago. He is presently retired, but still resides in Erwin, and continues to be very active in the work of the church in Erwin and the Northeast Tennessee area.

THE ONGOING BATTLE BETWEEN TRUTH AND ERROR

False teaching is nothing new. Counterfeit religions, perverted worship systems, and heretical doctrines form a veritable *Trail of Tears* through the Scriptures and subsequent church history. They portray an ongoing struggle between God and Satan, between good and evil, between right and wrong. The battle raged in eternity (2 Pet. 2:4), destroyed man's inheritance in a paradisiacal Eden (Gen. 3:24), ruptured the unity of both the Old and New Covenant people (2 Pet. 2:1), and will only be brought to an ultimate conclusion when the father of lies is banished from history's scene along with "whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Rev. 19:19-21; 21:27; 22:15).

The carnage left in the wake of false doctrine is appalling. With one lie the serpent led the whole world to open graves that never say enough (Gen. 3:4; Rom. 5:12; Pro. 30:15,16). National Israel succumbed to the lure of false fertility cults that left her with a heritage of shame, disgrace, and rejection (Num. 25:1-9; 2 Kings 25:1-21). The New Testament church, with

such a great and notable beginning on Pentecost (Acts 2:38-47), soon adopted divisive heresies radically altering its unified purpose (John 17:20,21; Eph. 4:1-6; Rom. 16:17,18; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 2 Pet. 2:1-3) and threatening the very existence of numerous congregations (Gal. 5:15; Rev. 2:5).

In this continuing battle for the souls of men, there is no room for complacency. Rather, in the interest of our eternal security, it is imperative that we recognize the serious threat false teachers and their doctrine pose to the cause of Christ, and firmly stand with every lover of truth against them.

THE NATURE OF FALSE DOCTRINE

False Doctrine Is Deceptive

Inherent in the very term itself is the concept of deceitfulness. It denotes a counterfeit, or that which deludes and misleads. It is a cover-up, a mask, portraying an appearance opposite to reality. This being true, it should not surprise us that deceit is one of Satan's most effective tools; in fact, it is his trademark. He marches under the disguise of an angel of light, and parades his messengers as ministers of righteousness.

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Examples of this might easily be detected in some of his modern day cover-ups for sin:

Abortion hidden under the cloak of choice.

Vice President Gore said he would adamantly defend a woman's right of *choice* (meaning the right to destroy her unborn child). But is he really a proponent of choice? Suppose the mother's *choice* was to give birth to the child then kill it a few months later if it did not meet her expectations? Or perhaps a mother's *choice* might be to chain her five-year-old son to a

bedpost for months on end, denying him life-sustaining nutrients to curtail his boisterous behavior. Would our Vice President, or any of his cohorts, defend these *choices*? Of course not (at least not at this point in time). *Choice* in the abortionists' camp has simply become a coverup, a false face, to mask a bloody crime -- the murder of innocents.

Homosexuality posed as an alternate lifestyle.

God labeled as "dogs" those who engage in same-sex practices (Deut. 23:18). He further defined such activities as lust, impurity, dishonorable, degrading, unnatural, indecent -- acts of depraved minds (Rom. 1:24-28, NASV). The master of deceit glosses over this abhorrent practice as "gay" or an "alternate lifestyle" to mask it with respectability, attempting to make an obscene perversion more palatable to a gullible public. To change the name, however, does not change the reality. Same sex acts are still vile, detestable, contrary to nature, and in direct violation to the will of God (1 Cor. 6:9,10).

A partner in fornication labeled a significant other.

Inspired writers gave no glosses to sexual impurity.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9,10).

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness... they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19,21).

Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge (Heb 13:4).

Satan's "ministers of righteousness," however, attempt to deceive the unsuspecting with a term much more conducive of acceptance: *significant other*.

With such deceitful perversions and cover-ups coined by the purveyors of death and corruption, Isaiah's summation of his day strikingly describes ours: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa. 5:20).

False Doctrine is Deadly

Jeremiah painted a vivid picture of pseudo prophets and the deadly results of their false and misleading doctrines:

Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed. And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them, them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them (Jer. 14:14-16).

The apostles of Christ re-echo the same alarm, but with reference to those living under the New Covenant:

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:7-12).

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

All this merely reaffirms the words of our Lord that if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch. It does matter what we believe: false doctrines and their proponents are a deadly mixture: they must be treated accordingly.

WOLVES AMONG THE SHEEP

Wolves In Sheep's Clothing

While most of us are far removed from the shepherding community of Bible times, we still have no problem understanding Jesus' injunction: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Mat. 7:15). My late brother Howard once exposed the doctrine of a false teacher through the public media of radio. The man felt the sting and responded sarcastically by saying, "I am not a false teacher; if I were, I would tell you I am a false teacher." Not so! No bogus bill ever has "counterfeit" stamped across its front. It must be as near the original as possible so as to pass for the real thing. When the chief priests and scribes wanted to fabricate a conspiracy against Jesus, they sent spies under the pretense of just men to entrap Him in His speech (Luke 20:19,20). Even so, false teachers clothe themselves with the apparel of sheep, or cloak themselves as ministers of righteousness, to conceal their wolfish nature in order to more readily gain access to the flock of God as they carry out their deadly work.

A Feigned Vocabulary

Not only do false teachers mask their appearance, they feign their vocabulary as well. Paul posted a strong admonition against the good words and fair speeches used with the intent to deceive the hearts of the simple

(Rom. 16:17,18). Peter, if possible, was even more emphatic about this ploy: "And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not" (2 Pet 2:3).

Our generation has witnessed the terrible onslaught of Modernism. It redefined the resurrection of Christ in terms of a new concept far removed from an open grave. They changed the gospel of redemption into a social gospel of economics. Even God Himself was recast into a new mold (remember the God is dead theory?) Sure, they can still use the old vocabulary, but almost every word has been clothed in a new garment. While not going as far, more conservative denominations embarked on the same course.

A preacher may confidently affirm: "I believe in baptism." Yet he does not believe it is essential to salvation (Mark 16:16); it is not for the remission of sins (Acts 22:16); it is in no way connected with the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16); it does not put one into Christ (Rom. 6:3,4; Gal. 3:27); nor does it have anything to do with saving a person (1 Pet. 3:21). In reality, he does not believe in baptism at all as it is revealed in the New Testament. His assertion is a fair speech composed of feigned words to cover his denial of the essentials of this cardinal Bible doctrine.

Others say, "We can take the instrument or leave it alone." I have never known this to be anything more than a feigned defense for the use of instrumental music in worship. When the real test comes, those making such claims do not "leave it alone," but invariably choose to worship where the instrument is used.

In more recent times we hear, "There is no pattern," or "The New Testament is just a love letter to Christians." This is to feign their denial of the rightful place of the New Covenant as an authoritative guide in religious matters. "Acts" of worship may be denied and held up for ridicule, or everything one does may become an "act" of worship to cover innovations. They leave no set rules for conduct in morals, worship or church polity; everyone is left free to determine his own course of action. Thus the no pattern concept is another way of saying that God has no say in our lives. The New Testament is made a dead letter indeed.

This list could be greatly expanded, but perhaps the most devious and deceitful are those who adopt a vocabulary of denial. They skirt the edge of rank false doctrine (sometimes wade knees deep into it), but when confronted by faithful gospel preachers, backtrack under the banner, "You

just misunderstood me." Too many times in our own brotherhood this has proven to be nothing more than feigned words to cover false doctrine in the heart of a person who had not at the time developed the courage of his convictions.

Sheep Who Have Turned Wolfish

The comic strip character, Pogo the Possum, often reached the conclusion, "We have found the problem, and the problem is us." How true! The church has indeed suffered down through the centuries from the poisoned arrows of its avowed enemies. The Jewish council beat the apostles and commanded them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18; 5:40). Saul of Tarsus made havoc of the church by persecuting it and filling prisons and cemeteries with its members (Acts 8:1-3; 22:4,19,20). Herod vexed the church by civil murder (Acts 12:1-3). Rome became the perennial enemy of God's people, spilling their blood under every pretense. The infamous French infidel Voltaire said it took twelve men to write up Christianity, but he alone would write it down, then set his hand to the task. Closer to our own time, Communism avowed to bury us. All these unquestionably have dealt crippling blows to the Lord's army, but by far the greater damage has been inflicted from within -- from sheep who have turned wolfish. Paul warned the elders at Ephesus of this imminent danger:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:28-30).

One of the most serious doctrinal problems to confront the early church was that of circumcision -- an internal departure from truth (Acts 15:1,2; Gal. 1:6-9; 3:1; 5:1-4; Phil 3:2,3; Rev. 2:9). False teachers from within disrupted the unity of the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 11:18,19; 15:12). The seeds of Gnosticism took roots and grew in the church at Colossae (Col. 2:16-23). Peter warned dispersed Christians of men "among you" who would "bring in" damnable heresies (1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1). All these are clearly marked as apostates from within:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour 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. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

Truly, "We have found the enemy, and the enemy is us."

OUR RESPONSE TO FALSE TEACHERS AND THEIR DOCTRINE

Increasingly prevailing attitudes in the church leave false teachers and their doctrines on the high ground of acceptability. We are told that we cannot know Scriptural teaching well enough to differentiate between truth and error, and even if we could, error is not such a bad thing as to require reprimand or censure. Diversity appears to be the watchword of our time. This is not, however, a Biblical attitude. The evidence of this is abundant and decisive.

The Biblical Response Toward False Teachers

A False Teacher Must Be Admonished

Our ultimate goal toward false teachers is the same as that for all men: the salvation of their souls (1 Tim. 2:3-6). For this reason every effort must be made to reclaim them from the stranglehold of error. Simon the sorcerer was as false as they come. Yet, the preaching of the pure word of God led him to gospel obedience and citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven (Acts 8:9-13). The eloquent Apollos taught error at Ephesus, knowing only the baptism of John. Aquila and Priscilla taught him the way of the Lord more perfectly, and he became a powerful proclaimer of truth (Acts 18:24-26; 1 Cor. 3:5,6). Even the famous apostle Paul was at one time one of the most notorious false teachers and persecutors of *the way* (Acts 22:3-5). Yet the gospel changed both his life and his doctrine (Gal. 1:23). He would later exhort young Timothy:

As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charges some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do (1 Tim 1:3-4).

False teachers are subjects of the great commission, and we must never forget it (Mark. 16:15).

False Teachers Must Be Marked

If there is no favorable response to the teaching of the Word, then the Bible tells us that we must label false teachers so as to distinguish them from the faithful servants who minister to the flock. Marking is, of course, done with the intent of easy identification. I grew up in a farming community.

I saw cows marked with a notch in the ear, or a metal plate permanently attached to the ear or other parts of the body. Westerners usually burned their brands into the hides of their steers. The result was that no matter where the animal wandered, even if among the herd of another, it could easily be identified. Since false teachers may appear as sheep among the flock, or as ministers of righteousness in the congregations, it is equally necessary that faithful men of God brand them for quick identification. This is an unpopular practice among the masses, but a Scriptural one nonetheless.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things) (Phil. 3:17-19).

Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words. At my first answer no man stood with me, but all

men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge (2 Tim. 4:15-16).

Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was (2 Tim. 3:8-9).

We Must Reject Heretics After The First And Second Admonition

Heresy is from an original word designating a doctrine which creates a partition, division, or separation apart from the accepted standard of truth. It is often translated in the Scriptures as "sect," and forms the basis for our word "sectarian" (cf. Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5,14; 26:5; 1 Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20; 2 Pet. 2:1). With reference to New Covenant truth, it is the promulgation of a doctrine not contained therein, and as such will keep one from entering the Kingdom of God (Gal. 5:20).

Paul says of one sectarianized through heresy: "A man that is an *heretic* after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself" (Tit. 3:10,11). Thus, every effort must be made to convert the false teacher from his error, but when our best efforts elicit no favorable response, we must reject him. We can no longer consider him as one of the faithful, nor allow him to promote his heresy to the disruption of the unity of the church.

However, a word of caution might be in order here. How we approach a person has to be a matter of judgment, but may well determine the destiny of an eternal soul. Doubtless, there are times when we need to fire "before we see the whites of their eyes." Take, for example, Paul's run-in with the false teacher Bar-jesus at Paphos:

And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, And said, O

full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand (Acts 13:6-11).

How different was the approach, though, which Aquila and Priscilla used with the tender hearted and receptive Apollos (Acts 18:24-28). Although not a part of this specific context, a good rule of thumb is found in Paul's admonition concerning those overtaken in faults: "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).

OUR NEED FOR BALANCE

We certainly need to be alert for wolves entering the flock. This is especially true at the present since there are those among us who have adopted an anything-goes type of theology. They see no pattern, no rules, no steps in the plan of salvation, no items or acts of Christian worship, no church organization, no lines of fellowship. For them to align themselves with sectarian churches is to be non-sectarian. Such are extremely dangerous to the purity of the church's doctrine and practice, and they must be marked and avoided.

But we can also well do without brotherhood mote hunters and splinter-pickers--self appointed doctrinal guardians who purport to see a bear behind every bush and a bug in every glass of milk. During my fifty years as a gospel preacher, I have personally observed or been reliably informed of these actual divisive "issues." (1) We must use crackers on the Lord's table rather than bread, because the Bible says we break it, and one cannot break bread: he has to pull it apart. (2) A church divided over the "issue" of beards at the Lord's table. The elders had ruled that no one could preside who wore one. (3) Another eldership dictated that no one could serve the communion with long hair (though they never reached some consensus of just what length constituted long hair). (4) Some strenuously object to eating in the place of assembly based on 1 Corinthians 11:22, but drinking is acceptable. The list could go on almost indefinitely. What sort of head covering, if any, must a Christian woman wear during worship? When we assemble, may we divide into separate classes? May the church take money from its treasury and help a needy non-Christian? May the church

have a located preacher? (Four congregations solved this problem by hiring four preachers who rotated weekly among them. In that way they never became "located"). May more than one "cup" be used on the Lord's table? Can the cup used be a glass or must it have a handle? Such majoring in minors has caused us to "stink among the inhabitants of the land" when we talk about unity (Gen. 34:30).

Some years ago I heard the story of four boys whiling away their afternoon in a ball park surrounded by a tall plank fence. Their curiosity was aroused by strange noises coming from the other side. Since they could not see over the fence, they found a small knothole which seemed to serve their purpose quite well. The first boy peeked through and excitedly declared that he saw: a row of pretty girls in skimpy outfits marching down the street. A second boy nudged him aside so he could take a look for himself, but all he saw was a couple of clowns. The third one looked through the hole and declared them both wrong; there was nothing but a lion, a tiger, and two elephants. The fourth boy could hold his suspense no longer. He asked one of his friends to boost him to his shoulders so he could see over the top of the fence and find out what was really going on. Each of the other boys had gotten only a knothole (partial) view of what was happening, but he saw the complete picture -- a circus parade.

What we do appears to be much like this. We get a knothole view of certain Bible teaching, and base everything else on what we saw. This often leads to wrong conclusions and harsh judgments. Much misunderstanding could be avoided by taking our eyes from the knothole and looking over the fence. As Paul Harvey would say, we need to know "the rest of the story." A few illustrations of this will serve well to conclude our lesson.

The writer of Hebrews says that the high priest of Israel entered into the holy place once every year (Heb. 9:7). With that before him as a knothole view, one might logically conclude and forcefully argue that the high priest went into that sacred place only one time each year. Yet from a study of Leviticus 16, we know that he went in at least twice. This helps us to see Paul's statement in its true light: the priest went in on only *one day* of the year -- the day of atonement. It is important that we know the rest of this story. The denominational teacher sees John 3:16 as "enough Scripture to save the world." He has "knotholed" this verse; he will not look at the parade of other commands the Lord has given relating to salvation. A Christian may become lukewarm, neglecting most of the Biblical requirements necessary for faithfulness. Yet, upon exhortation to better and more dedicated service, he retorts, "But I have been baptized." Baptism is the knothole for his religious view; it is all that he sees as necessary. So it is

with most of the things that cause division in the church: we get hung up on our particular knothole view, and that to us becomes the sum total of Christianity. We need to expand our horizons of biblical knowledge in order to give us a better understanding of what Christianity is all about. We must have this kind of balance.

CONCLUSION

False doctrine wears many different suits: violating laws God has made, making laws where God has made none, or perverting God's laws to accommodate unfaithfulness. False teachers are equally varied. There are those who are honestly and sincerely misled. Others have become so deeply entwined in human tradition that they have no desire for Biblical truth. Still others use religion as a stepping stone to popularity and wealth with no concern for their own spiritual welfare or that of others. All are in dire need of correction and conversion. We also have an equally pressing need for learning and self-discipline in order to properly instruct them. No doubt we would do well to heed the admonition of the apostle Paul given to young Timothy:

But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 6:11-14)

PERSONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT BIBLE STUDY

ROBERT R. TAYLOR, JR.



Robert R. Taylor, Jr., was born at Bradford, TN. He and Irene (Crump) have two children and four grandchildren. He is a graduate of FHC, DLC, and George Peabody College. Robert has preached for the Ripley, TN church since 1972. Around twelve gospel meetings are conducted and 20-25 lectures are presented annually. He has authored 30 books and 25-30 tracts and is a staff writer for four religious publications. For 12 years he wrote scripts and extended outlines for Howard's Gospel Hour. He has written **Gospel Advocate** quarterlies and Annual Bible Commentaries since 1978, and engages in radio, TV and prison ministries.

Genuine gratitude is expressed to James Meadows, the elders here at Karns, the entire congregation and the school for the treasured invitation to participate in this lectureship as I have done on nearly all the previous ones. I commend the work being done here both by the school and the church.

Hunger and thirst are among the deepest needs of the physical body. The Divine Maker of man knew that and designed food and water to nourish our bodies and slake our thirst. Life would soon end if we were deprived of these necessities. These are self-evident truths.

Man is a dual being consisting of body and spirit. Zechariah affirmed some 2500 years ago that God Almighty "formeth the spirit of man within him" (12:1). Life is the resulting state when body and spirit are united; death is the resulting state when body and spirit are severed (Jas. 2:26). At physical demise, only the body dies; the spirit or soul continues to exist. Jesus proved that to be the case to the materialistic Sadducees in Luke 20:27-38. That the spirits of Abraham, Isaac and

Jacob were very much alive in the realm of departed spirits (Hades) is the courageous contention of the Christ to His skeptical enemies. The account in Luke 16:19-31 relative to the rich man and Lazarus proves the same.

Hence, man is more than flesh, blood, muscle, bone and tissue. He is a spiritual being. As such his soul or spirit needs to be nourished. Jesus is the Water of Life and the Bread of Life as per His teaching to the woman at Jacob's well in John 4 and His synagogue sermon at Capernaum in John 6. These were the most pressing needs to the Samaritan woman and the synagogue attenders. They needed spiritual drink and food much more than the water in Jacob's well or the food at their next meal.

FEEDING ON GOD'S WORD IS IMPERATIVE

There can be no spiritual growth and development separate and apart from the solemn and serious study of God's Word. A friend of mine has spent much of his preaching life working with college students—in both secular universities and some of our Christian schools. Many times he has encouraged his students by saying, "You must feed your faith!" College youth who grew up in the church but quit Bible reading, prayers, church attendance and soul winning while pursuing higher education have allowed their faith to die. They did not feed it. They did not desire the sincere milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:2). They did not advance from the milk of the Word to the strong meat of God's Word (Heb. 5:12-14). Some have asked at college graduation, "What has happened to my faith?" They starved it to death by total inattention to spiritual matters. Had they treated their bodies as they did their souls, they would not have been around for the end of the first semester. Their funerals would have already been conducted!

SCRIPTURAL EXHORTATIONS TOWARD BIBLE STUDY

Moses exhorted Hebrew parents in Deuteronomy 6 to love God supremely, to have His Word firmly fixed in their hearts and then

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 (v. 7).

The Preface Psalm states with marvel and majesty,

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper (Psa. 1:1-3).

We read in the Bible's longest chapter, "O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.... Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word" (Psa. 119:97, 161). People with these devout dispositions are not going to neglect the Bible. It will be their cherished spiritual companion on a daily basis.

Through His great prophet Isaiah, Jehovah challenged His people with these words of weight and wisdom, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord..." (1:18). In later statements this great statesman prophet penned, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.... Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read..." (8:20; 34:16). Ignorance was a besetting sin to them as we read in Isaiah 5:13: "Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst."

Sensitive Jeremiah cried out to his calloused and cold contemporaries, "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord" (Jer. 22:29). But their ears were opened to every voice except that of God as conveyed by faithful Jeremiah.

In Hosea's era in the Northern Kingdom there was "no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge in the land," but swearing, lying, killing, thefts, the committing of adultery and blood touching blood pervaded the land (4:1,2). In the same chapter context sensitive Hosea, whose own heart had been broken by faithless Gomer, wrote:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children (v. 6).

Ignorance was anything but blissful for Old Testament Israel.

Admonitions relative to the great need for study continue on into the New Testament. Biblical ignorance is assailed again and again by Christ and the inspired penmen.

The Sadducees in Christ's day were dismally ignorant of God's Word and His power. Jesus once told them, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). Jesus chided the Pharisees by inquiring if they had not read what God said about marriage at its beautiful beginning in Genesis 2 (Matt. 19:4). Great destruction would descend upon rebellious Jerusalem at the hands of the ruthless Romans because they knew not the "time of thy visitation" (Luke 19:44). This would be a visitation of vengeance—not one bringing blessings from Heaven. Certain ones at Corinth experienced resurrection-believing difficulties because they lacked "knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor. 15:34).

In John 5:39 the Lord declared, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." Luke, the inspired church historian of the first century, commended the beautiful Bereans "in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Paul linked the reading of Scriptures with understanding by saying, "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4). He expressed an apostolic wish that the word of Christ might dwell richly within Colossians' hearts (Col. 3:16). In a thrilling trio of verses Paul wrote a young gospel preacher, Timothy:

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all....Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (1 Tim. 4:13,15; 2 Tim. 2:15).

In the last cited passage the ASV says "handling aright." We handle it aright when we rightly divide it; we rightly divide it when we handle it aright. We surely cannot handle it aright if we never handle it in daily study and personal meditation.

Seven bright, blessed and beautiful beatitudes grace the book of Revelation. The very first one blesses each reader/hearer of its message; the seventh and final one blesses those who do or obey the read or heard word of truth in order that they might enter the heavenly city at last (Rev. 1:3; 22:14).

STUDY AND GROWTH CONNECTED

This is precisely why we give so much emphasis to preaching and teaching in our worship periods. The early church did the same. Early saints in Jerusalem continued stedfastly in apostolic doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread (the Lord's Supper) and in prayers (Acts 2:42). Apostolic doctrine was apostolic teaching. Necessitated here are teachers and the taught. They are mutually dependent on each other and complement each other. Peter and the eleven apostles in Jerusalem gave themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4). The church at Antioch was blessed with prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1). Paul traveled far and wide but everywhere he went he found a pulpit or a personal work setting from which to preach/teach. His manner of preaching and teaching emphasis appears in his words to elders of Ephesus at Miletus (Acts 20:20). Epistles were written by Paul and others in order that all saints might be built up and dwell in peace with God and man.

There was a twofold mission to all this preaching/teaching.

1. People needed to be converted being turned from darkness into the light of God's Sacred Word. The gospel is God's power to save and it has to be taught or studied personally.
2. People, subsequent to conversion, needed to grow spiritually. God never intended that they remain babes. Some so remained that way but minus God's approval and apostolic sanction (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1ff; Heb. 5:12-14).

Look at all the modern emphasis upon the study of God's Word in order that growth might be ours. We encourage all Christians to pursue individual or family study. There is no substitute for this. We have Bible Study Classes on Sunday morning, Wednesday evening and during Vacation Bible Schools. We have sermons Sunday morning, Sunday evening and during gospel meetings. More and more congregations are having summer series on Wednesday nights for two

or three months where special speakers are brought in to discuss Bible topics. We have lectureships and seminars where special studies are conducted. Some of us are fortunate enough to live close to neighboring congregations where we may attend gospel meetings throughout the year, especially during spring, summer and fall. Ladies' Day programs are becoming more and more popular and serve a useful purpose for all our lovely Christian ladies. My wife has helped to pioneer in this for many years and has more invitations than she can fill. We have youth devotionals which are good for their edification and for fellowship purposes with those of the same age. We have personal work studies with potential members. We have visiting sessions with delinquent members in which we seek to win them back to solid sainthood from which they have departed. Teaching truth is on the front burner in all the foregoing and the stated purpose throughout is spiritual growth and dedicated development.

SOME GUIDELINES TO BIBLE STUDY EFFICIENCY

Pursue a wise plan of study. Opening the Bible at random for a few moments each day will never add up to effective Bible Study habits and yet this is what too many do. Do extensive reading of Sacred Scripture. Choose a plan and then execute it with diligence. Three chapters per day and five on Sunday will put one through the whole Bible in one year. Three chapters a day in the Old Testament and three in the New Testament will put one through the Old Testament once a year and the New Testament four times. Three chapters a day from the Old Testament once per year and the New Testament twelve times or once each month for the New. This makes for twelve chapters per day and is the plan of Bible reading I have pursued now for almost fifty years.

Memorization is vital. Not many have photographic minds. This means a verse will have to be gone over and over, if it is a long one, and this calls for quality time spent in study. I would recommend memory work with Bible topics. Even better is memory work with an entire book. I do this and try to memorize at least ten verses a day. I try to walk 2 ½ miles every day. I take a little testament with me and memorize my verses as I walk. This is a good way to travel with the truth as the eunuch was doing in Acts 8.

Word studies are important since the Bible is composed of words. We have a word revelation from God. Key words need to be studied with great diligence. Reference books are necessary in this. A Bible dictionary, an English dictionary, a good concordance and sets of

books with Hebrew and Greek studies are worth their weight in gold. Dictionaries help in defining terms. Complete concordances such as Strong's and Young's will define Hebrew and Greek words with lexicons doing such much more in detail. Concordances help us find a verse if we know one or two words in the verse we seek to find. I recently had a call from a man in New York asking me to tell him the location in the Bible where God has magnified His word even above His name. I told him Psalm 138:2. By means of a concordance he could have looked up magnified, word or name and found its location in short order. A member of the church many years ago heard a sermon based on the text, "Make me a little cake first." The subject fascinated him, but he forgot the textual location. When I visited in his home he told me how he had found the passage. He decided to begin at Genesis 1:1 and read until he found said passage. He read several Old Testament books and hundreds of pages before his eye lighted on the passage of his quest in 1 Kings 17:13. Had I visited with him before all this I would have told him about concordance usage. A check for the words make or cake could have told him quickly where said passage was located. The more one reads the Bible and memorizes large sections of it the less need he will have for concordances; he will remember where the desired passage is. I get a little upset with myself if I have to resort to a concordance for a New Testament passage and its location.

Build a good religious library. New books are high but used books can often be purchased at very reasonable costs. Many churches have invested large amounts of money in building good libraries. These can be checked out at no cost. Avoid buying books that have sensational titles and appealing covers but have little or no substance from Preface to Conclusion. Many popular bestsellers, such as the books by Max Lucado, Charles Swindoll, Billy Graham, etc., will not increase your Bible IQ appreciably. Furthermore, they contain too much error to be safe. A studious preacher, a veteran Bible teacher or a seasoned elder can offer wise words and constructive counsel relative to what books to buy and what books not to buy. There are far more bad books available in the realm of religion than there are worthwhile volumes.

Do not be afraid to ask someone for help on a difficult passage. Help may be only a letter away, a phone call away, an E-Mail away or a visit to one's preacher or an elder under whom he/she serves.

Subscribe to some sound gospel papers. They can keep you abreast of what is happening. Some papers are subscription free. Many

church bulletins are teaching mediums and can be received with a request by letter, card or a call.

Too many people say they do not have any time to study the Bible. I do not buy this for a moment. Most of us waste enough time that would permit good Bible Study periods. Look at how many times we have to wait in appointments. A little testament in pocket or purse can be drawn out and some reading done. I travel much on the Interstates of our country. I usually have a book or two nearby if there is a long wait due to construction, a wreck, etc. A plane flight, unless it is extremely bumpy, offers reading time. I always have a book or testament with me for just such opportunities. Quite often a person seated next to me, upon observing religious reading being done, will ask questions about the Bible. I was recently in flight to speak on a Texas Lectureship. There was a long delay at the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport due to threatening weather. They detained us on the runway for a few hours. I was sitting next to a University professor. I was going over my manuscript to be delivered later that day. He asked if he might read it which I was glad for him to do. It contained much fundamental teaching about the church and especially its worship. At least he knew more about us when finishing than when he began to read the paper. In such situations I have a captive audience for the person is not going to deplane till destination is reached or move to another seat due to a full flight of passengers aboard. Turning off the radio, tape player or television and reading God's Word for an extended period is something we can all do. Finding Bible Study time is simply a matter of priority for a surety.

SOME INTENSE IMPERATIVES FOR EFFECTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Study the Bible by Testaments.

There are two—the old and the new. This is by far the most familiar of all Biblical divisions. A surface student will quickly observe this familiar division of Sacred Scripture upon opening the Bible for the very first time. The Old Testament has 39 books; the New Testament has 27. Together they number 66 and compose God's Divine Library. They are called the first or the old and the second or the new (Heb. 10:9; 8:13). Jesus spoke of the New Testament in the instituting of the Lord's Supper in Matthew 26:28. In 2 Corinthians 3:6 the old is the letter and the new is the spirit. The old did not become old until God made it old. Man did not make it old; time did not make it old. God made it old and gave the new in its place after removing it.

Study the Bible by Dispensations.

Deity has dealt with man in three ages or dispensations. Some object to calling them dispensations. However, the Greek term for dispensation is oikonomia which means law, arrangement or administration. It is used four times in the New Testament. These three were the Patriarchal, the Mosaic and the Christian. Patriarch meant father; he ruled the family. Hence, this was a family type of religion. The Mosaic was a national religion composed of Abrahamic descendants through Isaac and Jacob. A passage in Deuteronomy 5:2,3 states that this covenant was given to Israel—not the whole world. The Christian Dispensation began in Acts 2 on that memorable Pentecost and will continue till Christ's second coming. It is worldwide in scope and age-lasting in duration. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:47; John 20:22,23 and Acts 1:8 forms its foundational and fundamental basis. These ages have been called respectively the Starlight, the Moonlight and the Sunlight due to the amount of light or truth available in each one. Fullness of truth reached its zenith in Christianity.

Study the Bible by Major Covenants.

The first major one was given Israel by Moses atop Sinai in the book of Exodus. The second major one was given the whole world by Jesus Christ. We are not under Moses as lawgiver; we are under Christ as lawgiver. The second covenant is superior in all fundamental facets. In it we have a better testator, a better system, better promises, a better sacrifice or better blood and a better law of pardon. How utterly strange that disciples in the first century, under the influences of Judaism, forsook Christ and hearkened back to Moses. The Galatians and Hebrews were both traveling this sure route of digression and apostasy. Equally strange is the emergence of a new breed of preachers and professors among us who deny that the law of Moses has ever been abrogated. Believe it who can!

Study the Bible by Major Periods of which There are Fifteen. They will be numbered and noted.

1. There is the antediluvian extending from creation to Noah's flood. Diluvian refers to the flood; ante refers to that before its arrival.

2. There is the postdiluvian period covering the era from Noah's flood to the call of Abraham the patriarch. Post means after the flood.
3. There is next the period of the great patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. This period extends from the Abrahamic call to their descent into Egypt under Jacob and at the invitation of Joseph, the Egyptian Governor.
4. There is the Egyptian period encompassing the time interval from the descent into Egypt until the Exodus under Moses and Aaron.
5. There is the period of wandering from the crossing of the Red Sea to the crossing of Jordan's flooded waters forty years later under General Joshua.
6. The period of Palestinian conquest covers the years from their crossing the Jordan until Othniel, the first judge, is appointed.
7. The period of the judges goes from Othniel's appointment as judge till Saul is appointed king. This period has been styled, "The Dark Ages of Hebrew History." This is an accurate assessment of this godless era in which every man did what was right in his own eyes (Jud. 17:6; 21:25).
8. The period of the United Kingdom covers the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon or 120 years.
9. The period of the Dual Kingdoms, Judah and Israel or the Southern and Northern, covers the years from Solomon's death till Israel fell into Assyrian Captivity around 722 B.C.
10. The period of Judah alone covers the years from Samaria's fall until the collapse of Judah at the hands of Babylon.
11. The period of the captivity covers the years from Jerusalem's fall until Cyrus permitted their return to Palestine.
12. The period of the Restoration covers from Cyrus's decree to the end of Nehemiah's and Malachi's works respectively.
13. The Inter-testament period covers from Malachi till Matthew or some 400 years.

14. The period of Christ's Incarnation covers the time period from His birth to Pentecost—about 33 years.
15. The period of the Lord's church covers from Pentecost to Revelation. This is the period in which we still live. All events of the Bible fit into these fifteen.

There is the Right Division According to Biblical Books.

The Old Testament books are composed of law (Genesis to Deuteronomy), history (Joshua to Esther), poetry (Job to Song of Solomon) and prophecy (Isaiah to Malachi). Respectively in these sections we have 5 books, 12 books, 5 books and 17 books. The prophetic books are sometimes divided into the major and minor prophets. The New Testament books have biography (Matthew to John), evangelistic history (Acts), the epistles (Romans to Jude) and prophecy (Revelation with both foretelling and forth-telling).

FRUITS OF BIBLE STUDY

1. Handling aright the Bible means we can understand and apply it. Failure in rightly dividing it means we will never understand and will never give it proper application in our lives. We will be like those in 1 Timothy 1:7 who understand "neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm." We will be like those of whom Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:7, "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."
2. Handling it aright or rightly dividing it means we can learn what to do to be saved, how to worship God, how to serve in His cause, how to live well the Christian life and how to prepare for death, judgment and the hereafter. Herein lies real spiritual growth and development.
3. Properly dividing the truth means we will be able to distinguish statements in the New Testament applicable to the provisional (the miraculous period of revelation and confirmation) and the permanent (that applicable to all of us throughout the gospel dispensation). This is an area where the Pentecostal movement has led astray vast portions of the religious world and far too many of our own brethren. In 1974 I attended the Woods-Franklin Debate at Gadsden, Alabama. It was a sad spectacle to

listen to Franklin in his newly espoused charismatic framework in contrast to his earlier soundness as a gospel preacher. I was in school at Lipscomb with Pat Boone. He was sound and solid then. The charismatic movement turned him into a totally different person—different in all the wrong ways! Soundness is essential for real growth and development to occur.

4. A right division of truth will enable us to know that we are under Christ—not Moses, not Moses AND Christ. This was one of the great lessons of the Transfiguration in Matthew 17; Mark 9 and Luke 9. Moses was present; Elijah was there; Christ was there. Peter spoke ill-advisedly. He proposed three erected tabernacles—one for Christ, one for Moses and one for Elijah. By such Peter was lowering Christ; he was elevating and exalting Moses and Elijah too much. The former was God and man; the latter two were good, great and grand men but still only men. God intervened with the startling statement, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5). In essence the Father was telling the Inner Three, "Moses has had his day to be heard; Elijah has had his day to be heard; NOW hear my beloved Son." This is why that great treatise of truth, Hebrews, begins as it does—God now speaks to us by His Son. He is our prophet, priest and king (Heb. 1:1-3). There cannot be real growth and development unless we have the correct concept of Jesus and true appreciation for Him.

Some years back a dear friend of mine, now deceased, taught a prominent Presbyterian preacher the difference between the law of Moses and the law of Christ and that we are amenable to the latter—not the former. At the lesson's conclusion he confessed to my friend, "I have been preaching all these years, thirty-five or more, and today is the first day I knew of this distinction in these two laws." Just think of how many people he had misled across the years for he was a very popular preacher among his people. But amazingly a strange thing now happening among us wherein some of the Change Agents are denying that the law of Moses has ever been abrogated or removed. Have they never read 2 Corinthians 3; Galatians 3,5; Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:14-17 and the entire epistle of Hebrews? If Mosaic law is still binding, the law of Christ has not been given and hence no one is saved, can be saved or has been saved from Pentecost to the present. There has been a great erosion among us relative to these two major Biblical covenants.

5. Serious Bible Study linked with a beautiful belief and constant practice of the same will keep us under the power of God's Word. It will strengthen us, solidify us and keep us soundly in that faith that is most holy. It will help us grow and develop as sons and daughters of God. Peter advised his readers to desire the sincere milk of the Word that they might grow thereby. As we grow we should desire the meat of the Word that our growth might continue to abound. All this will increase our relish for faithful and frequent worship. It will make joyful our pilgrimage of piety. It will increase our faith, hope and love. It will make us realize far more keenly our great need for Christian friends and spiritual fellowship. It will give us backbone to stand tall for truth when our faith is under fire. Peter wrote both his epistles to saints of God whose faith was really under fire. It will give us courage and conviction to continue. It will arm us for all Satanic darts hurled our way. It will fortify us in the faith, hallow us in hope and consecrate us in Christian charity. It will prepare us for death and fit us for heaven.

CONCLUSION

Bible Study is precious, profitable and permanent in the fruits accruing therefrom. It is by far one of the wisest investments we can ever make. Therefore, let us be more diligent in it than we have been in the past.

EVANGELISM

TIMOTHY D. HALL



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Several years ago, I had a dream for an area behind my house. My dream was a small vineyard, a place where grapevines would grow and flourish. But I wanted more than beautiful vines; I wanted fruit. The thought of home-made grape jelly on hot buttered toast spurred me to pursue that vision. It has not been a highly successful pursuit, but I have come to understand some principles of viticulture as a result.

Long ago, our Lord had a vision for this earth. His vision was to plant a vineyard, a place where a Vine would grow and flourish and produce fruit. But this Vine was not of the vegetable and fruit variety; it was the very Son of God! By means of this one great Vine, many branches would be nurtured and developed, and fruit would be the glorious result. Others would behold this marvelous Vine, and would desire to be a part of the process.

What we are describing is the vision God has presented to the church, a vision that we more commonly call "evangelism." Evangelism, literally defined, is the proclamation or sharing of good news. God has indeed given us good news through His Son, Jesus Christ. But what do we do with such news? Do we hoard it away, jealously guarding it from others? Or are we to tell others what we have found, and encourage them to enjoy it as well?

How are churches to grow? While many have resorted to gimmicks and entertainment, our Lord has given us the perfect plan. By telling as many people as we can the wonderful news of a Savior, we will be executing God's divine plan of church growth. It is an effort in which every church and every Christian should be interested. Sadly, that is far from being the case!

EVANGELISM, A VERY NATURAL ACTIVITY

Perhaps the greatest reason why evangelism is not practiced by more Christians is that it seems so unnatural. To many Christians, evangelism means walking down unfamiliar streets and knocking on unfamiliar doors in hopes of encouraging strangers to engage in a "cottage Bible study." Those are things the average person never does, and it is intimidating to consider doing it. With such a picture of evangelism in mind, very few Christians ever attempt to evangelize others.

Evangelism can be in the form we have described, making "cold contacts" for our Lord. But we should understand that it can be in many other forms, many of which are more natural and more comfortable for the average Christian. If we can communicate this idea, maybe more would be actively engaged in sharing the good news of salvation.

Can evangelism be a natural activity? A reading of Acts 2:44-47 indicates that it can be very natural: "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."¹

It is obvious from this passage that evangelism was being practiced. The end result was that people were "daily" being saved. Many were telling the good news about Jesus, and those hearing the good news were submitting to it in glad obedience. There was nothing artificial or unnatural going on here; it all seemed to be comfortable and spontaneous. What were these Christians doing that was so effective?

First, note that these disciples were "together." They had a great interest in fellowship and in being around others who had not yet heard the word of grace. It was a practice they kept up, for we are told that

"continuing daily" in the temple and "from house to house," they worshipped God and shared meals with one another.

Notice their attitude: "gladness and simplicity of heart." How unlike many who approach evangelism with fear, nervousness and reluctance because what they are about to do is very unnatural to them! These first Christians were happy to be together, and their joyfulness was contagious. It was a delight to be around these people, for they were cheerful and happy. No wonder they had "favor with all the people."

Do not miss the key element in this successful evangelistic campaign: "praising God." Many regard this praise as a feature of their worship assemblies, and it undeniably was. But this writer contends that the praise of the early Christians spilled over into their daily lives. How could you keep enthusiastic disciples from speaking highly of their Lord and their God? How could you silence them from telling the powerful story of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

In our day, we typically praise athletes, rulers and celebrities. In our daily conversations at the office, we tell and retell the great plays a certain athlete made. We leave a movie theater raving about the performance a particular actress gave. We make phone calls and knock on strangers' doors urging others to vote for a certain candidate. Are these not all examples of praise? And yet these are mere human beings we so commonly put on pedestals!

The early Christians praised the One who died for them, who arose again, and who ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God. As they told others these astonishing facts, their faces were aglow with excitement. There was enthusiasm in their voices, and their gestures were lively as they spoke. Here was true evangelism in action, and it was natural! No one had to beg them to practice it; no one had to attend training classes. Evangelism, in this first recorded instance, was an overflowing of joy. It was an eager desire to share something wonderful with others.

Finally, in this passage, note how the praise of these early Christians was fortified by action. A situation of need existed in that original Christian community. Many of the brethren were without basic necessities of life. The response of the disciples was one of generosity. They "had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need." These actions

proved to the observer that the religious fervor of the Christians was genuine and deep. What a message each charitable gift carried with it!

With all these factors in mind, it is not surprising that the church grew so quickly. When Christians share the good news of Jesus Christ because of the fountain of gratitude within their hearts, others will take note and listen, and many will be converted to the paths of righteousness.

THE FRUIT OF THE VINE

Jesus gave an image in John 15 that helps us see more clearly the natural place of evangelism in every Christian life: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (vs. 1,2). It is a simple word picture, but one that gives us material over which to reflect for many hours.

Jesus compared Himself to the vine. The vine is the main stem of the grapevine; the trunk from which all branches grow. It is the vine that is directly attached to the roots, and thus the only source of nourishment. A visit to a local vineyard will reveal the strength of this image; the main vine may be many years old and very thick. It is this that supports all grape production that will take place.

Christians, according to this image, are the branches. Every individual who puts on his Lord in baptism, thus becoming a Christian, will be a branch attached to the one vine. Since all branches are attached to the one vine, they will have certain things in common. You will not find white grapes on one branch, and red grapes on another. The branches will bear common fruit because of their common relationship to the one vine.

If theologians today were to revise the image, they might picture the entire vineyard as God's, but different types of grapevines scattered about. In my own little plot, I have two or three varieties of grapes. A large vineyard might have many more. If this had been the picture Jesus had given, then we might find room for the concept of different kinds of Christians.

But Jesus stressed that there is but one vine in God's vineyard. It is a vine like no other. It can support hundreds, thousands, even

millions of branches, so great is this vine's vitality. Instead of different kinds of branches bearing different kinds of grapes, here is the one vine with branches bearing the one fruit. Denominationalism does not fit into our Lord's metaphor.

Our main point of emphasis from this image is the purpose of the branches: To bear fruit. We have already noticed that from verse 2. That continues to be the emphasis throughout Jesus' discussion, from verses 1 through 11. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (v. 5). "By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (v. 8). There can be no doubt: God did not intend for His vineyard to be ornamental. He desired fruit to be produced. In fact, according to verse 8, fruit-bearing is an essential element in determining whether a person is truly a disciple of Jesus.

Bearing fruit is a natural process for a branch of a grapevine. In fact, something is wrong with the branch that does not bear fruit. It may be diseased, or something may have restricted the flow of the sap to that branch. It is unnatural for a branch of a vine to not bear fruit!

We, as Christians who abide in Christ, produce the fruit of the vine. The vine will not produce the fruit without the cooperation of the branches. In God's plan, converts to Christ will not be won by direct actions from heaven. Jesus' followers have the responsibility of planting the seed of the word of God into the hearts of men.

THE FRUIT WE BEAR

Consider the nature of fruit: The fruit of any particular plant is a marvelous seed package. Why is the seed so packaged? To make the seed attractive and desirable to others. If I hand you a seed and tell you to plant it and eat whatever grows, you might hesitate. How do you know if the fruit or vegetable will be good for you? How can you know if you will want to eat it? You do not know those things just by looking at the seed. That is why you will not find pictures of seeds in any of the seed catalogues; you will only find pictures of the final produce.

In the same way, God wants people to be able to sample the goodness that results from His seed when implanted in the human heart. Instead of simply ordering people to be converted and start living right, He has commanded Christians to bear fruit. Others will sample the good taste of the fruit, and they will likely want to have the seed planted in their

own lives! "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" (Psa. 34:8).

The *fruit* which the early Christians produced was the benevolent spirit they displayed in the face of need. By sharing what they had, and by selling their goods and giving the money to help the poor, they were producing *the fruit of the Vine*. In each instance of the fruit, there was seed inside. Those who liked what they tasted of these good works could easily see how to grow it in their own lives, for the seed was contained within the fruit.

IS FRUIT-BEARING OPTIONAL?

Christians today look upon the example of the first-century Christians as something extraordinary. Similar to the ability of some early disciples to do miraculous deeds, they might be tempted to think that evangelistic zeal is something else that Christians today should not expect to possess. Be faithful in attendance, keep up your contributions, and God will be satisfied, they think.

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away....If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:2,6). Jesus gives no reason to believe that fruit-bearing is an option for Christians. Instead, every branch should be busy producing fruit, assuming that it is abiding in the Vine.

Paul's words in Galatians 5:22,23 also come to mind: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law." Again we must conclude that these are fruits that every Christian must bear. There is nothing to suggest that this is a menu, and we pick from it those things we like, and pass up those things we do not.

What happens when a person becomes a Christian, and begins bearing this "fruit of the Spirit"? What effect will this love, joy, peace, kindness, etc. have on that person's neighbors or co-workers? Will they not take notice? Will not most people be pleased with the changes that have come into this life? Like one who has tasted a delicious apple, they will be thankful for the taste, and might even ask how to obtain the seed for themselves!

A branch of a grapevine bearing fruit is a natural process. Christians who view themselves in this way—just as the Lord has described—should see evangelism in a new light. Rather than being an unnatural chore, it becomes something one would expect from someone who has been snatched from the fire (Jude 22, 23)!

But once we have shown Christians that evangelism is a natural activity for people who are grateful for their salvation, we must be ready to show them how it can be done.

METHODS OF EVANGELISM IN OUR DAY

Paul established a principle in 1 Corinthians 9:22: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." Obviously, Paul did not always use the same approach in attempting to save those with whom he came in contact. Though Paul's method of choice appears to have been preaching, he made it clear that he would use any means possible (and scriptural) to capture hearts for Christ. We believe the situation is the same today.

Evangelism can be done in many different ways. Jesus' command to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19) was generic in terms of method. The command to "make disciples" was specific. But the method to be used was not specified. We believe God has left it to man to discover various ways of sharing the good news with others. Let us consider a few of the methods that have been used by Christians in our day.

One-On-One Bible Studies

Here is the kind of evangelism practiced by Philip in Acts 8:26-40. Philip engaged the Ethiopian eunuch, a man already interested in knowing God's will, in a closer study of the meaning of God's word. Just as this study resulted in the conversion of a precious soul to his Lord, so thousands in our day have been won to Christ because someone cared enough to study with them one-on-one.

One method that has been popular among churches of Christ along this line is Ivan Stewart's "Open Bible Study." In his book, *Go Ye Means Go Me* (1974, self-published), Stewart details the rationale and methods of this simple but intensive approach to teaching the gospel to

another. Three sessions are envisioned with this approach, each being very clearly driven toward bringing the student to making a decision to obey the gospel of their Lord.

Other books have urged Christians to prepare themselves to conduct Bible studies with their non-Christian friends, neighbors and co-workers. Otis Gatewood's *You Can Do Personal Work* (1956, self-published) and Jack Exum's *The Glory Of The Ordinary* (1960, self-published) are two other examples of preachers among us who have sought to encourage ordinary Christians to take seriously the responsibility of being bearers of good news. Many other approaches and books have been put forth. But still the average Christian has been reluctant to get involved in teaching the gospel one-on-one.

Video-Based Bible Study Courses

Probably the best-known approach to evangelism among churches of Christ in the last half of the twentieth century has been Jule Miller's "Visualized Bible Study Series." First released in the format of filmstrips accompanied by narration on records, this series has been updated to video cassette format. The claim is made that over 100,000 sets of this material have been purchased by churches and individuals, thus attesting to its effectiveness and ease of use.

In five lessons, each lasting about forty-five minutes, the student is given a birds-eye view of the message of the Old and New Testaments, especially with a focus on the redeeming work of Jesus Christ and the authority of the new covenant for today. The plan of salvation is studied in-depth in the fourth session, and a brief survey of church history concludes the series. Many thousands of people have been taught the fundamentals of the gospel and shown the errors of denominationalism using this Bible study technique. It is still used by many to reach the lost for Jesus.

Other video courses have been developed for the purpose of helping Christians teach the gospel to the lost. "The Story" is a set of five video cassette tapes produced by Robert K. Oglesby, and is designed with a similar focus as Jule Miller's tapes. The setting is more casual, with the speaker appearing in various locations in the Bible lands as he discusses various topics from the Bible. Another organization that has produced a large number of video tapes for teaching is World Video Bible School of Maxwell, Texas. One example of an evangelistic series would be the series "Trip Through the Bible" with Dave Miller serving as

the instructor. Again, five lessons are devoted to giving an overview of the Bible's message, culminating in the plan of salvation as revealed through Jesus Christ. There are several other series produced by World Video Bible School that focus on more specific teachings of the Bible or on denominational doctrines.

There is great value in using the video approach to evangelism. First, it is a medium with which Americans are most comfortable. The time Americans spend in front of the television, on the average, is well-documented. How natural it is, therefore, to ask a friend or a neighbor to watch a video tape on an evangelistic theme in hopes of provoking deeper discussion and study. Also, it is a relatively easy approach to evangelism. A Christian does not have to have extensive training nor be an "expert" on the Bible in order to study with someone on basic Bible doctrines. For that reason, many Christians have been introduced to the excitement of teaching their friends the gospel by means of filmstrips or video tapes.

One word of caution must be given regarding video approaches: The videos will not do it all. The Christian must be prepared to follow up the viewing with specific questions that will open doors for further discussion or study. The Christian must be ready to answer questions that will arise from viewing the videos. And the Christian (perhaps most importantly) must be able to say, "I don't know the answer to that question right now, but I'll study it and come back next week with an answer." Obviously, Christians will grow in their understanding and knowledge of God's word, regardless of the response of the sinner being targeted.

Group Bible Studies

Another method of evangelism that has been found effective is that of studying Bible subjects in group settings. This approach has been in use among churches of Christ for many decades in the form of "Sunday school" or mid-week Bible studies. But the approach has found new popularity in the last several years in the form of "small group Bible studies."

The appeal of group Bible study is that it is often less intimidating than one-on-one study. A person might be hesitant to allow a Christian to come into their home and teach the Bible, for they know that they will be the target of the study, and their conversion is the desired end. But a group Bible study is not so focused on the individual, and thus many feel

less threatened in studying the Bible with a group. Many have come to understand the gospel of grace because a friend has invited them to Sunday school to study an interesting Bible subject.

The small group Bible study removes one more factor that is sometimes intimidating: Going into a church building or place of worship. For some non-Christians, just entering a house of worship is a frightening prospect. Small group Bible studies are frequently conducted in homes of Christians, and that provides a more casual setting for comfortable study and discussion of Bible topics.

John and Mary, both Christians, are concerned about their friends, Bill and Sue, who are not Christians. They have asked Bill and Sue several times to attend Sunday school and worship with them, but every time their friends find a reason not to come. However, when asked to come to John and Mary's house on a Tuesday evening to join a small group who are meeting to study the book of Luke, Bill and Sue readily agree. What has happened? While Bill and Sue were reluctant to enter a climate of "formal religion", a more relaxed and non-threatening environment is more appealing.

Small group Bible study has exploded in popularity among many Protestant denominations. One of the major causes for this phenomenon is the success of Bill Hybels and the Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago. This approach is used to reach people who are "unchurched," and the result has been one of the largest churches in North America. Many who are eager to duplicate the success of Willow Creek have adopted this approach. For the same reason, many among churches of Christ have looked down on small group Bible studies, considering it to be too much imitation of denominational fads and gimmicks.

It is true that we should avoid certain practices that denominations have utilized, even though they may have been successful in attracting large crowds. But a practice cannot be condemned solely on the basis that it is also used by denominations. If it is a method that is authorized by scripture, and one that has been proven effective, then it might bear serious consideration for use in our congregations.

The approach of small group Bible study appears to be in the same category as the practices noted earlier in Acts 2. The Christians "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine...continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house..."

(Acts 2:42,46). The picture that emerges from these verses is that of Christians meeting in one another's homes, and studying scriptures with one another. Many were turned to Jesus Christ as a result of such interaction. The approach of small group Bible studies is clearly Biblical.

However, there are certainly some dangers connected with small group Bible studies. One is that it might be looked upon as a replacement for some assemblies of the church. Some churches have replaced one or more public assemblies (typically Sunday evening worship assemblies) with the practice of smaller groups meeting in various homes. We consider this an area that needs careful thought and prayer. Public assemblies of the church serve needs that cannot be served by smaller group meetings (fellowship among all, mutual edification, close oversight by the elders, etc.). Too, small group Bible studies may be looked upon as a way of relieving the stress of declining Sunday evening worship assemblies. Such an approach does not address the problem, but only masks it. We do not recommend that churches utilize small groups in lieu of any public assemblies.

Another concern attached to small group Bible studies is the material used. Presently, there is little discussion material being produced by faithful Christians committed to the New Testament pattern. It would be all too easy for an unsupervised group to use material produced by denominational authors that might contain serious doctrinal flaws.

There are, however, materials that are good, with some reservations. One such product is the LifeGuide Topical Bible Studies. Several courses are available in this series, each focusing on a book or a topic of the Bible. The Bible text is emphasized in each lesson, and questions are designed to direct the student back to the Bible text for the answers. Discussion among all students is encouraged. Still, there are occasional statements within the questions which reveal doctrinal errors, and group leaders must be aware of these and ready to point the students to the truth. With this disclaimer said, the materials are quite effective in encouraging close examination of Bible subjects.

Elders of congregations must be firmly in control of small group Bible studies. It is imperative that they know when and where groups are meeting, who is in charge, and what material is being used in the study. But with good supervision by godly shepherds, the small group Bible study method can be a valuable tool in teaching the lost about God and His will.

"Lifestyle Evangelism"

One emphasis that has been taught in recent years has been given the title "lifestyle evangelism," or "friendship evangelism." This simply refers to the fact that evangelism cannot be reduced to a three-step program, or a quick gimmick. It is, instead, a long-term commitment that Christians make to be true friends to their neighbors, family and co-workers. In being true friends, they hope to ultimately lead these people to Christ.

We have all discovered that the process of bringing someone to Christ varies greatly from individual to individual. Just as germination periods vary for different types of seeds, soils and climates, so different people will be brought to Christ in various ways. We cannot attempt to teach someone the gospel and then abruptly back off when it becomes apparent that their conversion will require much time and effort. As Christians, we must commit to others whatever time and effort is needed to bring them to Christ.

This also eliminates manipulation. How many times have Christians appeared to be friendly toward non-Christians, hoping to set up a Bible study? But when the offer of a study is refused, the Christian turns away from that prospect, having nothing further to do with them. Such an approach is very nearly that of manipulation; "I'll be your friend if you go along with what I want to do." That approach will not win many souls to our Lord. It may, in fact, make it harder for others to reach those prospects in the future.

"Lifestyle evangelism" teaches us to look upon all those around us as potential prospects for further study and conversion. We are willing to invest much time and effort in these people, realizing that it may take years to ultimately bring them to Christ. They may never come to Christ. But we will continue to imitate the example of Jesus Who never refused to be a friend to anyone, regardless of race, gender or social background.

When lifestyle evangelism is our foundation, we will be always looking for opportunities to make a good impression for our Lord. We will seek opportunities to do good (Gal. 6:10), knowing that each good work contains within it a seed that may lead to the fruit of everlasting life. Rather than occasionally taking time to practice evangelism, such Christians are living the goal of evangelism constantly. This, we believe, is what God would have us all to become!

CAN WE SIT ON GOOD NEWS?

The northern tribes of Israel faced a crisis in 2 Kings 6. The nation of Syria had laid siege to the city of Samaria, and the result was a gradual starvation of the people inside the city walls (2 Kgs. 6:24-29). Things looked very hopeless for the people in the city.

God stepped in and did for His people what they could not do for themselves. By causing a noise that sounded like approaching armies, He caused the Syrian army to flee from their camp, leaving all food, drink and weapons behind (2 Kgs. 7:6,7). The danger for Samaria was taken away. But the people inside the city walls did not yet know the good news.

Four Israelite lepers, out of desperation, decided to surrender to the Syrian army, hoping they would either give them food to eat or put them out of their starving misery. These were the ones who found the abandoned Syrian camp, and for a time they gorged themselves with all the food and drink they could find (2 Kgs. 7:3-8). Who could blame them for their actions? But while they feasted, the city of Samaria continued to starve.

Finally, one of the lepers came to his senses. He stated, "We are not doing what is right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent" (2 Kgs. 7:9). The others agreed, and they went to inform the king's household of their find. After initial skepticism over the report, the city was told of the food and drink just outside the city, and the people were delivered from their famine (2 Kgs. 7:10-16).

God did for the people what they could not do for themselves—He defeated the Syrians and removed the noose from around their necks. But God did not do for the people what they could do for themselves—telling one another about the deliverance He had accomplished for them. That act of telling good news was left up to the lepers. Thank God they rose to the task!

Can we not still say, with even more conviction, "This day is a day of good news"? Is not our deliverance even greater than Samaria's? They were given relief from physical hunger; we are given eternal salvation. Yes, our news is far greater than what they enjoyed.

Then how can we "remain silent"? How can we sit on good news while others are dying for lack of what we feast upon? Will God not hold

us accountable for hoarding the power (Rom. 1:16) that could save many others?

We can give many reasons for our lack of action. But there is really only one question to be answered: Are our friends, neighbors and co-workers lost without Christ? Are their souls in danger if they slip into eternity without salvation? And if the answer to that question is Yes—and undoubtedly it is—we must find a way to tell them the good news of a Savior.

As I drive home late one night, I notice smoke coming from the home of a dear friend. When I look closer, I see flames in one end of the house. What will I do? Will I make a mental note to call my friend tomorrow to see how they are doing? Will I calmly drive to a phone and call the local fire department? Or will I not immediately stop my car, jump out, pound on their door, break their windows—do anything to wake them to the danger that surrounds them?!

If I am convinced that my loved ones are in grave danger without Christ, I will find a way to get the message to them. It is good news for them that they can be saved. I must find a way to let them know.

And in the process, the church will grow.

¹ All scripture citations are from the New King James Version.

RESPECT FOR LAW AND ORDER

EDWARD E. DYCHE



Edward E. Dyche was born in Cumberland, MD, and was converted while stationed in Fort Monmouth, NJ. He is a graduate of ACU and began preaching in Carlisle, PA in 1965 where he remains today. He has served both as an elder and preacher. The church at Carlisle now has two full-time men. He and his wife have three children and six grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

The theme for this year's lectureship, "Practical Studies in Church Growth," is a worthy theme. The church of the Lord considers growth the significant aspect of her existence. Without growth, the church cannot survive. According to the Newsweek magazine for March 29, 1999, Christianity as a whole was 29% of the world's population in 1990 and in 2010 it is projected to be 27%!!!¹ In 1996 Brother Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr. delivered the Inman Bible Forum lectures, "Church Growth or Church Decline Among Churches of Christ." In that series he revealed there are 13,097 congregations of the church with 1,280,838 members.² This is a clear indication that the church is not as large as perhaps thought from past accountings. Furthermore, he stated that the church loses 40% of her young preachers after their first work. These thoughts ought to impress the church with the necessity to consider ever more seriously the issue of church growth both internally and externally.

My part in this lecture series is to develop the subject of "Respect for law and order" as it relates to church growth anywhere in the world. First of all it is important to look at America's attitude

toward religion (many other countries of the Western world are about the same). Secondly, it is necessary to look at several New Testament texts that specifically address governing authorities and the church. Furthermore, it will be necessary to consider church growth as it relates in general to matters regarding the law and how we should respond as respectful Christians. Finally, it is imperative to address some practical matters regarding the Christian, his influence for church growth, and how it relates to respecting law and order.

THE CURRENT SITUATION AS IT RELATES TO RESPECT FOR LAW AND ORDER

In 1987 Allan Bloom published a seminal book called The Closing of the American Mind. He stated sadly that "there are no absolutes; freedom is absolute."³ This statement, among many others in his book, gives expression to the environment in which we are preaching the Gospel. Truth and ethics are relative in America's pluralistic society. This is the environment in which our government has been downgrading religion.

A reading of Stephen Carter's book, The Culture of Disbelief, likewise reveals how much the government is trivializing religious devotion. He writes that the message of the government is: "pray if you like, worship if you must, but whatever you do, do not on any account take your religion seriously."⁴ Anyone who believes seriously is understood to be "fundamentalist" and is thus discredited as a thinking, rational person. This book is significant from a legal perspective as Mr. Carter is a lawyer by profession.

In his classic book ACLU The Devil's Advocate, F. LaGard Smith reveals and documents numerous situations where the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) has labored against religion in the public arena. One classic example (pages 151-157) concerns a fifth grade school teacher, at the Berkeley Gardens Elementary School in Denver, Colorado. Mr. Roberts, the fifth grade teacher, had a silent reading period for his students during which time he, too, would read silently at his desk. Sometimes Mr. Roberts read his Bible (as well as other religious literature such as books about Buddah) during this silent reading time. The school principal, Kathleen Madigan, discovered this and told him the Bible should be kept from his desk between 8:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. During a parent-teacher open house, one of the parents pursued the books Mr. Roberts had in his room. The parent discovered Christian books such as The Bible in Pictures and The Life of Jesus.

The parent protested this material being in the classroom. As a result of Mr. Roberts reading the Bible and having such "Christian" books in his room, the matter went to court. It should be noted that among the other books in the room were books dealing with Greek gods and goddesses and American Indian religions. You would think that since the Christian material was singled out, Mr. Roberts would have been exonerated. Not so! He was found in violation of "teaching religion." On page 155, Smith records the judge's words: "Mr. Roberts' conduct, in the context of a fifth-grade class full of impressionable children, had the purpose and effect of communicating a message of endorsement of religion in a manner that might reasonably be perceived to bear the imprimatur of the school."⁵

I wonder what might have happened if Mr. Roberts spent time reading the books on the American Indian religions and kept them on his desk? Would the results have been the same? It is very doubtful if the issue would ever have been raised. All of this reflects what seems clearly an affront of the government toward religion and especially Christianity.

THE EARLY CHURCH RESPECTED LAW AND ORDER AND IS OUR PATTERN FOR THE CHURCH TODAY

The pivotal text of the New Testament on this matter of the government is from the pen of the Apostle Paul found in Romans 13:1-7. His thesis is clearly "let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God" (v. 1). From that pronouncement comes forth a line of reasoning that expresses such obedience. To disobey the powers is to disobey God (v. 2). The powers can be a minister of God for good (vv. 3-4). The powers bear the sword (v. 4). Christians are to be in subjection to the powers for conscience sake (v. 5). They are to pay tribute (v. 6). Finally, they are to render to all their dues (v. 7). This great text of scripture lays out for God's people the relationship to governments under which they may reside. It certainly is not to be used as a pretext for disobeying God should the powers stand in opposition to God's will. It is simply a powerful text laying out for the Christian his obligation to not only understand the purpose of government, but to submit to it within the limits of its God-ordained function.

The church's first encounter with the government is found in Acts 4:1-31. Of course it was the government (Jewish and Roman) that put our Lord to death in the first place, but our focus is on the church from the time of its establishment. Peter and John have been placed in prison

for preaching the Gospel (v. 1-3). The priests and Sadducees were "grieved that they taught the people" (v. 2). Having put them in prison over night, the next day Peter and John were interrogated about this preaching. At the conclusion of the interrogation, Peter and John said: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard" (v. 19-20). In addition, Peter and John reveal how God had spoken prophetically about the powers opposing the Gospel. This is recorded in Psalms 2:1-2 (also vv. 25-26). The Psalm reveals the "conflict" between the powers and the Lord's anointed. The church gathered to face this understanding with a prayer for courage and boldness to speak (v. 29-30). God responded in a miraculous manner (v. 31—the place was shaken) as a testimony that He is with His people in the midst of the world that opposes them.

The trials of the first century Christians were also well expressed by Peter in 1 Peter 4:12-18. They were not to think their struggles were "strange" or that "a strange thing happened," indicating that this is the plight of those who follow Christ! The "fiery trial" was to prove them (and us)! In the third chapter Peter exhorted "but even if ye should suffer for righteousness sake, blessed are ye: and fear not their fear, neither be troubled" (3:14). Of course the Christian cannot suffer as a "murderer, or a thief, or an evil doer, or as a meddler in other men's matters" (4:15), for that is in opposition to God's will for us. The words of Peter encourage us in that we should "glorify God in this name [Christian]" when perhaps we suffer under the powers!

The challenge to Christianity today is the same: "We must obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29)! It is interesting that in the fifth chapter of Acts we find the situation in Jerusalem becoming more intolerable. The Apostles are brought again to the government officials. Evil is intended (v. 33)! Had it not been for Gamaliel, perhaps the intent to kill them would have been carried out. Instead, the Apostles are beaten, charged not to "speak in the name of Jesus" and let go. This is a foretaste for any who would follow Jesus. Paul wrote in 2 Tim. 3:12 that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." It may not mean death, it may not mean prison, but it will certainly mean we are not in the world's favor.

The church's history recorded in the book of Acts shows this is the case. Paul leads in the persecution of Christians (Acts 8), cities persecute missionaries (Acts 13-18), the Jewish authorities persecute (Acts 21-24) and so the examples continue. Though persecuted, the church continues to proclaim Christ (Acts 8:1-4) and she grows.

Tertullian said it powerfully in the second century: "the blood of Christians is the seed of the church." The church was born in adversity. It lived, thrived and grew in adversity. This seems to be the story for God's people: proclaim the Gospel, know that persecution may come, but so will there be growth!

The church's respect for law and order must be observed in light of the "powers that be" and who we are as we live under those powers. The New Testament affords ample illustrations of the conflicts and responses to the preaching of the Gospel. The world would rather have the Gospel "go away" than have to deal with a devout people proclaiming it. May this important lesson be learned by the church!

THE CHURCH MUST FOLLOW THE PATTERN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH TO BE OBEDIENT TO GOD

Obedience is an essential characteristic for church growth and for respecting law and order. It is essential to look at the church as being obedient within herself and then obedient to the powers under which she resides. This is imperative for understanding the spiritual warfare in which the church is engaged.

Obedience within the church is reflected in the church's understanding of authority and how that authority is administered. The Bible teaches that Jesus is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23). Within each local congregation there are appointed "elders" to oversee and shepherd the church or body. The church must submit to its elders by "obey(ing) them that have the rule over you and submit(ing) yourselves unto them for they watch on behalf of your souls as they which must give account, that they may do this with joy and not with grief, for this would not be profitable for you" (Heb. 13:17). Though this is the authority structure established by God, it seems the attitude of our society has affected the attitude of the church. It is an attitude that says, "I have my rights and no one is telling me what to do." The result for the church is disastrous! Little wonder that elderships are in trouble or are ineffective! In the April 1999 issue of "Contending for the Faith," Bob Patterson wrote an article titled, "The Church and Present Trends." He stated the following words concerning the elderships of the local churches: "There are also many attacks against elderships by some who are unwilling to be submissive and obedient to those men charged with the watchful care of their souls (Heb. 13:17). When this is the attitude, there is not very much appeal for men to desire this work."⁶ To be submissive means "to defer to" and this must be the attitude of Christians. Of all people on the

face of the earth who ought to understand "obedience" and respect for "law and order" (especially the law of God) it should be the child of God. The words spoken of the Lord are significant for the church: "he learned obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8-9). God's people are obedient people!

One of the sad things we observe about our society and "Christians" is that there seems to be little difference between the two. George Barna, in his book The Second Coming of the Church states, "The stumblingblock for the church is not its theology but its failure to apply what it believes in compelling ways."⁷ Simply stated, the church does not practice what it professes! It differs little from the world around it! The churches of Christ must not be so! The church must come "out from among them and be ye separate" (2 Cor. 6:17).

As Christians, we must learn obedience in the church and teach our children such. Then we can better understand our obedience to the "powers" that be. When each Christian is willing to obey in a spirit of humility, the church can influence people for Jesus Christ. Without individual obedience in the local congregation, there can be no harmony and peace in the church and it cannot grow. Why does God say that He hates one "who sows discord among brethren" (Prov. 6:18) if this is not so important?

The Christian who lives in obedience to God must live in obedience to the governing powers. The Christian is a citizen of the kingdom of God but lives among the kingdoms of men. This does not mean the Christian surrenders to the earthly powers nor necessarily approves of them. It means the Christian will always obey the commands of God as they relate to the governing powers.

The Christian possesses an unusual citizenship. According to Paul's words in Philippians: "our citizenship is in heaven..." (3:20). Based on this truth our "relationship" to the worldly powers (any such power if you please) is from the position of a "foreigner," "alien," or "stranger." These words are used by Paul: "So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints" (Eph. 2:19). They are also used by Peter: "Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims..." (1 Pet. 2:11). In the context of history these words refer to the church's relationship to the Roman empire. They mean that the Christian is a citizen of God's kingdom and only in the kingdoms of this world is he a sojourner and pilgrim. To obey the powers wherever they be is to do so with the idea that we are strangers and sojourners there. This understanding may help us as we make some

application as to how to participate under the government in which we may happen to reside.

Consider how this truth applies to mission work. Missionaries reside in other countries for which they must possess both a passport and visa. Should they engage in activities that are either illegal (which they should not) or disruptive to the government, they would be subject to the authorities of that land and could be jailed or deported. In a foreign country we as Americans are not its citizens. As Americans we cannot engage in things that are out of order in that country. Missionaries are careful to work within the framework of the nation where that work is done. This is not to imply that, when evil is done, it cannot be responded to. The important question is "how to respond?" If warned about preaching, missionaries may continue until arrested, then be prepared for the consequences. There also may be injustices and evil against the people that certainly may not be in harmony with God's will, but what then? The Christian can only do his best to help. Christians remember whose servants they are! This principle applies to Christians living in America as Americans.

As Americans, Christians belong to a great nation. America is the envy of the world! However, the nation continues to change from what it was. The challenge of applying the Constitution and Bill of Rights to an increasingly pluralistic society is becoming more and more difficult. All of this is to say, where do Christians as a people of a free society go in their relationships to each?

There is certainly a need to understand the uniqueness of America as a nation. The right to protest and the right to speak out are freedoms the Christian can use to stand for godly principles. Paul utilized his Roman citizenship for the Gospel's sake. He appealed to Caesar in Acts 25:1-12 (note especially vv. 10-11). His defense was that he was standing before "Caesar's judgment seat" and ought to be judged there (v. 10). It is interesting that in Acts 22:22-29, when Paul was first arrested and about to be beaten by the Romans, he appealed to his Roman citizenship. The beating was not carried out. However, when we read of the abuse that Paul took as a follower of the Master among the Jews, he was five times beaten with the "forty stripes" by them (2 Cor. 11:24). On the other hand, Paul did not use this appeal when he was beaten by the Romans at Philippi until after the situation had developed (Acts 16:19-40). He did this to embarrass the authorities for not getting the facts. Whatever may be surmised, Paul was a citizen of Rome and did not hesitate to use its laws in a proper way for his life as a Christian.

There is a need now to consider all that has been said in the context of the spiritual warfare that is spoken of in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In the sixth chapter of that letter, Paul would remind Christians of what they are about in this world. They are engaged in a warfare! The Christians' warfare is with the "principalities and powers" (v. 12) and certainly is not fought with guns and bombs, but with the "sword of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 10:3-5). It is a cultural, secular, and religious war. That is, it is a warfare to capture the hearts and minds of mankind for Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:7-8). Any thought, idea, concept or law that is not rooted in Christ is called the *stoicheia* in the New Testament and is translated variously as "elemental spirits" (RSV), "rudiments of the world" (ASV & KJV), or "basic principles of the world" (NIV). This word is used seven times in the New Testament and its basic meaning is "element." It is used in reference to creation in 2 Peter 3:10,12. It refers to the basic truths of the Gospel in Hebrews 5:12. The remaining four times are found in Galatians 4:3,9 and Colossians 2:8,20. They refer to any idea, world-view, or philosophy whereby mankind lives outside of the revealed message of the Gospel. These are "basic" or "rudimentary" concepts about the world in which we live. The rudiments of the world are not the things revealed by God for man to live by.

Every law of man and every ethic of man is less than the divinely revealed Gospel by which the citizen of the kingdom lives. Every society and culture must be understood according to this truth. As Christians the obligation is to "fight the good fight" (1 Tim. 6:12) and every matter that the Christian addresses involves the Gospel of the Lord. Christians put on spiritual attributes. Their loins are girded with truth, they put on the breastplate of righteousness, they have their feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel, they have the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and finally the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. Christians engage the spiritual forces of the principalities and powers with this complete armor of God. Christians must be serious about the spiritual warfare!

The warfare of the church requires discipline. The church must be a disciplined people and live lives that show this discipline. This is both individual and collective! Thomas Jefferson wrote: "That government governs best which governs least, because its people discipline themselves."⁸ Are the challenges and problems the church faces with big government and the legal maze the result of an undisciplined people? Our nation's drug, alcohol, pornography, and general crime problems do stem from the lack of self-discipline. The seemingly anti-religious tone of the ACLU has removed prayer from much of the public domain, made choice the center, and continues to

misinterpret the supposed wall of separation of church and state in the public arena. The real issue, though, is America's personal self-discipline. Moral problems are personal and involve the training arenas that best deal with such. Those arenas are the home and the church. The schools and society are to reinforce and uphold those institutions if society is to be decent and civil.

As Christians the matter of respect for law and order is one of obedience so that they might "live a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity" (1 Tim. 2:2). Their prayers are for everyone in positions of power, etc., but their task is to be about the Master's business! Christians do not need to respect any government nor its laws per se. It is a matter of Whom we ultimately serve! Christians need to be in submission as Peter says, "to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Pet. 2:11). They are to live as honorable people of the Lord and not of a particular government or culture. Christians serve only one King!

THE CHURCH TODAY MUST CONSIDER HOW HER PRIORITIES RELATE TO RESPECTING LAW AND ORDER

There are four things I would like for us to consider as we close this lecture. First of all the church must know what battles to fight. Second, she must use her time wisely. Third, she must be more involved in people's lives and fourth, she must see the power of the local church in this work.

What battles should the church fight? There is no doubt that every battle on a spiritual level must be fought. She needs to do battle against abortion, pornography, false science and relative ethics. However, sometimes individual battles can detract from the greater war—saving mankind from their sins! God's people have certain strengths they need to use. The church has serious and accomplished Bible students, very skilled debaters, and excellent teachers. The local church should focus on these attributes to engage the enemy. She needs to be more aggressive in challenging the thinking world around us. Why not use the printed media and the visual media to challenge the educators on matters of philosophical and ethical importance? In addition she needs to train, support, and use men who will speak to this world philosophically, ethically, and theologically with the Sword of the Spirit. The battles must be selective.

All Christians have time limits. They simply do not have enough time to do all that they would like. Christians need to look at where they spend their time. The hustle of many Christian's lives can be distractions to what is important! The need for these Christians is to discipline themselves in some activities in order to do others more effectively. Paul wrote to the Ephesians and said, "look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16). The church and the individuals must manage their time for wholesome and effective uses! Christians need to see that learning and teaching are two significant factors for them. Life cannot be lived wholesomely or purposefully without understanding. The church has always been a learning and teaching institution. She must devote time to these matters more effectively.

The church must also emphasize the importance of being with people. The methods she uses for spreading the message such as TV, computers, the internet, web pages, and call-in programs, may be good in many ways; however, they in no way assure church growth. We must think about simpler things and methods that center in personal involvement in people's lives. One of the best methods many have used with success is the small group study. This method puts people at the center and brings conversions. It is also an excellent way to help new converts to grow. The church must be on a personal basis to change lives.

God's people must appreciate more and more the local church as their spiritual home. Each Christian must work within the local church to influence the world around them. When each one works to have a great local church that church becomes a blessing for all. The efforts to do this of course are not always easy. Jesus taught his disciples to be one (John 17:20-23) and that means unity! Being of one heart and soul is the way the local church is to live with her Lord (Acts 4:32). The church before the watching world can be a tremendous influence when she truly lives as a local body of Christ's disciples. She needs to love those who make her the body of Christ. She needs to love those who go astray. Above all she needs to love God with all the "heart, mind, soul, and strength" (Mark 12:30). The local church must be the center of law-abiding Christians!

CONCLUSION

It has been my privilege and joy to share this lecture regarding church growth and the need for respecting law and order. The New

Testament reveals the struggles that the early church faced in the Roman empire and how she responded to them. The church is obedient to God, not only as the church, but obedient to the powers that be. The church must focus on the battles she is to fight, focus on the time necessary to do what is important, focus on the methods needed to win her neighbors, and finally she must focus her desire to be a community of God's people. May our Father continue to be pleased with the church as she continues to honor His Son by living as His faithful, obedient law-abiding servants!

¹Kenneth Woodward, "2000 Years of Jesus" (Newsweek, March 29, 1999), pp. 52-60.

²Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr. Church Growth or Church Decline? (Inman Bible Forum, Ohio Valley College, 1996).

³Allan Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind (Simon and Schuster, NY, 1987), p. 28.

⁴Stephen Carter, The Culture of Disbelief (Harper Collins, NY 1993), p. 15.

⁵F. LaGard Smith, ACLU The Devil's Advocate (Macron Publishers, CO 1996), pp. 151-155.

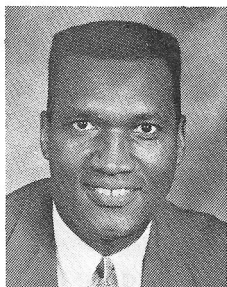
⁶Bob Patterson, "The Church and Present Trends" (Contending For The Faith, April, 1999), p. 5.

⁷George Barna, The Second Coming of the Church (Word Publishing, TN, 1998), pp. 5-6.

⁸LaGard Smith, op. cit., p. 278.

PROPER RACE RELATIONSHIPS

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PROPER RACE RELATIONSHIPS ENHANCE GROWTH

This writer is grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this very important and timely lecture series on "Church Growth." The specifics of this treatise concern the subject "Church Growth through Proper Race Relationships." Much of the material presented will derive from the experience of this author. For more than twenty years my wife and I have sought to practice that for which I now write.

In the midst of a segregated world a young man obeyed the gospel of Christ and the lord added him to His church (Acts 2:47). The young man was fortunate to be a member of a culturally diverse group of sound Christians. When the military transferred him to a new location, the young man (now newly married) was eager to attend the church in their new location. With great anticipation the new couple arrived at the appointed time for Bible study and immediate attention was given to the racial makeup of the new congregation. Without any hesitation (in part because of his zeal) the young man raised a question that would forever change his life. "Where are the Black folks?" The question seemed to

have penetrated everyone in the room when a very fine elder responded, "You know, you can help us to answer that question."

The reply of this godly man created an atmosphere for growth and change in the racial identity of that congregation. Here was a Christian of another race who was willing to take a new convert and make a difference for the Lord! What was great about the response of the elder? Negatively: (1) He did not direct the couple to another congregation that crystallized on race and culture. (2) He did not try to justify the absence of people from the other races. (3) He did not determine how comfortable we would be worshipping elsewhere. Positively: (1) He was honest and genuinely interested in helping us to feel at home. (2) He was proactive and he valued our assistance in reaching others of our race. (3) He treated us as equals in the Lord. This was all we expected because we were aware that we are all one in Christ and that the new goal for our lives is to go to heaven.

What a difference one person (the elder) made for the Lord! In twenty years time, that congregation's racial makeup increased and today it thrives as an example of a church united in Christ Jesus. This unity is also reflected in a proper regard for race relations and the royal law of God. Here is a church that seeks to answer the prayer of Jesus for complete unity of all believers!

A proper understanding of the Lord's prayer will enable all Christians to realize the important axiom for genuine growth. Christian unity promotes world conversion. Let us note some passages from the prayer of Jesus:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou I me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17:20-23).

The late Guy N. Woods wrote:

The object of this prayer was that all of his disciples should be one; and the unity he desired from

them finds its mode, in that close and indissoluble union obtaining between himself and his Father. This unity for which he so earnestly prayed in the shadow of the cross was not for unity of opinion or of organization alone, though these are certainly included; but for unity of faith, of practice, of aim, of purpose and of love. Such unity can be realized only when men of good will come to recognize Jesus as the only sovereign of his realm, the head of the church and the executor of his will on earth.

The unity of life and spirit for which Jesus prayed had as its design the conversion of the world: 'That the world may believe that thou didst send me. The greatest barrier to the conversion of all mankind is the disunity which prevails in the religious world. The only really effective argument the infidel has against what is called the Christian religion is the disgraceful divisions which fracture and weaken it.'¹

Stacy W. Grant writes:

Those who believe that division and confusion are of God have ignored the prayer of all prayers! This prayer is a lighthouse and tour guide for all who seek to please the Master. It is the foundation upon which the church rests.

Although the concept of complete unity has been preached fully to the world, it has been practiced selectively in the church. Ephesians 2:10-11 and Galatians 3:26-27 can strengthen the church in a mighty way. If only brethren, black, white, brown, red and yellow would communicate more often, they would realize they have much more in common than ever imagined! Everyone will win when brethren unite.

Think of the good that could be accomplished if only God's people would demonstrate to the world proper conduct concerning race (only one truly exists, Acts 17:26) relations. Think of the effect it would have on neighborhoods and communities throughout the world. Think of the message it would send. Think of the pleasure the Lord would enjoy. Think of the effect it would have on succeeding generations of Christians.²

As Jesus prayed to His Father concerning the apostles, He also prayed for ALL BELIEVERS that they might be united. This was not an exclusive prayer for a certain race of believers! Every person (regardless of purse, position or pigmentation) that believe on Jesus through the teaching of the apostles is the object of the prayer of Jesus. The simple truth behind the prayer of Christ can be stated without any contradiction: **ONENESS IN CHRIST BY BELIEVERS PROMOTES OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST BY UNBELIEVERS.**

When the world can focus on genuine Christian unity—they (the world) can be so influenced (because of the power of unity, which is wrought only through the cross) that sinful mankind would believe. The Christian's message to the world is a message of unity among us (Christians)! This unity is not just in word, but also in deed. It encompasses practice as much as it does precept. Friends, there must be the presence of unity of all Christians involving true racial integration rather than an imagined separate, but equal toleration! The world takes note of people who are truly different. Instead of being one racial group to ourselves—why not practice being ONE IN CHRIST?

The ingredient of oneness is Paul's inspired solution to a fractured church in the ancient city of Corinth:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body (1 Cor. 12:12-20).

Oneness in Christ is the only solution for the problems of mankind. This unity of oneness (according to Jesus) is achieved when every man will obey the words of God rather than man (John 17:20; Acts 5:29). If Christians drift away from the Word of God in just one area

(respect of persons, which includes racism) would it really matter? The prayer of our Lord unequivocally demonstrates that it does matter! The Lord's prayer for unity of all believes is not some lofty and unattainable ideal! This is an inspired achievable framework for growth. If this were not the case why emphasize the Great Commission passages (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47; John 20:23)? Why would Jesus bother to reconcile Jew and Gentile in one body (Eph. 2:16) if unity of believers was not His priority? These two groups (Jew and Gentiles) were segregated (Eph. 2:11-12) until the doctrine of Jesus had thoroughly impacted them!

The world of today awaits the impact of ONE CHURCH! This church is uniquely colored RED because the blood of the Lamb redeems all members (Acts 20:28; Eph. 2:13; Rev. 1:5-6; 7:9). Great good can be realized in our broken world when the church of Christ is fully integrated to send the message of salvation within our communities. Division of believers in Christ by reason of racism or class is truly the major hindrance to world conversion! May God help us to end the programs of planned division and hypocrisy! The hypocrisy to separate and discriminate based on race and cultural appreciation while telling the world that we are united minimizes and mocks the prayer of Jesus! Any program of church growth which intentionally excludes because of race or status (Jas. 2:1-7) or circumvents the prayer of Jesus (John 17:20-23) such a program should be rejected.

The so-called "homogeneous-unit principle" has been endorsed by a number of brethren as a reason to resegment the churches under the guise of growth. This theory suggests that the churches that grow fastest are monocultural (one culture). While many among us may find great comfort in worshipping with folks who are young, attractive, verbal, intellectual and similar, Christ did not assure us of this social amenity. Christians can not afford to be seduced by a materialistic culture into a comfortable, racially resegmented brotherhood. Too many souls are at risk of being lost and every child of God will account for their role in answering the prayer of Jesus for complete unity, even in the midst of our diversities. With the exception of tongue speaking (1 Cor. 14:22-30) where an interpreter is not available, churches of Christ have no reason to separate because of culture or any other social variable.

WAYS TO DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN RACE RELATIONS

In the Lord's church we should always be mindful that the first place of honor is reserved for the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul

stated emphatically that "He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18). The unity and fellowship that exist in the body (church) of Christ is achieved when each member prioritizes Christ first. The first priority of your life (Matt. 6:24) will determine the rest of your life (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

Note the language of 1 Corinthians 12:24-27:

For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

From the language of 1 Corinthians 12:24-27 we learn important truths in regulating proper relationships among diverse cultures of believers: (1) **Maturation**—It is God who tempers the members of the body. This truth requires Christians to grow up together in the Lord (2 Pet. 3:18; Phil. 1:9). (2) **Mutual Care**—It is only when members have the same care one for another that division in the church of Christ is averted (Gal. 6:1-2). This truth demands brotherly love (1 John 4:20). (3) **Mutual Allegiance**—Membership in the body of Christ demands submission to the Head (Jesus). This mindset can help us to overcome racist thinking and fears about other members different from ourselves. Total dependence is on Him rather than ourselves (Gal. 2:20). (4) **Master Control**—The preeminent Head (Jesus) directs member functioning. This is accomplished through the Word (John 12:48). When Christians allow Jesus to have His way with us we can be empowered to leave our "comfort zones" and boldly take the world with the gospel (1 John 5:1-4).

G. Ernest Wright has observed, "The confession that Jesus is Lord was a highly significant social statement. The church was an effective social instrument, then, not because it was *primarily* a social institution. No, it was effective precisely because it knew itself to be the body of Christ under the guidance of the Spirit. This knowledge, in turn, made far-reaching concomitant social demands. In time, it came to reshape the whole religious and social structure of the Empire itself."³

Unity in the body of Christ requires every member to mature in wisdom and knowledge. Members who are maturing are members who are caring for others without respect of persons. They treat one another according to the royal law. "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well" (Jas. 2:8). Mutual allegiance to Christ will permit Christ, the Master controller, to use every member to the glory of God. Let us return to God's pattern for regulating all of our relationships.

PRACTICAL INTERVENTIONS FOR CHRISTIANS

Since unity, which includes proper race relations, is an outgrowth of Jesus' prayer for all believers in Christ, Christians must have the mind of Jesus to maintain racial harmony.

I would begin by going alone to God to discover myself to attempt to know myself as only God knows me (Psa. 139:1). Like the prodigal son, I must come to myself (Luke 15:17). I must find the real me including my true racial attitudes and feelings, my real doubts and fears, and my actual motives and aims.

I must repent of known sinful racial attitudes and actions in my life and, like the publican of old, pray to God for forgiveness (Luke 18:13). I must ask God to enlarge my spirit and to expand my capacity for love and compassion for all others (Eph. 3:14-21). I must pray that God will lead me beyond self-knowledge to a knowledge that will deepen my understanding, and I must receive divine wisdom and courage to guide my actions (Jas. 1:5-6).

I must realize that the *surest of all signs* of racial prejudice is expressed when I deny my own prejudice. I must realize that the only way to overcome racial prejudice is the way of experience. First, I must seek to promote integration. Why? Because social scientists teach us that behavioral change precedes attitudinal change. Blacks and whites can never change their attitudes toward one another until they first have opportunities for behavioral experiences with one another. This social contact, if achieved in a setting of equality, can help the races to come to *know* each other as fellow human beings, as *real* brothers and sisters in Christ. When these associations are maintained, the false stereotypes of ethnic groups that fasten themselves on our minds can be destroyed.

I must work for the promotion of healing experiences, striving to promote a non-segregated church. This can be realized when we strive

for an integrated leadership of capable elders, ministers, deacons, and teachers in the church. I must affirm equal justice and opportunities for all races with respect to jobs in the body of Christ. Jesus' teaching of the golden rule and his teaching on love for neighbor supports such action (Matt. 7:12; 22:27-40).

I must declare the whole counsel of God on the subject of race relations. This I must do regardless of whether God's will is popular or even acceptable, regardless of cost.⁴

I must never be ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17). Four reasons why Christians ought never to be ashamed of the gospel, (1) Because of its origin, the gospel originated with God and not man (Gal. 3:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). The idea of racism is a genuine reproach upon the gospel! (2) Because of its operation, the gospel is an operation of power that can cut out racist attitudes if we will humbly allow it to leaven in our hearts (Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 1:8). (3) Because of its outcome, the salvation of mankind is only through the gospel (Mark 16:15-16). And finally, because of its outreach, the gospel message reaches out to all races of man. To deny any of these four points is to deny Jesus and hinder the work of saving souls.

Instead of blame, brethren, it is time to reclaim (Phil. 3:7-10)! In the Garden of Eden when the man and the woman sinned against God, an amazing phenomenon to place. When questioned by the Creator concerning their transgression the man blamed the woman and the woman blamed the serpent (the Devil). While this incident was occurring God simply noted their behavior and promptly selected a remedy that would take man beyond the blaming stage. Adam and Eve just stood before God blaming while God prepared the remedy for their sin (Gen. 3:15). They were both equally guilty of sin and the need of the hour was to reclaim their lost innocence! Blaming behavior was not the cure for the problem it only made it worse! Brethren, we could do well to end the victimization process of affixing blame and seek the victory by reclaiming unity in Christ Jesus! Here is a challenge. Let us work to reclaim unity, the absence of friendships, and the lack of family harmony.

A Prescription to the Church

If as Christians we are members of the kingdom of God in which all women and men are valued and can reach their true humanity, whatever their race and background, then in our congregations we need to find practical ways of living this out. Is it really possible to merge all

racess in the one church of the Bible? Not only is it possible it is God's will. Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17 is realized in the church of Christ when Christians can find their proper places in serving God rather than themselves. The basis for this service is the mercy and love of God for all of mankind. A prescription for churches to involve all members without respect to race can be gleaned from a number of passages in the New Testament, but we will use the twelfth chapter of the Roman letter to illustrate the principle.

In Romans 12:1-3 Christians have acceptance with god only when they have mentally prepared themselves to serve Him as a living sacrifice. This sacrifice does not look to the standards of the world or of self, but unto God.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And 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. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith (Rom. 12:1-3).

In Romans 12:4-8 sacrificial living is accomplished by ALL of the members (though they are diversified by reason of difference, which includes culture and socio-economics) in ONE BODY. These members cooperate with each other through the Head (Jesus) as they carry out diverse functions.

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. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching. Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness (Rom. 12:4-8).

While differences among members existed and the involvement of roles were diverse, please note the attitude of sacrificial service to God as brethren cooperated with uniquely different Christians: "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Rom. 12:9-10). The Holy Spirit did not state that there would be no problems, but problems were minimized where brotherly love and the royal law were facilitated (Jas. 2:8). What an ideal picture of the Lord's church to present to unbelievers!

Where there is unity of a culturally diverse group of saints in a congregation, more groups of people in the community will likely identify with such a group. The congregation that is culturally diverse showcases Christianity as God intended it to be—a universal religion that reaches out to everyone.

The challenge to leaderships in congregations rings loud and clear. To reach out in out culturally diverse communities, congregations must strive to ascertain full and complete racial integration as we go *into the entire world with the gospel*. Churches must develop their thinking and strategies about their multiethnic communities if they are to be effective and honor their Lord. This is not out of step with the sentiments of the apostle Paul in First Corinthians 9:20. Remarkable elasticity is necessary in the major task of evangelism. Paul concludes a long sentence emphasizing his own mode of life by stressing that he had "become all things to all," so that he might be effective in reaching some. The statement implies absolutely no compromise of truths, but flexibility in methodology.

There are many very fine ideas that can help churches to move toward complete unity in the matter of race relations. Small groups and zone programs should practice cultural diversity as they reach out into the community with the gospel. Gospel meetings and workshops should consider using sound and faithful men of every race. Black and white role models have much to offer our congregations by way of helping our young people to appreciate every effort of the church to experience racial oneness. Lectureship programs will better enhance all efforts to bridge unity by inviting (beyond tokenism) other races as speakers. Individual congregations can further provide a platform for growth and racial understanding by training and using young men to preach at scheduled times. It is unfortunate when congregations possessing so much talent in the pews will neglect it due to racism or professionalism. Team ministry involving a white and a black preacher working in unison with a

community is becoming more commonplace than ever before in our history.

What will it take? Blacks and whites will have to leave their egos on the altar of Satan and come together in the arms of the Savior. Although it has been some thirty years ago, the words of John Allen Chalk still ring true regarding the issue of peace and unity in the Savior:

Racial peace will never be attained unless it comes from God. Contrary to many popular and ignorant conceptions God does provide racial peace. Our problems today have arisen from man's rejection of God not from a supposed divine separation of the races. Racial peace assures all men freedom from cultural, physical, and even religious conflicts. There has never been a more intense racial problem than that which existed between Jew Gentile and Jew Samaritan during the Lord's lifetime. Yet, the problem was faced, and Paul says that Christ not only made peace between God and man but he also established peace between Jew and non-Jew. (Ephesians 2:11-19.) Christ took the racial problem to the cross. To all sane and obedient men the problem was settled there! Because of this sacrifice, "He came and preached peace to you that were far off (Gentiles, *jac*), and peace to them that were nigh (Jews, *jac*): for through him we both have our access in one Spirit unto the Father." (Ephesians 2:17-18.) We may make our black brothers use different doors into public facilities but they will use the same door we use to get into heaven! We both become one struggling mass of lost men when we approach God. Jesus died to accomplish racial peace.⁵

Peter's statement in Acts 10:34-35 has forever settled the issue of racial and ethnic equality for those who believe the Bible. 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 of him. He wants all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), extending his grace to all (Tit. 2:11). Discrimination, whether racial, ethnic, economic, or whatever, is plainly condemned: If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors (Jas. 2:8-9; cf. Vv. 1-7).

May God help His body (the church) to realize the need of the hour. We must turn from selfish superiority and face the Savior as we go out to reach all of humanity with the simple gospel of Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:16-17; Mark 16:15-16). Let us labor within the framework of Jesus' prayer for unity. The journey begins with one person at a time. May that one person include you.

¹Guy N. Woods, New Testament Commentaries, "John" (Nashville, TN., Gospel Advocate Company, c. 1981), p. 364.

²Stacey W. Grant, Breaking Down the Wall, article entitled "Unity is the Key," Vol. 1, Number 1, Jan. 1999; Avondale Church of Christ, 4017 Memorial Drive, Decatur, GA 30032.

³Errol M. McGuire, "The Christian and Social Issues," Christ and Race Relations, 20th Century Christian, July 1968, p. 38.

⁴Walter E. Burch, "But What Can I Do?" Christ and Race Relations, 20th Century Christian, July 1968, pp. 28-29, 47.

⁵John Allen Chalk, "Christ Our Peace," The Praying Christ and Other Sermons, Christian Publishing Company, Dallas, TX, c. 1965, pp. 90-91.

SECTION II

Special Classes

A STRONG PULPIT

WAYNE LANKFORD



Wayne Lankford was born in Carthage, TN. He is a graduate of the Nashville School of Preaching and attended DLU. He began full-time preaching in 1970 and has done local work in Middle and East Tennessee. He was listed in Outstanding Young Men of America (1975). He has spoken in youth rallies, served as counselor in youth camps, spoken in lectureships, preached meetings in TN, KY, GA, AL, and MD. He preaches in 5-6 meetings each year. Wayne and Rita (Boles) have two sons, Drew and Tim. He preaches for the East Main church, Murfreesboro, TN.

Once again I am honored to be back in East Tennessee (Big Orange Country), with the opportunity to speak on this lectureship program. I lived and worked with the South Knoxville church for twelve years (1976-1988); therefore, I have had the opportunity and privilege of observing this school for over twenty years. It is sound. The students who graduate from this school have received some of the finest instruction available. I commend the Karns church and the Faculty for your love and support for this school.

FIRST WE NEED TO DEFINE "STRONG"

Webster's New World Dictionary gives a long list of definitions. One among many definitions is, "Having a large amount of its essential quality; not weak or diluted: As, strong coffee." When I read this, I immediately thought of the late "Uncle" Rue Porter who preached in and around Neosho, Missouri, most of his life (1890-1967). Brother Porter stated that he preferred his coffee to be "as strong as the United States Constitution." Another definition Webster gives is, "Firm and loud." Past generations of "Pioneer Preachers" often spoke in this manner. Perhaps

one reason for those "strong (loud) pulpits" was due to not having public address systems as we do today. Another reason may have been what the prophet Isaiah said: "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isa. 58:1). I have often wondered what kind of voice the apostle Paul had. Was Paul's presentation of the gospel soft, loud, or was it a conversational approach? Of course we can only speculate. However, we can be sure that Paul's preaching was firm. "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27). Notice again one of the definitions of "strong" being that of "living a large amount of its essential quality." Declaring "all the counsel of God" is essential in having a strong pulpit. Preach like Paul (as well as the other apostles and inspired writers) and you will have a strong pulpit. By a "strong pulpit" we have reference to the preacher who stands behind the rostrum week after week. Paul was thankful for the great privilege to preach.

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief (1 Tim. 1:12-13).

He also counted it a blessing or favor (grace) from God to be able to preach. "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" (Eph. 3:8). Furthermore, he realized his solemn responsibility. "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16)!

ESSENTIALS FOR A STRONG PULPIT

First, we must preach Jesus Christ. The preachers in the early church preached Christ foremost. It was their desire to point the lost to "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter began his sermon by pointing out that Christ had fulfilled God's purpose through the prophets.

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and

wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it (Acts 2:22-24).

Peter continued to show that David's prophecy was fulfilled in Christ (Acts 2:25-28). The summation of Peter's sermon called for a soul-searching examination of themselves, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom he have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

The theme of preachers in the early church was the preaching of Christ.

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them (Acts 8:5).

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus (Acts 8:35).

And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues (Acts 9:20).

The apostle Paul taught the truth, the "distinct" message about the cross and the gospel of Christ.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:1-2).

I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:14-16).

Today, "change agents" (those who desire to change God's plan) captivate their audiences by substituting sound preaching with denominational ideas like chorale groups, drama presentations, and testimonies. They believe that strong pulpit preaching is archaic. They forget that "the *preaching* of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). Also, "it pleased God by the foolishness of *preaching* to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). Remember, preaching (i.e. the truth of the gospel) pleases God. It may not please men. Who are we trying to please? "for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). Has that fact changed today? Should we accommodate the desires of those who are tired of the so-called traditional way of doing things?

Second, we must preach the gospel of Christ. God has given us the "good news" of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection to present to lost men in order for them to obtain salvation.

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

This gospel is not obeyed until men are baptized into Christ for the remission of their sins (Rom. 6:3-4; Acts 2:38). This message of salvation was impressed by Paul upon the mind of the young evangelist Timothy.

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-6).

Those who desire to present the truth will not be ashamed or afraid to defend the pure gospel of Christ (Phil. 1:17). Paul was not ashamed to preach this gospel, because it is "the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 1:16). Also, it is "the power of God unto salvation." Please note that it is not "a" power, but "the" power, i.e., the only power to save. Since there is only one power of God to save, and that power is the gospel, then there is only one gospel. The same is true regarding baptism (as taught in Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38). Mark 16:16 is not "a" scriptural way, but "the" scriptural way. One must not be irresponsible. Paul said: "woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16). Preaching the gospel is what God wants. It is not up to us to decide whose gospel we are to preach. In fact, we are warned of the result of preaching "another gospel."

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

All men will not accept the truth (2 Thess. 2:10-12). However, there will be some who "hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matt. 5:6). A strong pulpit must be available for them. This pulpit must sound forth the truth that makes men free (John 8:32). This calls for preaching the "fundamentals" of the gospel, which include faith in Christ (John 8:21,24), repentance of sins (Luke 13:3), confession of Christ (Matt. 10:32; Acts 8:37), and baptism "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). This is God's plan and not man's! Therefore, we should never be ashamed to present these truths.

We must preach the gospel just as it is written in God's word. "That ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written" (1 Cor. 4:6). The result of this kind of preaching (above that which is written) will always bring division (1 Cor. 1:10-13). But, some had rather hear outlandish fantasy and fable. Such is not biblical! A strong pulpit will always preach "the preaching I bid thee" (John. 3:2).

After the Lord chose the twelve (Matt. 10:1ff), and began his ministry, he used parables to teach about the nature of His kingdom. For

example, he talked about "seed" (Matt. 13:3-9; Luke. 8:1-8). After his disciples had asked him the meaning of the parable He said: "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). The word (gospel) must be preached if the church is to survive the battles raging against it—some within her own ranks! Anything taught outside of, in addition to, or less than the word of God will produce division among the saints (1 Cor. 1:10-13). And eventually, this will develop into a drought of spiritual thirst.

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it (Amos 8:11-12).

There is a famine in some pulpits today! Since elders have the oversight of the church, they must know "spiritual food" is being fed to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-2). That spiritual food is the word of God, not men's philosophy. Are our colleges (universities) producing "men of the book" or "men of philosophy"? If one is to please God he must "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2), no matter what any college has taught.

Third, a strong pulpit will oppose error. Paul charged Timothy to "be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). From the very day of its establishment, the Lord's church has faced opposition against the truth.

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41). Not all men "gladly receive" God's word. Peter and John were opposed by the religious leaders of the day (Acts 4:1ff). The apostle Paul was opposed by "false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you (Gal. 2:5-6). Likewise, Paul named Hymenaeus and Alexander as "having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck" (1 Tim. 1:19-20). Furthermore, Paul warned of Demas who had forsaken him ("having loved this present world"), and of Alexander the coppersmith who had done him much evil (2 Tim. 4:10,14). Paul further warned: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom.

16:17). When men reject the gospel of Christ, they judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46).

A strong pulpit will reprove, rebuke, and exhort. All of this must be done in love (Eph. 4:15). Some evidently think their job as the local evangelist is to always attack! Any time they walk into the pulpit it becomes a battleground from which they fire at brethren. Every article they print in the weekly bulletin seems to be aimed at error they perceive being taught by brethren. Such is not producing a strong pulpit today. Paul warned: "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (Gal. 5:15). Being contemptible in spirit is not Christ-like (Rom. 8:9). Being caustic in presenting the truth will not edify the church (1 Cor. 14:26).

To some, speaking the truth in love means being soft, not presenting subjects of controversy, or bringing up issues among brethren. A strong pulpit will not keep back anything "profitable" (Acts 20:20). It will warn of dangers that will lead souls away from Jesus (John 6:66). The business of the preacher is to help people go to heaven. The preachers in the early church first convicted men of sin (Acts 2:36-37), then they preached "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) which included a "balance" of God's will for man. There are some who will not preach specific subjects because they know it will upset some in the audience. By doing so, they must avoid certain passages of scripture regarding that particular subject. For example, we must preach on the home. We should preach about the responsibility of each family member, as well as the love that should characterize the marriage. However, if the marriage is "unscriptural," God does not sanction such a marriage in the first place. Therefore, we must preach the truth regarding divorce and remarriage according to God's will (Matt. 19:3-9). We must preach on the subject of worship, for God seeks men to worship him (John 4:23). However, we must point out that men who bring in "innovations" (acts not authorized) are worshipping the Lord in vain (Matt. 15:8-9). Some desire that the preacher always be positive (according to their own definition of the word). Such is not always possible if we desire to please God (2 Tim. 4:2). When we preach "all the counsel of God" some are not going to like it. Unfortunately, when preachers preach "all the counsel of God" there are those who will want to get rid of that preacher and find one whom they believe will preach what they want to hear. Paul warned: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

If the brethren become upset because the word is preached (just as it reads), then the preacher should not fret, but rejoice that he was "counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41). A word of caution! A strong pulpit does not mean being offensive just for the "enjoyment" of upsetting brethren.

HOW A STRONG PULPIT CONTRIBUTES TO GROWTH

First, it will generate numerical growth. The Lord's church began (in its established state) with the preached message of God's word being heard and obeyed (Acts 2:22-47). The result of that proclamation was: "and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). Although there was resistance to the presentation of God's word (Acts 4:18), the early church grew (in number) because the disciples "spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). The Lord's church grew in number wherever the word of God was preached.

"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

"Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand" (Acts 4:4).

"And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5).

Second, it will produce spiritual growth. The early church continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine (Acts 2:42). The apostle's doctrine was to be followed because they (apostles) were guided by the Holy Spirit to reveal all the truth (John 16:13). Jesus said it is truth that makes men free (John 8:32). That truth is God's truth (John 17:17). When the pure gospel of Christ is presented in love (Eph. 4:15), and received in obedient hearts (Jas. 1:21-22), it will bring forth fruit (Matt. 13:23; 1 Cor. 3:6). Peter states: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). Only those "in Christ" can grow (John 15:5). However, spiritual growth does not come automatically. Peter also says: "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). This passage is often ascribed to as being [only] for new converts. However, one will observe that the text is calling on Christians (new converts as

well as those more mature) to desire the nourishment from God's word just as a baby craves its mother's milk. Each individual who wants to grow spiritually must be willing to accept the milk and meat of the word (Heb. 5:12-14) that furnishes us unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). A strong pulpit, therefore, will "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2) in order for this spiritual growth to occur. But remember, a strong pulpit cannot bring the desired results by itself. The worshipper must also be a doer of God's word. A failure to do so will prohibit growth.

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed (Jas. 1:21-25).

Third, a strong pulpit that contributes to church growth brings honor and glory to God (Eph. 3:21). As heralds of the gospel, we must glorify God. Never seek to impress man. One cannot be a "hireling" and glorify God (John 10:12-13). A hireling is one who preaches to please himself and others. He wants to be accepted, no matter the cost. All that we do should be done to God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31). Like the apostle Paul, we too should "preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5). A strong pulpit will glorify "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). When the pulpit proclaims Christ, it is pointing men to the Savior (Acts 4:12). Why should any preacher desire to glorify himself? The Prophet Jeremiah wrote: "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). What a privilege and blessing it is to preach Christ, showing lost men the only way to God (John 14:6). "But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts" (1 Thess. 2:4). Brethren, what are we doing with Christ's gospel? Can God trust us with His gospel? Does the gospel we preach glorify God and His Son Jesus, or do we try to make an impression upon hearts of men by pointing to ourselves? I have been told that some convert the lost to themselves and not to Christ. When this happens, the member will usually stop attending

worship when the preacher moves to another location. Therefore, a strong pulpit will glorify the one whom the Holy Spirit came to glorify—Christ (John 16:14).

Finally, a strong pulpit will be instrumental in helping folks go to heaven. The main objective of every gospel preacher should be the same as Christ's—"to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). God's only Son was a preacher. Jesus came to earth to die that men could go to heaven. Yet, the only way lost men can go to heaven is by learning the preaching of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18). Man is saved by grace (Eph. 2:8-9), but it is grace that gives us God's word (Acts 20:32). Paul tells us what grace does for us: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:11-12). It is through a strong pulpit that men learn "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Preaching the gospel of grace shows the way of salvation clearly, and reveals how men are to live. To please God, men must live righteous and godly lives. God cannot save without preaching. Not all preaching will save (Prov. 14:12). Not all preachers will preach the truth (Gal. 1:6-9). But the only way men can go to heaven is by doing God's will (Matt. 7:21). This is why today (and always) every congregation needs and deserves a strong pulpit. "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

LEADERSHIP

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The leadership of any organization, business, school, government or church unquestionably exerts a profound influence upon the entire institution. Think for a moment about the far-reaching impact being exerted on the national consciousness by our political leaders. An entire civilization is shaped and molded by those who are in positions of leadership and authority—for better or for worse.

The book of Kings demonstrates this principle. The central theme of the book of Kings is that as the king goes, so goes the nation. As the king's relationship with God goes, so goes the condition of the country. The inspired writer of Kings consistently measures each monarch on the basis of the simple criterion—how did the king conduct himself in the sight of God. That one all-consuming key consideration is all that ultimately matters in the history of a nation. If the leadership is out of harmony with God's will, the nation will inevitably suffer pervasive negative consequences.

Many Old Testament verses show the link between leadership and success. Listen to Psalm 33:16-18:

No king is saved by the multitude of an army: a mighty man is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a vain hope for safety; neither shall it deliver any by its great strength. Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy.

Mercy and truth preserve the king, and by lovingkindness he upholds his throne (Prov. 20:28).

Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning! Blessed art you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles, and your princes feast at the proper time—for strength and not for drunkenness! (Eccl. 10:16-17).

Before Israel ever clamored for a king, God predicted their desire and warned what would happen if the king did not remain loyal and linked to God (Deut. 17:14-20; 1 Sam. 8:10-18).

THE PRESSING NEED FOR CAPABLE LEADERSHIP

Churches of Christ are experiencing difficult times. The church in America is in a state of crisis. A leftist element has introduced sweeping changes into the church of our Lord. They have initiated a widespread apostasy. Perhaps preachers are the primary conduit through which this subversion is taking place. But the fact will remain strikingly evident in eternity that the ultimate responsibility will rest with the elders. God has charged the elders with the awesome responsibility of monitoring the spiritual condition of the local church and seeing to it that the church remains faithful. They have been given the crucial task of protecting the flock from the wolves. If ever there was a time in recent history when immediate and critical attention needs to be given to developing solid leadership in the local congregation, that time is now!

A wealth of material is given in the New Testament pertaining to the work and qualifications of elders (Acts 20:17-35; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 5:17-20; Tit. 1:5-9; Heb. 13:7,17; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Likewise, the Old Testament pinpoints leadership qualities by introducing us to a myriad of men who functioned as leaders. Let us spend a few minutes examining the attributes of some of the great leaders of the past.

Leadership Qualities of Joshua

We are first introduced to Joshua in Exodus 17 when he is about 45 years old. Fresh out of Egypt, he commands the troops in their skirmish with the Amalekites. We next catch a glimpse of him at the base of Mt. Sinai awaiting the return of Moses from his encounter with God where he received the Ten Commandments. Many of the people are back in camp partying and indulging their fleshly appetites, but Joshua's focus lay elsewhere. He was busy cultivating his spiritual appetite (Ex. 32:17). In the next chapter, he is given the honored job of remaining at the pre-tabernacle tent that was specially constructed to be the location where God's presence would descend in the form of a cloudy pillar in order to communicate directly with Moses (Ex. 33:11).

Next we see the Israelites arriving at the southern-most boundary of the Promised Land where a reconnaissance team is formed to investigate Palestinian land conditions. One leading individual from each of the 12 tribes was selected. From the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea was selected. His name meant "salvation," but Moses prefixes an abbreviated form of the divine name making it "Joshua," which means "Jehovah is salvation" (Num. 13:16). When the spies returned and issued a faithless report, Joshua was one of the ones that tore his clothes and urged the nation to refrain from rebelling against God (Num. 14:6-9). When God pronounced judgment upon the disobedient and banned them from the Promised Land, He specifically named Joshua and Caleb as the exceptions to that pronouncement (Num. 14:30). Joshua's leadership ability is clearly seen in his tremendous concern for the people and his high regard for the will of God. He literally risked his own neck when he tried to stop the people from disobeying God.

Up to this point, we see in Joshua a man who, from his youth, dedicated himself to the work of God. He was excited about what God was doing among His people and he wanted to be right in the middle of things. He was active in the things of God and willing to stand with the minority in order to remain on the Lord's side. His focus and passion in life was to please God and to attempt to get others to do the same. He was able to take orders, to be submissive to authority—which showed him to be an humble man, not prideful, not out for himself. Instead, he was genuinely concerned with spiritual things and the spiritual condition of those around him. As a result, he received an official commissioning from God through Moses (Num. 27:18-23). God will use in His service those who demonstrate the concern and devotion necessary.

As the forty year period of desert meandering drew to a close, God paid Joshua a wonderful tribute when He said that Joshua had followed God "whole-heartedly" (Num. 32:12). Here we see a critical leadership characteristic—the determination to be consistent and persistent in following God (cf. Luke 9:62; 17:32). Then God gave Joshua more leadership responsibility when He placed Joshua and Eleazer the priest over the job of assigning tribal land allotments (Num. 34:17). God uses those who *prepare* themselves to meet the challenges that will come. Preparation is critical.

Again God pinpointed aspects of leadership when He identified Joshua as the associate or assistant of Moses and told Moses to "encourage him" (Deut. 1:38). Leaders in the church and potential leaders need encouragement and support. God also stated that Joshua would "cause" the people to inherit the land of Canaan (Deut. 1:38; 3:28). That means that leaders have a tremendous influence over God's people. If elders will obey God and follow God devotedly before the people, they will have a profound impact on the people and actually facilitate their obedience.

Not long before he was to take over the reins of the nation, Joshua was reaffirmed before the people and encouraged by God (Deut. 31:1-8, 14, 23). Before Moses' death and his official succession of Moses (Deut. 34:9), Joshua participated with Moses in instructing the people (Deut. 32:44). His leadership qualities now begin to come into clear view. We move into the book of Joshua and we see numerous leadership qualities to be emulated by God's leaders today.

On the day of his official commissioning by God in Joshua chapter one, he was issued four admonitions: (1) three times he was told to be strong and courageous (1:6, 7, 9); (2) do not be afraid (1:9; cf., 8:1; 10:8, 25; 11:6); (3) do not be discouraged (1:9; cf., 8:1); and (4) study the Bible and do not deviate from it (1:7-8). Here is sage counsel from the God of the universe to leaders who embark upon the great task of leading God's people to conquer the obstacles that lie between us and the promised land of Heaven!

As we proceed through the book of Joshua, we see a model of great leadership. We see the importance of being a *planner* and anticipating potential obstacles to the work of the church (2:1ff; 7:2). We see the essentiality of deep *faith* and confidence in God (2:24; 10:12-14). We see the importance of the quality of being a *fighter* and possessing a spirit of militancy (6:8). We see the careful attention that is to be given to being meticulous in *obeying* the details of God's instructions (6:10;

10:40; 11:9,12,15,23; 15:13; 17:4). Joshua is a model of what it means to be an *initiator*. For example, he chided the people and urged them to proceed with the task of land disposition (e.g., 18:3).

We also see in Joshua the attribute of being *investigative*. A leader must be careful to check things out, not jump to premature conclusions or be unduly influenced by hearsay (e.g., 7:16ff). He must also be a *disciplinarian*, willing to take on the unpleasant tasks—the distasteful even intimidating tasks—that must be pressed and brought to a conclusion (7:19,24-25; 10:28; cf., Ezra 9-10; Acts 5:1-10; 1 Cor. 5).

A leader must be a *worshipful* person—a person who naturally worships and communes with God and urges others to do the same (8:30-31). People are able to see that he possesses and demonstrates a familiarity and an intimate acquaintance with God. He leads the people in adoration and praise offered to the Father. He is also a *teacher*—an instructor of the congregation—with the accompanying zeal to urge members to obey God. Joshua made a copy of the law in the presence of the nation and then personally read it to the people (8:32-35). He wanted them to be an informed people—alert and aware.

A leader must be a *positive*, upbeat person. He must encourage members and uplift them by his supportive attitude. Joshua complimented the transjordanic tribal groups for their commitment to the cause (22:1ff). He enthusiastically admonished and urged the people to render obedience with all their heart and soul (22:5).

Joshua's farewell address to the nation is a fitting summary of leadership attributes. He stood before the nation an old man. He had so conducted himself that he could stand before them without hypocrisy, having set a good example by the life that he had lived before them ("of good behavior"—1 Tim. 3:2). Here was this seasoned, devout, aged man of God who had faithfully discharged his duties as a leader. He had been through so much—from his youth in Egypt, his participation in the crossing of the Red Sea at the Exodus, his experience at Mt. Sinai, his role as a spy in the Promised Land, his endurance of the forty years of desert wandering, his succession of Moses, and his participation in the conquest of the land. Now he stands before the nation to give them his final admonition as a great leader of God's people.

What does he say? First, he recounts their history to them—from Abraham right down to the present time (24:2-13). He then places before them an urgent challenge about which they must be decisive and definitive. He declares that what they ought to do is to serve the Lord

24:14). However, they do have the alternative option—to serve false gods. But he announces in no uncertain terms that he and his house would serve the Lord (24:15). Leaders cannot force people to be faithful. They cannot coerce people to follow God and His word.

What can a leader do? He can be a planner and demonstrate deep faith; he can be a fighter and obedient himself; he can take the initiative; he can be investigative and a disciplinarian; he can be worshipful; he can be a teacher of the people and positive in his interactions with them. These leadership qualities certainly served Joshua well in his capacity before God. They will surely aid leaders today in fulfilling their responsibilities.

Leadership Qualities of Nehemiah

With the fall of the mighty Babylonian Empire came the ascendancy of Persia in the world. Persian kings issued decrees allowing conquered peoples to return to their ancestral homelands to reinstitute their culture and religion. Three groups of Jewish exiles took advantage of this Persian permission, with Nehemiah participating in the third. Amid trying times and difficult circumstances, this man of God demonstrated exceptional leadership skills.

First, he showed deep concern for other people (1:2,6,10; 5:19). He was concerned about their condition and he wanted them to be cared for. A person simply cannot be a genuine elder in the Lord's church and not have a real concern for people.

Second, Nehemiah was deeply religious himself. He was a spiritual giant. His greatest interest was in the religious and spiritual condition of the nation. He possessed a burning desire to have God's religion reinstated. He wanted the walls and the gates of Jerusalem rebuilt—a necessary prelude to reestablishing temple worship. He was a man of deep faith and conviction (e.g., 4:20).

Third, Nehemiah was a humble man who demonstrated a penitent heart and a willingness to open up and confess to God (1:5-7). He desperately wanted to be right with God. He cared what God thought about him and those under his leadership. He wanted to have God's approval. He was not too proud to bow before God and admit his failings. He knew that above all things, the leaders of God's people must be in close link and spiritual communion with God.

Fourth, Nehemiah was so tender and humble that he could cry—shed tears—when the occasion called for it (1:4). Several years ago, a book made the bestseller list entitled *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche*. It made its claims based on food and clothes—not God's assessment of things. But the Bible teaches that "real men" can cry. Nehemiah was not so arrogant or self-sufficient that he could not be touched and moved to tears by tragic spiritual conditions.

Fifth, Nehemiah was a prayerful man (1:4; 2:4; 6:9). He did not make decisions without turning first to God and pleading for God to give Him insight and wisdom. He made direct appeals to God as if God was a friend who was near to him (4:4-5; 5:19; 6:14; 13:14,22,29,31). The line of communication between Nehemiah and God was wide open and Nehemiah resorted to that link repeatedly. He understood the meaning of "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

Sixth, Nehemiah gave all credit to God. He understood that he was merely a tool in the hand of God and that he did nothing for which he could boast or take credit (2:18,20; 4:15,20; 5:15; 6:16). Elders must understand that they have no reason to think they are somebody. They are only useful to God if they realize they are merely pawns to do God's bidding. When they lose that perspective and that attitude, they become a liability to the cause of Christ (cf., 2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Seventh, Nehemiah was resourceful and aggressive. He knew when to take the initiative (2:7-9,13ff; 5:17). He knew how to motivate and mobilize the people to rise to their responsibilities (2:18; 4:6,14; 5:12-13). An elder must keep the work of the Lord and Christian responsibility before the people. He must challenge them to rise to the occasion.

Eighth, Nehemiah was able to overcome his fear and muster courage to take and stand and promote a righteous cause (2:2; 6:9,19). Elders will face many intimidating circumstances and people. The inclination will be to back off and avoid confrontation and action. But elders must not allow their natural fear and reluctance to prevent them from doing what must be done. A literal shepherd is worth very little to the sheep if he allows his fear of the wolf to cause him to avoid confrontation.

Ninth, when Nehemiah faced opposition—as leaders will—he was able to handle it gracefully, firmly and biblically (2:20). When he faced ridicule and insults, he turned it over to God and went ahead and did what he could do to cope (4:4,9). Not only did he have to deal with

opposition from outside of God's people, he even faced conspiratorial activity from the inside (6:17). Some of the opposition was due to family relations (3:4,29-30; 6:18; 7:10). Efforts were made to intimidate and bully him (6:14,19). An elder cannot abandon his post at such times and leave the sheep vulnerable to such forces. He must take the heat and endure the pressure for the good of Christ's church.

Tenth, Nehemiah was a hard worker (4:23; 5:16). He was industrious, persistent, determined and confident in the application of himself to his tasks. He was sacrificial in his willingness to expend himself to do the work. A leader cannot be lazy (Matt. 25:26). He has to be willing to spend himself in the work of the lord.

Eleventh, Nehemiah was not rash or impulsive. Rather he was thoughtful and deliberate in planning and preparing to address the issue before him in an effective manner (5:7). The elder must not leap before he looks. He must weigh the situation carefully and make certain that he knows the proper path to pursue.

Next, Nehemiah demonstrated prudence, wisdom and insight in his decision-making. He was clever, alert and vigilant (6:2; 13:13). He was discriminating in his ability to size up opponents (6:12). He was unmoved by diversion and distraction (6:3-4). When it was necessary to respond to his enemies, he did so forthrightly without pretense or subterfuge (6:8).

Nehemiah understood the proper place of wrath. He could become angry for a righteous reason, but he was able to control and channel that anger into appropriate action (5:6ff). No man should be appointed to the eldership that is hot-tempered or prone to "fly off the handle." He must not be "quick-tempered" (Tit. 1:7). Why? Because "the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (Jas. 1:20). A man who cannot control his own spirit has no business ruling over other people (Prov.).

Nehemiah was also a benevolent leader. He was generous in his dealings with others and he demonstrated concern for the less fortunate (5:1-10,14-18; 7:70). An elder must possess a benevolent spirit and an attitude of generosity. He must give of himself and his possessions to advance the work of the Lord.

In addition, Nehemiah was an instructor and teacher of God's word. He verbally pointed people to God's truth—including offering

rebuke and reprimands (5:9; 13:15-18,25-27). An elder must be able and willing to apply Scripture to members and exhort them to comply.

Two additional leadership characteristics modeled by Nehemiah were the fact that he was above personal bias, self-interest and greed (5:14-16,18; 7:2; 13:13). Elders must never use their role to benefit themselves. They must not be perceived by the members as taking advantage of their position. Finally, as with Joshua, Nehemiah was a positive, upbeat leader (8:10). Even in the midst of the trials and tribulations of returning from exile, he was an encourager of others. He offered reassurance and comfort to them.

Leadership Qualities of Abraham

Many other characters of the Old Testament demonstrate leadership attributes. For example, Abraham's leadership shines through in the marvelous assessment articulated by God:

For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him (Gen. 18:19).

Abraham was a leader and a guide of those committed to his charge. He could be counted on to fulfill that responsibility.

Abraham is also pinpointed in Scripture as being exceptional in the magnitude of his faith. It may seem that his faith sagged at times, but even in the case of the Hagar incident, he was acting out of his strong conviction that God would fulfill His promise of an heir. He simply thought that since his wife was beyond the childbearing years, a surrogate mother would have to be enlisted. God had not informed him up to that point that the child would come through Sarah. God had only stated that the child would come from his own body (Gen. 15:4). The narrowing of the promise to include Sarah was not stated until 13 years after the birth of Ishmael when Abraham was 99 years old (Gen. 17:16,19,21). Paul was referring to this approximate time in Abraham's life when he said about him, "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform" (Rom. 4:20-21).

Abrahamic faith is further seen some years later when God instructs him to sacrifice his son (Gen. 22:2). Clearly, Abraham was not

merely "playing along" with God, thinking the whole time that God would not really make him go through with it. Abraham was not thinking that God would stop him at the last minute. Abraham fully intended to comply with God's instruction and execute his son! His faith was so strong that he figured that God would simply raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19)! Elders must have strong faith in God.

Leadership Qualities of Ezra

Then there is Ezra. Here was a man who lived his life as a captive in a foreign country. Yet he spent his time preparing himself for that day when he would return to his homeland and participate as a leader in the restoration movement: "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). Leaders do not just happen! They have to prepare themselves diligently over time to be ready to rise to the occasion and handle the nuts and bolts of leadership. They must have the desire and determination to function in that capacity.

Leadership Qualities of Phinehas

What about Phinehas—the grandson of Aaron? This man was a leader par excellence! We first see him while still fairly young stepping forward at a critical moment in the history of the nation of Israel. The nation was encamped at Shittim where they began engaging in sexual immorality in conjunction with pagan religious ritual. One Israelite was so brazen that he brought a Midianite woman within eyeshot of the assembly on his way to his tent. Phinehas saw the couple, left the assembly and followed them into the tent. He took a spear with him and with one thrust drove the spear through the bodies of both.

This one incident portrays several leadership qualities: deep conviction, a zest for righteousness, courage, initiative, a sense of being responsible for the spiritual condition of others. Hear God's assessment of the conduct of Phinehas: "Phinehas...has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them...he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel" (Num. 25:11,13). Incredible! To have God commend a human being for possessing the same attribute of zeal that God possesses! God was saying that Phinehas was like God in the level of intensity with which he displayed righteous concern for God's people!

This same man was selected to accompany the expedition that was charged with destroying the Midianites (Num. 31). Many years later we see him again after the nation has entered the Promised Land and achieved occupation. The transjordanic tribes were dismissed from any further military service and permitted to return to their tribal homelands beyond the Jordan River. When word filtered back to the main body of Israelites that an alternate worship site had been erected by those tribes, a delegation headed by Phinehas was dispatched from Shiloh to investigate the rumor. When the matter was clarified and found to be innocent and scriptural, Phinehas said,

This day we perceive that the Lord is among us, because you have not committed this treachery against the Lord. Now you have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord (Josh. 22:31).

Phinehas manifested reserve, caution and care when the occasion called for it. He did not "jump the gun" when rumors were flying. He kept his cool and got his facts straight before taking action.

Early in the period of the judges, we again see Phinehas in action as a leader. Terrible things had happened that necessitated making war on the Benjamites. Phinehas was on hand to participate in receiving counsel from God in order to determine the proper course of action (Jud. 20:28). Elders must be men who commune with God's word and present it to the flock as the divine authoritative will. Many additional examples of leadership fill the pages of the Bible.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF LEADERSHIP QUALITIES FOR ELDERS

The New Testament passages that treat the function of elders provide many insights into the leadership skills that are necessary for the job. They speak of the elder possessing faith and conduct that is worthy of emulation (Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 5:3). They speak of the job as requiring *labor*—work, effort (1 Thess. 5:12). They allude to genuine love and tears for people, the need to support the weak (Acts 20:31,35). They spotlight the courage necessary to refrain from running from wolves that arise (Acts 20:31). They speak of ruling, shepherding, overseeing, admonishing and instructing (Acts 20:28; 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Pet. 5:2). They speak of the need to understand that an elder is accountable (Heb. 13:17). They pinpoint motivation and enjoin a lack of ulterior motives—such as the desire for prestige, power, attention or

even money (Acts 20:30; 1 Pet. 5:2-3). Instead, an elder should have a positive, upbeat, eager attitude (1 Pet. 5:2). They indicate that an elder must be able to defend the word of God against those who contradict it, while encouraging and convicting his hearers (Tit. 1:9).

Perhaps the central responsibility of the elder is most clearly identified in the words, "for they watch out for your souls" (Heb. 13:17). To qualify as an elder a man must desire first and foremost to help people get to heaven, to help people to be spiritually safe, to aid them in being faithful. Matters like the selection of new carpet and who is going to mow the grass next summer fade into insignificance when placed next to the critical duty of watching for members' souls. I would be willing to suggest to us that if a man who aspires to the office of an elder does not possess at the very center of his desire a burning passion to nurture people's souls to get them to heaven, then he is unqualified to be an elder and in actuality does not even understand the position.

Permit me to suggest a few specific applications of the leadership characteristics that we've surfaced in this lecture. The elders ought to make their leadership felt in the local congregation by maintaining both public and private contact with the members. For example, they ought to occasionally stand up near the end of the service and commend the sermon to the membership as being God's will and vital for their salvation. They ought to frequently stand before the church and offer explanations as to what is taking place with the work of the church.

They ought to be men who sit down together and map out the future of the church at that place. Where do they expect the church to be in one year, five years, or ten years? What plans do they have for moving the congregation in the right direction in order to discharge the work of the church in the realms of evangelism, benevolence and edification? They ought to set goals and future objectives and then draw the membership into the excitement and challenge of meeting those goals and participating in those objectives. They ought to keep opportunities for service and spiritual growth before the members on a regular basis.

They ought to set in place a consistent, perpetual program of corrective discipline. They ought to be on top of the spiritual condition of every member. They must address problem areas that arise before those problems get out of hand and the member is completely lost. They must constantly monitor the lives of members and families and be ready to counsel and advise. In order for an elder to achieve this critical

responsibility, he must relinquish and delegate all those matters that really ought to be turned over to deacons and other competent members.

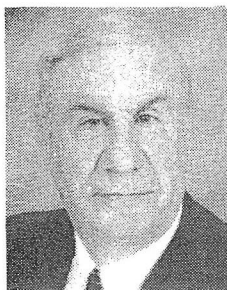
CONCLUSION

God is always looking for men who will rise up and fill the role of leadership among His people. Of all times in the recent history of the church of Christ, we need strong men who will step in and guide the church through the rocky waters that threaten us. In one sense, we are facing a critical shortage of competent leadership in the church. Apostasy via the liberal movement is sweeping over the church. Subversive elements, especially charismatic, smooth-talking preachers, are leading large numbers of people down the primrose pathway to destruction.

Now is the time for men who possess keen insight into the spirit of the age and the nature of the times in which we live. Now is the time for capable, talented, confident men, who know God's word, to step forward and lead faithful churches in the 21st Century. May God bless us to the extent that His promise to ancient Israel may come true for us: "I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer. 3:15).

BETTER SINGING AND SONG LEADING

BURT JONES



Burt Jones is a native of Gadsden, AL. He spent most of his life as an Episcopalian, and has a military and business background. One week after obeying the gospel he began preacher training. He has a BS in Music Education, Jacksonville Univ.; MA in Middle Eastern History, Youngstown State Univ.; and is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He is a former combat officer during the Vietnam era. He is composer of the hymn, "Safe in His Arms"; instructor in four-part video series on music fundamentals, "Singing with Grace," and author of "A Practical Handbook for Singing and Song leading," published by the Firm Foundation Publishing House. He has held singing and gospel meetings in thirty-two states. He has three children.

In the next ten years the problems facing the church will not be with those outside, but will be found within.

If that body becomes corrupt, then everything that we have fought for, that our forefathers lived and died for, will have been in vain, for there will be no world for our children and our grandchildren.

And I ask you to search the Scriptures, to search your hearts and to become active once again, to rise up in the name of Christ and to speak boldly the things that God has said.

Over two thousand times in the Bible this statement is found, "Thus saith the Lord." At one time the church of Christ spoke those words with almost every breath. No longer is that true. We have lost our intense spirit, we have become complacent.

I believe that men and women everywhere who hear or read these things will be touched by truth and that they will preach the word; they will become urgent, they will reprove, rebuke and exhort with all longsuffering, because I have faith in my brethren; have faith in the truth.

My subject is Singing and Song Leaders in Church Growth. I always think of this little story when I think about instrumental music. You remember it: The little boy went to worship with his father. When they left, he said, "Dad, did you give a lot of money?" And his father looked at him and said, "Why, son?" He said, "Because those folks are so poor they can't afford a piano." This actually is what a lot of people think as they think about instrumental music in the church of Christ. It really is not a matter of faith! It is just a matter that they do not have enough money to buy a piano, but humbly beg to disagree. I believe that this is a matter of faith. I hope that when this lesson is over you will think so too.

Today, as has been true for 100 years, there are men within the fellowship of the body of Christ who are raising these questions, who actually say, "There is really nothing very much black or white but everything is relatively grey." What they mean is simply this—that truth is not absolute, that the situation determines almost everything. Brethren, we do not believe this. We believe that far more things are black and white than people like to admit, and that there are only a very few things that are in the grey area. Instrumental music is not a grey area.

This question is not new. In 1858 and/or 1859 Dr. L. L. Pinkerton, a preacher for the church of Christ in Midway, Kentucky, made this statement: "I am the only preacher in Kentucky of our brotherhood who has publicly advocated employing instrumental music in some churches and that the church of Christ in Midway is the only church that has made a decided effort to introduce it."

This man frankly admitted that in 1858 or 1859 one congregation in our brotherhood had advocated introducing instrumental music in worship. So the first thing that we need to understand is that this is not a new issue; this is something very, very old. Even the pettiness that we will notice which some men would use to justify using the instrument or not using it, as they see fit or you see fit, are actually not new at all.

Second, this issue split the body of Christ over a hundred years ago. This resulted in the Christian Church. It is something that is not an educated guess, but men actually split the body over this issue. Notice again, "Division came not all at once, but gradually and surely. By 1875 the break was a reality although not many fully recognized this. It was not until 1906 that the two separate groups were listed in the United States census of religious bodies. Since that time, the body of disciples using instrumental music in worship and supporting the missionary

society have become known generally as the "Christian Churches." Notice, one thought that the scriptures provided an all-sufficient guide in matters of doctrine—worship—morality. The other felt that where the scripture did not specifically forbid a thing, the worshipper was at liberty to use his own judgment and wisdom in the matter.

Too long, men and women of the pew have sat and allowed the preachers and elders the authority to cry out against sin or to bring in sin. It is time that the brethren in the pew sat up and were counted. When you find a preacher going bad, an eldership going bad, somebody quietly folds his hands and says, "What can we do?" Brethren, you can do the very same thing that God has always taught his people. Stand up and be counted! Raise your voice against the error.

Instrumental music was authorized or allowed as worship under the Old Law, but it died when the Law of Moses was abolished at the death of Christ. This is absolutely fundamental to the understanding of many things in religion, but certainly applies to the issue today. Men would like for you to believe that instrumental music is a matter of opinion; it is a matter of expediency, take it or leave it. And yet, the Bible very plainly teaches that instrumental music was a part of worship under Old Testament law.

In 2 Chronicles 5:11-14:

And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place (for all the priests that were present had sanctified themselves, and did not keep their courses; also, the Levites who were the singers, all of them, even Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and their brethren, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them a hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets (11-12).

Now notice what happened:

It came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking Jehovah; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised Jehovah, saying, "For he is good; for his loving kindness endureth for ever," that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of Jehovah, so

that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of Jehovah filled the house of God.

God accepted their worship; God allowed their worship. It involved the singers, it involved all those with instruments of music. As far as the law was concerned, it was authorized.

And he set the Levites in the house of Jehovah with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet; for the commandment was of Jehovah by his prophets (2 Chron. 29:25).

It was commanded! God commanded it; it was an authorized element of Old Testament worship.

And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt-offering upon the altar. And when the burnt-offering began, the song of Jehovah began also, and the trumpets, together with the instruments of David, king of Israel. And all the assembly worshipped and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt-offering was finished (2 Chron. 29:26-28).

Listen to that! All the congregations worshipped! The priests were offering burnt offerings on the altar, the singers were singing, those with the trumpets and harps were playing and yet inspiration says, "they all worshipped." It was a part of worship. We will notice a little bit later, it was not just an aid. These passages show that God Himself allowed it. God blessed it and God's glory filled the house of God where it was done.

But just as surely as it was worship under the law, the Law of Moses died at the cross of Christ. I think it is unthinkable that anybody in the church would deny it, but just to make it logical and so that you can study it, let us read and see Matthew 5:17 and 18, Jesus said:

Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one.

tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law till all things be accomplished

Everything about the life of Christ was to fulfill perfectly the law of God. He was born, he lived and he died under the Law of Moses, the only man to keep it perfectly. In John 17:4 he said, "Father, I have accomplished the work which thou has given me to do." In Matthew 5:17 he said, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill the law." It was to be made full, it was running over with completion, nothing left out. At his death, he said, "It is finished" (John 19:38). Therefore, what Jesus came to do, Jesus did. He came to fulfill the law, the law was fulfilled. It was taken out of the way; it was nailed to the cross.

If there is a repetition of what was found under the old, restated in the new, we do not keep it today because it is in the old; the old has been completely done away. We live under the new and whatever God has commanded us to do is done because it is found in the new by the authority of Christ and the apostles.

We live under a new law, a new covenant or testament. In Matthew 26:28, Jesus said as he instituted the Lord's supper: "This is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins." In Matthew 17:5, God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."

How many times have you heard your preacher say that Jesus has all the authority that Moses had and all that he did not have? He has all the authority that David had and all that he did not have. Jesus has all authority. And so, everything under the law is gone once and forever.

Then again, 2 John 9 (and brethren, this is a crucial passage). Second John 9 says, "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son." No wonder liberals and sectarians say that this has no application to all the teaching of Christ. Do you know the reason they want to pervert it? It is because it stops them cold in their tracks. If they can get around 2 John 9 they are really running. But they cannot pass. Second John 1 refers to the fact that Jesus Christ is the authority; He is the power and the authority of Almighty God. If it is not authorized by Christ, it is not allowed in any way whatsoever.

Every man who wants to justify instrumental music finds himself face to face with three more passages in the New Testament. He finds himself face to face with Galatians 1:6-9 where the apostle Paul says:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you in the grace of Christ unto a different gospel: which is not another gospel: only there are some that trouble you [and bless your heart, they do trouble us] and would pervert the gospel of Christ. [And they are perverting it.]

And he said:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

To practice instrumental music in worship today is to go beyond the teaching of Christ. I have shown the law and all that was under the law stopped at the cross of Jesus Christ. First, it goes beyond the doctrine of Jesus Christ. It goes beyond the teaching of Christ. It goes beyond His authority. Notice what he said, Matthew 28:18: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." He commissioned the apostles to preach the gospel. He taught the children of God to teach the very same thing that they had taught. He pronounced a curse in Galatians 1 on the man that taught anything different. He plainly pointed out in these passages such as John 14:26, that the apostles would be guided into all truth, that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance every thing that Christ had said. In John 16:13 this is repeated. "When the Holy Spirit comes, he will guide you into all the truth." So what do you have? You have the promise of Jesus himself that the Holy Spirit would, through the apostles, bring to their remembrance everything that He (Christ) had said. They would further be guided into all the truth and He would teach them all things. He did not teach them about instrumental music. And so, instrumental music is beyond the authority of Christ; it is beyond the things that the Holy Spirit brought to their remembrance. It is beyond that which He guided them into and it is beyond the teachings of the Spirit. The Bible says in 2 Peter 1:3 that God has given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness; he did not allow instrumental music, therefore, instrumental music does not pertain to life and godliness. Brethren, this could not possibly be plainer, even for a ten-year-old child. They could sit down and understand these passages and learn very, very quickly. Jesus said in Matthew 16:19 that "Whatsoever you shall bind on earth will have already been bound in heaven." But He did not bind this on earth; therefore, it was not a part of

that which God had previously bound in heaven. These things are so simple that I learned them the first year that I started preaching. So it goes beyond the authority of Jesus Christ and beyond the principle of faith.

The Bible very definitely teaches that a life of faith is a life that rests on explicit authority. I heard a gospel preacher the other day, that knows the truth on instrumental music say, "Not everything that we do has to be authorized." I said, "If it isn't, you better quit doing it." What he failed to see was the fact that God can authorize generally. It has to either be authorized generally or specifically or it is not authorized at all. Somebody says, "You mean it has to be authorized if I go over to the power company and work?" Right. What is the authority for it? If it is an honorable place to work, then a man is authorized to do it because the Bible says that whatever your hand find to do, do it with all your might. It is authorized. It is a command of God. Sometimes we feel that it is about the only way we can authorize it! It is honorable. It does not mean we like it. There are a lot of those jobs we do that we do not like, but they are authorized: everything we do; everything we believe; everything we teach. Period!

When you come to the New Testament, you find numerous cases where God has specifically authorized that which He wants done. Even on baptism, we have no problem—yet. But it will come. God specified that it was to be a penitent believer. We fought manmade churches. We fought infant Baptist a hundred years ago and we might have to fight our brethren over it again. But the point is this, God has authorized baptism in water, a burial. You cannot cover him up with a sheet, you cannot sprinkle dirt on him. Nothing else but burial in water suffices. And that is why when God specified sing, nothing else will do. It violates the specific command and authority of Christ.

I have listed every passage in the New Testament that involves singing:

Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26: And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Acts 16:25: But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns unto God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Romans 15:9: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for her mercy; as it is written, Therefore will I give praise unto thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.

First Corinthians 14:15: What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

Ephesians 5:18-19: And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit; speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.

Colossians 3:16: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God.

Hebrews 2:12: Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I sing thy praise.

Hebrews 13:15: Through him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to his name.

Lips, not pianos, make confession to His name.

And finally, James 5:13: "Is any among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise."

Now, that is all the New Testament says about singing. It involves the kind of songs, the attitude, the spirit, the manner, the object. It involves everything that God wanted in it. It automatically excludes everything that God did not want included. There is not a word of authority for an instrument in it in any shape or form. This is all that God says in the New Testament about singing. This is exactly what we practice in worship. When a man says that he can do something else, he is under obligation from God to prove it.

First, they say it was used in the Old Testament. This falls of its own weight because we do not live under the Old Testament, and we do not live by the Old Testament laws, and to do so would violate the law of Christ. In Galatians 5:4, "Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law, ye are fallen away from grace." Every time a man refers to the Old Testament to justify instrumental music, he does the very two things that we affirm. He first shows that there has to be some authority for it, and secondly, it is not in the New Testament. And, brethren, that is all we affirm that there has got to be authority for it, but it is not found in the New Testament. There are many things under the Old Testament that nobody would allow today, or at least in some areas. started to say "polygamy," but it has become where today men want two or three, or more, wives. So you cannot use that argument anymore. Pretty soon they will be trying to defend that as well. But the truth of the matter is that whatever we find under the Old Law is gone forever. Some men say, "Well, it is used in heaven." This is pure guess-work because the description of heaven is highly figurative. It shows simply the relationship of the redeemed of God to the pleasure and joy of heaven. If that argument is worth anything, it would be worth too much, for you find that bowls of incense and horses tramping around heaven.

Then again, "The New Testament does not forbid it." It does! Now listen to this argument well. Some of our folks, I guess, would defend taking cocaine for pleasure. I do not know. I have not heard them yet, but that does not mean that they would not do it. The Bible forbids taking cocaine for pleasure just like any other of the hallucinatory drugs even though it nowhere says, "Thou shall not take cocaine." But I say with all the power of my being, that the New Testament forbids it. It forbids it with every scripture that tells us how to live and on the ground that your body is a temple of God. The Bible teaches that the child of God needs every faculty he has and anything that is that dangerous and that deceptive is forbidden indirectly. There was a time when you could have said that the New Testament forbids drinking, but now folks have outsmarted us preachers. Someone says, "Where in the word of God does it say that you can't drink moonshine or beer?" (As if some new revelation has come along.) If God had proved directly, "Thou shalt not drink beer," some smart aleck would say, "Where is the one that says wine?" and off we would be again. It is the same old problem, whether people want to recognize the authority of God or whether they do not.

God did not say, "Thou shalt not put cake and ice cream on the Lord's table," but I say that it is forbidden, for God did authorize what should be done. He authorized fruit of the vine and he authorized bread—period. It is not enough to say that we believe in the Lord's

supper, but we will take the cake and ice cream too. The man that takes the cake and ice cream does not believe in the passages that authorize bread and fruit of the vine only. Those are just the facts. Sometimes people say that the New Testament does not forbid it. It does forbid it and God does not have to say it like Burt Jones in order for it to have been said.

Then there are those who say it is just an aid. It never has been. It was authorized worship under the old law. If it is simply an expedient, then who changed it from authorized worship to expedience, and by whose authority? It has not been changed in the mind of God. You are never going to get those folks where they cannot make an argument. It is like the old drinker, if you prove to him it is wrong to get drunk, he will say, "Well, where does it say it's wrong to drink beer?" If you prove that to him he says, "Well where does it say it's wrong to drink wine?" And on and on you go. They do not recognize the specific authority of God. It is not just an aid. The God of heaven says to preach the gospel. There are chalkboards. I can use that to expedite preaching the gospel, but if that board changed one jot or tittle of the gospel, it would be wrong. I can use a microphone, but, if by some way of mechanics, it changed the truth of the gospel of Christ it would not be an aid, but an addition. It changes the basic nature. God said "sing." He did not say sing and play." And anything that adds another element changes basically what God has bidden. You can put the Lord's supper on this table two feet deep, but add another element, you are wrong. That is the way God's authority stacks up. There are two kinds of music. God specified but one. If instruments are part of worship, which one will you choose?

Then there is an argument that is much like this. People say, "It is just like lights and baptisteries and meeting houses and pitch pipes and song books." If it is, you are going to have to get rid of them. But it is not. A New Testament helps to teach the word of God. A song book helps us to sing. It does not change the essential nature of singing. It does not add another element as would playing. If it did, brethren, it would be wrong. It is the same old argument in just another disguise. If baptisteries change the command to baptize, the baptisteries would be wrong. Baptize means one thing, it means to plunge, to dip or to immerse, which is a one-time action. You cannot get poured or sprinkled out of it unless you have a dictionary. You cannot get it out of the truth of God. The same things are true about baptisteries, lights, pitch pipes and songbooks.

I believe with all of my heart that we have shown the case to be true that instrumental music violates the authority of Christ, and therefore

is unauthorized worship for the children of God. I believe that our brethren believe this, and will believe it stronger in the future. And therefore, we cannot extend our fellowship to include those who have searched the scriptures and have come to the opposite conclusion. We are not denying that some of them are good people and that some of them are friends of ours, but we are humbly saying that God Almighty will not allow us to fellowship that which split the body of Christ, which is unauthorized and throughout Bible history has always been the reason why God simply condemned the worshipper for offering unauthorized worship. And for that reason, we will not extend our fellowship to include those who practice it or teach it or even who believe it to be true. May God help us to study these issues with an open mind and open Bible.

MAINTAINING UNITY

WILLIAM WOODSON



William Woodson, a native of Jasper, AL, was baptized by Gus Nichols in 1950. William taught Bible and related studies at FHU ('59-'82) and at DLU ('82-'96). After his retirement in 1996 he moved to Lawrenceburg, TN, where his two daughters live. He began preaching in 1950 and has done local work in TN and MS and has conducted gospel meetings in numerous states. After 14 years with the Granny White church in Nashville, he retired from local work in 1995. He conducts meetings, does lectures and special studies, and writes regularly for the *Spiritual Sword*. He has written three books and co-authored one. He and Jeanne (Casey) have three children and five grandchildren. Hobbies include reading, woodworking, fishing, and canoeing. "Retirement is proving to be a delightful experience; it is recommended for all who qualify for it."

Few matters contribute more to its growth than unity in the local congregation; few matters hinder growth more than tensions and division in the local work! Maintaining unity is essential to the health and vigor of the church and contributes to its present and continuing growth. "Maintaining Unity" is vitally related to the theme of "Practical Studies in Church Growth."

EXEGESIS

We begin with an exegesis of a well known passage:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly

joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Cor. 1:10.)

1. Various problems troubled the Corinthian church: division (1:10-16; 3:3; 11:13; II Cor. 12:20-21; 13:9); moral failures (5:1-13; 6:9-20); members indicting brethren before the pagan court (6:1-8); and questions concerning various difficulties before the church (7:1; 8:1; 11:3, 20; 12:1). Nevertheless, Paul exhorted them always to abound in the work of the Lord (15:58).

2. The ideal of what the church once was and what it should be again was presented in I Cor. 1:1-9.

Under the authority of Christ (1:1) Paul did not seek to dominate them but to be their fellow helper in joyous service (2 Cor. 1:24) and to encourage their perfection¹ (II Cor. 13:9). They were sanctified in Christ and called "saints" (I Cor. 1:2; 6:11). They called on the name the Lord (1:2). In obeying the gospel (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 4:15) they came to know the grace of God (1:4). They were enriched in all utterance² and knowledge³ (1:5)⁴. God's testimony was confirmed by miracles authenticating the message preached (1:6⁵; Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4). The church lacked no spiritual gift (1:7; 12:1-14:40), and was equipped to remain faithful to Christ until his coming (1:7-8; cf. 11:26). God, who is faithful, had called them into "the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1:9). What the church should be had been ignored or laid aside by some at Corinth; the church had to be restored to its true nature in order to please God.

3. Instruction for restoring the church to proper standing is revealed in I Cor. 1:10. Under authoritative instruction resting on the name of Christ, the whole church was to obey three obligatory stipulations--one negative, two positive in nature.

a. All must speak "the same thing."⁶ Those who were departing from this united proclamation must return to speaking the truth. All heard the same gospel (Acts 18:8; I Cor. 1:6-7; 4:15; 15:1-4); if all had continued therein unity would have continued; but some had refused. In correction, all were to speak the same thing, i.e., the gospel, the "one faith" (Eph. 4:5)!

b. No "divisions"⁷ are permitted. The Greek term translated "divisions" refers to a faction or split within the church itself. At the time, a group-separated-from-and-not-meeting-with-the-church division was not

present. Some, however, had formed cliques or groups with one or more self-chosen items of faith or conduct which set them apart from the rest of the church. Such cliques lead to division with separate groups meeting in separate places. Such "division" is prohibited!

c. The church must "be perfectly joined together."⁸ This requirement that the church "be perfectly joined together" translates a periphrastic perfect passive subjunctive with the verb "to be" and the participle "having been joined together," and means "You are to come to be and continue to be perfectly joined together."⁹ Faction(s) must be removed; differing individuals must come together; strife must end!

The church must unite in "the same mind" and "the same judgment." (1) "**mind**" is "a particular way of thinking and judging" (Thayer, p. 429), that is, the "mind, attitude, way of thinking as the sum total of the whole mental and moral state of being," specifically, "the Christian attitude or way of thinking" (Arndt-Gingrich, pp. 546, 547). (2) "**Judgment**"¹⁰ *gnome* is "that which is thought or known, one's mind; view, judgment, opinion: 1 Cor. 1:10" (Thayer, p. 119), i.e., "purpose, intention, mind 1 Cor. 1:10" (Arndt-Gingrich, p. 162).

Brethren at Corinth were to be united in their thinking concerning the instruction they had received in the gospel. When decisions were made concerning the church, the group was to be united. Select individuals or sub-groups of members were not to split off and crystalize their views in contradiction to the mind and will of the group. This is the unity which Paul enjoined. To achieve such understanding and unity of action, they must remember they are under the authority of Christ and his inspired word, and must form their attitudes, their thinking, and their actions in keeping with this revealed will.

EXPLANATORY PASSAGES

In addition to the verse we have studied in some detail, there are other passages which supply additional insights concerning the unity of God's people. We note briefly the following selected verses.

Romans 15:5-9. Following the discussion of eating or not eating meat (14:1-23), several principles are noteworthy: (1) Unity is granted of God in the same way that salvation was granted to the Jews (Acts 5:31) and the Gentiles (Acts 11:18), i.e., by the preaching of the truth and the obedience to it by those who are so blessed; (2) By the instruction of

Scripture God produces in his people the patience ("steadfastness" margin ASV) and consolation ("comfort" ASV) which enable them to remain strong and to encourage others to submit to God's will; (3) God's people are to be "like-minded"¹¹ ("of the same mind" (ASV); (4) This likemindness is according to¹² the will of Christ; (5) The brethren are to be "of one mind"¹³ and "one mouth"; (6) They are to thereby glorify God together; and, (7) They are to receive one another as Christ has received each of them.

Philippians 2:2-3. The following principles are noted from these verses: (1) God's people are to stand fast in one spirit and with one mind are to strive together for the faith of the gospel, 1:27; (2) In 2:1 ff.: "The Apostle here appeals to the Philippians, by all their deepest experiences as Christians, and all their noblest impulses as men, to preserve peace and concord."¹⁴ (3) They are to be "likeminded,"¹⁵ be of one accord, and of one mind;" (4) Strife and seeking for personal glory¹⁶ are to have no place among them; and, (5) they are to esteem others better than themselves.

John 17:20-21.¹⁷ The verses present these thoughts: (1) This unity strives for the ideal of unity present between the Father and the Son. Can one imagine the Father being at odds with the Son; the Son refusing to be united with the Father? (2) In these verses, Christ prayed for those who would be obedient to him through the word of God; (3) Those who are one, are one because they are united with the Father and the Son--not because of submission to human decrees and agendas; (4) The world can and will know and be blessed by the unity of God's people.

Titus 3:10-11. These verses set forth these principles: (1) "Heretic" or "factious man" (ASV) translates *hairetikon* from the verb *haireo*, to take for one's self, to choose, prefer," Thayer, p. 16. The noun *hairesis* is a "chosen opinion. tenet; according to the context, an opinion [or tenet of faith, WWJ] varying from the true exposition of the Christian faith (*heresy*)," *Ibid*. The heretic, factious man, has chosen as his own a tenet of belief which is perverted,¹⁸ which departs from, which varies from the true exposition of the faith. (2) Such an individual is "subverted"¹⁹ ["perverted" (ASV)], is sinning,²⁰ and is self condemned.²¹

Other verses might well be considered, but these must suffice for the present study. The relevance of several of these principles will be noted in the later studies of this topic.

EXAMPLES TO CONSIDER

It is instructive to consider how brethren in earlier times made application of these verses and others when they dealt with certain problems which arose. Their examples to be sure, are only illustrative, but they are helpful when considering the way such passages as we have noted were applied. Three examples must suffice.

Aylett Rains. After his immersion in 1828, Rains was asked to preach at a meeting of the Mahoning Association in August. Prior to his immersion Rains had been a Universalist preacher. Because of this, some objected to his preaching. Some wanted to disfellowship Rains, others wanted to accept him; tensions were high.

Alexander Campbell stated what was proposed and accepted: "Some of us made a proposition that if these peculiar opinions were held as PRIVATE opinions, and not taught by this brother, he might be, and, constitutionally, ought to be retained; but if he should teach or inculcate such private opinions, or seek to make disciples to them, he would become a factionist, and as such could not be fellowshipped."²² Rains stated these views were "in his judgment, matters of opinion, and not matters of faith" and declared he would not teach them. On this basis he was allowed to preach and continued to do so. Campbell quoted a letter from Rains stating that "the sentiments have been slowly and imperceptibly erased from my mind" and that he resolved only to teach the word of God.

R. H. Boll and Premillennialism. R. H. Boll was the very popular front page writer for the Gospel Advocate from 1909-1915. By the latter year, Boll was advocating premillennialism more and more publicly and criticism had mounted to the point he was firmly told to stop such writing; he ultimately refused to do so and began writing his views in his own paper *The Word and Work*. The matters in dispute were widely discussed, and some pled for disfellowship of Bolls and those with him.²³ In 1927 a debate was conducted between Boll and H. Leo Boles.²⁴

In the closing part of the debate, H. Leo Boles indicated there was much agreement between the disputants, "enough to fellowship each other as brethren in the Lord;"²⁵ and urged that brethren would continue to study the questions in dispute until "all are at a unit on them, until there be 'one faith' as there is but 'one Lord' and one God and Father of all."²⁶ The fact was, however, that matters did not go as Boles requested.

By 1935 matters had become much more heated. R. H. Boll and his associates insisted on preaching their views and the result had been dissension and division. H. Leo Boles recognized the situation had dramatically changed; his appraisal of the premillennial movement and what should be done about it had changed accordingly. He wrote:

The language used in that book could perhaps be applied to some of these brethren now, who do not press these theories to the division of the church and who are not aligned with the contingency doing so, but it cannot apply to those who are wedded like Ephraim of old to their idols and who have suffered division to come rather than recede from their theories. . . Later developments reveal the character of the movement even from incipency and justifies the attitude of such men as F. W. Smith and M. C. Kurfess, who were criticized for their attitude on the issue."²⁷

Within a short time most, if not all, fellowship with the advocates of premillennialism and churches espousing these views was over.

Anti-Cooperative Difficulties. By the mid 1950s a significant group of brethren sharply disputed the right of other brethren to support both cooperative work in evangelism and to support orphans from the church treasury. Debates were conducted, heated exchanges flew back and forth in periodicals, churches were frequently in turmoil, and division more and more was in evidence. No brief summary can adequately capsule those turbulent years; a brief note, however, will hopefully provide accurate and beneficial insight.

The heart of the difficulty, as best I can discern it, was stated most succinctly by Gus Nichols in an article entitled "Bible Ways to Do Bible Things."²⁸ Nichols alluded to such difficulties as those over Bible classes, the number of containers brethren may use in partaking the fruit of the vine, as well as the support of orphans from the church treasury. Of the brethren who refuse to have Bible classes for all ages, Nichols affirmed:

Some say a church is a true church today if it does 'BIBLE THINGS IN BIBLE WAYS.' This is a misleading statement in the main, and is made by every faction among us. It is argued by the 'Anti-Sunday School' faction. They argue that they are the true church because they study and teach in only one group publicly.

This is one scriptural way of teaching and was used for hundreds of years before the modern class method was introduced. They became a faction, not for having only one class, but for teaching the false doctrine that this is the 'ONLY WAY' of teaching in a meeting house of saints, and by making themselves a faction and trying to proselyte others to their hobby. [p. 2.]

Of those opposing churches supporting orphan homes from the treasury he wrote:

The command for the church to 'RELIEVE' (I Tim. 5:16) those in need is 'GENERIC'--as is now admitted by brethren in general; and they are not a faction for merely not giving to an orphan home, but for teaching the false doctrine that their way is the only "BIBLE WAY," and that the brotherhood must come to them and accept their man-made law, and that we cannot do a Bible thing in a modern way when the Lord has left us the command to do the thing under 'GENERIC' law (as to methods of 'doing Bible things in Bible ways'). The early Christians did 'BIBLE THINGS IN BIBLE WAYS' and so do we, when we do the very 'THING' commanded, even if we do it in some modern way. Those who use modern ways of doing Bible things are perverters of the word of God, if they make a hobby of such methods and means, and build a faction around themselves, excluding others from their fellowship. [p. 2]

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The Bible clearly teaches the essentiality and the means by which unity is present and can be maintained in the church. At its center, unity rests upon the willingness of the individuals and the group to follow the guidance of Christ in attitude and in service; lacking this resolve, difficulties will come which can harm if not destroy the unity which he enjoins. We must each resolve to avoid harm and remain true to our Lord and his church.

Unity becomes imperiled when an individual or group within the church selects some tenet of judgment, misguided or misinformed teaching, personal whim or pique and elevates it so that it becomes a

rallying point giving rise to a party or group at odds with the church at large. Here is the beginning of a faction, the "division" of I Cor. 1:10. Let us resolve never to be or become a rallying point for a difficulty or division in the church!

When an individual has embraced and is promoting a personally selected tenet of grievance or teaching at variance with Scripture which he refuses to resolve or relinquish, but forces on and into the church, that individual has become the "heretic" of Titus 3:10. We should refuse to be or to become a follower of such a person.

When such a situation arises, all brethren should do their best in attitude, word, and deed to resolve the problem, admonish the individual and the group involved, and urge all to return to the love and service that was present before the particular problem or tenet of misguided or misinformed faith came to the church. Here the unity of the church will be made or broken; here the firmness and consolation of Rom. 15:5-6 comes to the forefront. May we ever stand by these principles of truth and proper conduct to restore and preserve the unity of the church.

The individual who embraces such a grievance or such a teaching should be willing and ready to consult, to meet with, to discuss fully pro and con the matter involved, and to receive admonition(s) from brethren to explain, justify, withdraw, or hold as private opinion the offending item of faith or conduct. This effort can and should involve and allow adequate time and opportunity for discussion in a Christian manner, but it is not to be allowed to become a waste of time or a war of words. Such a course is not a sign of weakness but of strength of conviction to abide in the doctrine of Christ and preserve the unity of the church.

When by discussion, clarification, evaluation, and careful study of Scripture the matter is not resolvable, the unity of the church must be preserved. The individual or group involved must be clearly alerted to this central imperative and admonished to cease the offending teaching or practice. Adequate time should be given, according to the nature of the problem, for reconsideration, correction, and return to faithful service; but, when that fails to preserve the unity of the church, the church must reject the individual or the group as harmful to the well being of the church--never a painless or pleasant decision or action. Sadly, it must be accepted that the church can no longer abide the violation of truth, and fellowship is reluctantly broken.

When the offending tenet is more wide spread than a local church, neighboring churches can and will learn or be informed of the

difficulty and decision, but each local church in keeping with its own autonomy must make its own decision about what to do. Here the truth of Scripture, binding all in allegiance of Christ the head, is to bring about the unity of faith among the sister churches and, independently but in concert, they can and should decide to remain true to Scripture and refuse what varies from it.

Even when fellowship has been broken, an interest in and effort to bring about reconciliation and restoration of unity on the basis of Scripture is to remain in the heart of individual and church(es). Where this is possible, and it has occurred on occasion, all should rejoice that the will of Christ now has prevailed and his people are united and at peace after a time of difficulty.

May we all endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

¹"Perfection" (KJV) "perfecting" (ASV). *kataristin* noun related to a verb [*katartizo*] meaning to render fit, sound, complete, hence to mend, to complete, to put in order, adjust, to make one what he ought to be, Thayer, p. 336.

²"Utterance" (KJV; ASV). *logos* almost certainly here refers to the richness of insight they had in the word of God, the truth, which they had heard preached and which they consequently knew (15:1-3). Elsewhere Paul referred to the "word of wisdom" (12:8) and the "word of knowledge" ["wisdom" ASV] (12:8). Also, the Corinthians abounded in "faith, utterance [*logos*], and knowledge" (II Cor. 8:7). The message heard orally and the spiritual gifts which enabled the proclamation and confirmation of the gospel, the content of which was finally written in Scripture, enabled the Corinthians to know and speak the truth of God.

³"Knowledge" (KJV; ASV). *gnosis* is almost certainly the understanding, the awareness, the content of the insight into the things of God which they came to know when the gospel was heard and obeyed (2:9-16; Acts 18:8).

⁴Henry Alford's words on this verse deserve careful consideration: "in all teaching and knowledge. *logos* (obj.), the truth preached. *gnosis* (subj.), the truth apprehended. They were rich in the preaching of the word, had among them able preachers, and rich in the

apprehension of the word, were themselves intelligent hearers." *The Greek Testament*, Vol. II, p. 475.

⁵"Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." (II Cor. 12:12).

⁶Thayer commented that "the same thing" *to auto* means "to profess one and the same thing," p. 374. Arndt-Gingrich stated: " *to auto lego* agree (not only in words; s. on *lego* I 1 a) I Cor. 1:10" and "*to auto legein* be in agreement (not only in words) . . . I Cor. 1:10." pages 123, 469.

⁷"Divisions" (KJV; ASV - margin "schisms;" NEB); "dissensions" RSV; "split up into parties" Phillips; "factions" Goodspeed; Williams. *schismata* plural number of the noun *schisma*. The noun is from the verb *schidzo* to cleave, cleave asunder, rend, to divide by rending (Jn. 19:24); to split into factions, be divided: Acts 14:4; 23:7." Thayer, p. 619. The noun is translated "rent" Mt. 9:16; Mk. 2:21; "division" Jn. 4:43; 9:16; 10:19; "divisions" I Cor. 1: 10; 11:18; and "schism" I Cor. 12:25).

⁸*ete de katartismenoi* present subjunctive active of perfect passive participle of .

⁹The verb translated "perfectly joined together" is *katartidzo*, the noun of which is translated "perfection" (II Cor. 12:9 See endnote 1).

¹⁰A remarkable parallel occurs concerning the "beast" and the "ten kings" of Revelation 17:8 ff. The ten kings receive power for one hour with the beast (v. 12) and "have one mind" [*mian gnomen echousin*] with him to make war with the Lamb (v. 13, 14). The reason: God put it in their hearts to fulfill his will and "to agree" ("come to one mind" ASV) [*poiesai mian gnomen*] and give their kingdom to the beast (v. 17).

¹¹The KJV rendering of *to auto phronein*, of which Thayer stated: "several people are said. . .to be of the same mind, i.e. to agree together, cherish the same views, be harmonious" p. 568. *TDNT* Vol. 9, p. 233 gives this summary of the meaning: "The fundamental demand of Pauline exhortation is a uniform direction, a common mind, and unity of thought and will. In Phil. 2:2 the apostle issues an urgent admonition that we are to seek the same goal with a like mind, establishing the given unity and maintaining a Christian disposition in all

things. . . In R. 15:5 there is a prayerful desire to the same effect with common praise of God as the goal."

¹²The expression "according to Christ Jesus" translates *kata Chrsiton Iesoun* in which the preposition stands "simply with the accusative [case, ww] of the person according to whose will, pleasure, or manner something occurs" Arndt-Gingrich, p. 408.

¹³Of "with one mind" translates *homothumadon* one reads that by etymology it means "with the same emotion," "with the same mind," "unanimously," and that "This word denotes the inner unity of a group of people engaged in an externally similar action. It can be rendered 'with one mind.'" *TDNT*, Vol. 5, p. 185.

¹⁴J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1883), p. 107.

¹⁵Lightfoot's explanation of these words deserves careful thought: "a general expression of accordance, which is defined and enforced by the three following clauses. It is concord not of a common hatred, but of a common love. . . It manifests itself in a complete harmony of the feelings and affections. . . It produces an entire unison of thought and directs it to one end." *Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹⁶Again, Lightfoot's words are most valuable: "The two impediments to an universal, diffusive, unconditional charity are the exaltation of party and the exaltation of self. Both these are here condemned; the first by *kat' eritheian* ["strife"], the second in *kata kendoxian* ["vain glory"]." *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁷On these verses, our beloved brother Franklin Camp often taught us that one will not properly interpret these or other verses on unity without considering carefully the preceding context of John 13-16 concerning Christ's attitude and willingness to serve and that without this attitude and action on our part proper unity cannot be realized. [Would he were here to teach us again on these verses!]

¹⁸In Acts 20:30, it is of interest to note that "perverse things" renders *diestrammena* perfect passive participle of *diastrepho*, "to distort, turn aside, to turn aside from the right path, to pervert, to corrupt" Thayer, p. 142; thus to "teach perversions (of the truth)," "Arndt-

Gingrich, p. 188. A self chosen distortion of truth is embraced, then this having-been-perverted view or tenet is forced on the church! This way lies disturbance and division and is to be rejected.

¹⁹*Echestraptai* perfect middle indicative of *ekstrepho* "to turn or twist out, tear up, to turn inside out, invert, to change for the worse, pervert, corrupt" Thayer, p. 199. The individuals has turned his faith inside out, and the result is being pushed on the church. The LXX has this remarkable description of Israel's sin: "it is a perverse [*echstrammene*] generation, sons in whom is no faith." Faith is gone; the perverseness has taken its place!

²⁰*Harmtanei*, present tense verb, he is sinning in so doing, i.e., being a factious person with self chosen, self twisted ideas and tenets not in keeping with the faith.

²¹*Autokatakritos*, from [self] + [down on], [judgment] the judgment one brings down on himself. David Lipscomb aptly concluded: "The way of salvation is to walk only in the way God has marked out--do only the things he has required. A man who persists in introducing things not commanded by God walks directly against the way of salvation, sins, and brings condemnation upon himself." **Commentary on Titus** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1942), p. 286.

²²Alexander Campbell, "Millennium. -- No. II," **Millennial Harbinger** 1:4 (April 5, 2830), p. 148

²³M. C. Kurfees wrote, "Hence, when men thus persist in teaching and spreading divisive opinions--things which God does not require, and from teaching which they could properly refrain--there is but one proper thing to do, and that is to oppose them with all our might with the word of God. Let them be faithfully pointed out and marked as false teachers and schismatics." M. C. Kurfees, "A Most Vital and Radical Distinction," **Gospel Advocate** 65 (October 25, 1923), p. 1036.

²⁴H. Leo Boles and R. H. Boll, **Unfulfilled Prophecy** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1928).

²⁵*Ibid*, p. 395.

²⁶*Ibid*, p. 412.

²⁷H. Leo Boles, "The Issue Now -- And Then," *The Gospel Guardian* I (October 1935), p. 5.

²⁸Gus Nichols, "Bible Ways to do Bible Things," *Words of Truth* (July 20, 1973), pp. 2-4.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

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INTRODUCTION

Disciplining members of the church is almost a thing of the past. Old church records will occasionally report that a brother has been disfellowshipped for drunkenness or a sister for dancing. And then a later report shows they have been restored. Disciplining is not an easy task. It has many complications and often more than one person is involved. Members of a family and close kin often react improperly when the church exercises discipline toward a member. Lack of courage on the part of elders often leads to neglect in the matter of discipline. But will these or other problems connected with discipline excuse us for failing to follow God's word?

No one familiar with the Bible will say that the subject of church discipline is unimportant. Any mature and serious student of God's word readily acknowledges that this subject occupies a prominent position in the remedial scheme. The Lord gave complete and adequate instructions for the administration of discipline in the church.

Discipline is a word which is particularly out of step with our time. Ours is a permissive, indulgent age. It is an age emphasizing no controls, no restraints and no limitations...one of the great needs of our day is discipline.

Church discipline is a matter especially deserving of our study today. Two extremes are encountered in this matter: (1) Misuse (abuse) and (2) nonuse (abandonment). For some, church discipline has been simply an outlet for personal animosity. For others, church discipline is to be avoided at all costs. Neither of these two extremes is acceptable to God.¹

In these lessons we plan to study the following: (1) What is the Meaning of Discipline? (2) Is Discipline a Bible Subject? (3) What are the Responsibilities of Elders in Discipline? (4) What are the Responsibilities of Each Member in Instructive Discipline? (5) What is Corrective Discipline? (6) What are the Purposes of Corrective Discipline? (7) Upon Whom is it to be administered? (8) What is the Scriptural Procedure in Corrective Discipline? (9) What Should be Our Treatment of One Disfellowshipped? (10) What are Some Objections to Church Discipline? (11) What are Some Suggested Procedures in Discipline Cases?

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF DISCIPLINE?

Discipline means to teach, instruct, to correct or train one that he might be strengthened, perfected; to punish or chastise. Webster says it means "training or experience that corrects, molds, strengthens, or perfects, esp. the mental faculties or moral character...."

Broadly speaking, church discipline includes all processes or means by which a church trains or educates her members to "walk in the light." Paul said, "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. 3:16-17²). The marginal note on "instruction:" is "discipline" (Greek, paideian). Thayer says "discipline" means "whatever in adults cultivates the soul, esp. by correcting mistakes and curbing the passions; hence, instruction which aims at the increase of virtue."

Discipline is two-fold in its nature. There is instructive discipline that is preventive in nature. Corrective discipline, on the other hand, is chastising and penalizing in nature.

IS DISCIPLINE A BIBLE SUBJECT?

There are many scriptures which emphasize discipline and the reasons why discipline was to be exercised on the following: (1) The uncircumcised were to be cut off (Gen. 17:14); (2) anyone who ate blood was to be cut off (Lev. 2:27; 17:8,9); (3) those who engaged in idol worship (Deut. 13:13-18); (4) those that cause division (Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 4:19-21); (5) fornicators (1 Cor. 5:1-13); (6) unruly (1 Thess. 5:14); (7) those that will not work (2 Thess. 3:6-15); (8) those who made shipwreck of their faith (1 Tim. 1:19-20; 5:19-20; 6:3-5).

There are many examples of discipline being exercised in both the Old and New Testaments. A man caught picking up sticks was stoned (Num. 15:32-40). Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before the Lord and were devoured by fire (Lev. 10:1-2). Achan took of the spoils of the city of Ai and was stoned to death (Josh. 7:1, 19-26). Ananias and Sapphira attempted to lie to God and were struck dead (Acts 5:1-11).

WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF ELDERS IN INSTRUCTIVE DISCIPLINE?

Elders are a part of God's arrangement for the local church. The church in Jerusalem had elders (Acts 15:6); Paul appointed elders in the churches at the end of his first missionary journey (Acts 14:23); Paul called the elders at Ephesus to Miletus (Acts 20:17); the church at Philippi had elders (Phil. 1:1); Titus was told to ordain elders in every city (Tit. 1:5). Elders play a vital role in the instructive part of church discipline.

First, elders are to feed the flock of God:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready Mind (1 Pet. 5:2).

In taking "heed" to the flock and "feeding" the flock, Paul placed three responsibilities upon the elders from Ephesus (and all elders). They must guard the church against false teachers from without. "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29). They must guard the flock from false teachers within. "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). They must be mindful of the flock day and night. "Therefore, watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31).

Second, elders are to be an example to the flock. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock..." (Acts 20:28a). "Heed" [Greek, proseche] means "hold to, to apply mind to, to give heed, to attend to, to observe, to consider, to provide for." In being examples elders are not to be "...Lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3).

Third, elders must take the oversight and rule the congregation. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers..." (Acts 20:28). "Let the elders that rule well..." (1 Tim. 5:17a). "Overseer" is a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly" (Thayer). The Bible clearly shows how the oversight and ruling are to be done. (1) "not by constraint, but willingly" (1 Pet. 2b); (2) "not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" (1 Pet. 2c); (3) "neither as being Lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3); (4) limited to one congregation (1 Pet. 5:2a); (5) with diligence (Rom. 12:8); (6) well (1 Tim. 5:17).

Fourth, they must watch in behalf of souls. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb.13:17).

Watch is the present imperative of the Greek gragareo which means to be awake, to watch, to be alive, to be attentive, to be vigilant. The present denotes "keep on watching." Elders must watch with reference to the

dangers—both within and without. They must watch both individual and congregational.³

The best physicians are they who prevent diseases. They are the best bishops who, by their watchful attention to the occasion of falling or apostasy, anticipate and prevent delinquencies.

WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF EACH MEMBER IN INSTRUCTIVE DISCIPLINE?

Each member of the church has a responsibility to himself in instructive discipline. Self-discipline is essential to every worthy undertaking. The Christian is under the constant restraint of divine truth. Self discipline involves self-imposed measures on ourselves. Elders are told to "take heed therefore unto yourselves" (Acts 20:28). Paul admonished the young preacher Timothy to "take heed unto thyself" (1 Tim. 4:16). Paul practiced self-discipline because he said, "I keep under my body" (1 Cor. 9:27) or "I buffet my body." Christians are told to crucify the flesh with the lusts thereof (Gal. 5:24).

Each member of the church has responsibilities to the elders in instructive discipline. "And we beseech you brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord" (1 Thess. 5:12). "And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake..." (1 Thess. 5:13a). Honor the elders. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17). "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:19-20).

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (Heb. 13:17).

Every member of the church has a responsibility to all the other members in instructive discipline. When Barnabas came from Jerusalem to Antioch and "had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:23). We are to "increase and abound in love toward one another..." (1 Thess. 3:11). "But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13).

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24).

WHAT IS CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE?

Corrective discipline, or withdrawal, is definitely commanded, in some cases. "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). "Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself" (1 Tim. 6:5). "But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor. 5:13).

There are a number of things corrective discipline does not mean or include. First, it does not mean the church is primarily interested in making someone suffer, even though suffering is involved. Second, it does not mean vengeance toward the offender. Vengeance belongs to God (Rom. 12:19). Third, it does not mean pronouncing or condemning a person to hell. Fourth, it does not mean merely making an announcement before the congregation. Fifth, it does not mean the one withdrawn from becomes an enemy (2 Thess. 3:15).

What does corrective discipline mean or include? First, it means to avoid or turn away from. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17).

Second, it means to refuse association or company. "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators.... But now I have written unto you not to keep company...with such an one no not to eat" (1 Cor. 5:9-11).

Third, it means one does not give encouragement in any way to the evil one is doing. One must separate from, to retire from personally and privately, (after the church has withdrawn) as well as by public announcement, and to turn away from.

WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES OF CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE?

One purpose of withdrawal is to save the soul of the erring one. The fornicator in the church at Corinth was to be "delivered unto Satan

for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 5:4-5). Paul delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander unto Satan "that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Tim. 1:19-20). The Thessalonians were to have no fellowship or company with the disorderly "that he may be ashamed" (2 Thess. 3:14). It can be clearly seen that one of the purposes of withdrawal is to save the soul of the individual.

A second purpose of withdrawing is to save the souls of the other members of the church. It is only as one sees the true nature of sin that one will shun the appearance of evil. Failure to purge out sin leads to a toleration of sin and blinds one to its true nature. The Corinthians were "puffed up" (1 Cor. 5:1-2). "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6). It is only by purging out the leaven that the rest of the lump is kept free from contamination. It is only as the church delivers the wicked to Satan or withdraws fellowship, that she can escape the condemnation that is sure to come for a refusal to do so (cf. Rev. 2:12-16; 18-20).

A third purpose of withdrawing is to magnify and exalt the Lord and his church in the eyes of the world. Every church and every individual has the responsibility to be a light to the world (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:14-16; Eph. 3:10). Every church and every individual has the responsibility to "do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31) and to cause men, by their lives, "to glorify God" (1 Pet. 2:12). Church discipline, if conducted properly, will increase the respect of men for the church.

Often we hear church leaders say they do not exercise discipline because the church will be hurt in the eyes of the world if the world learns there is trouble in the church. The world will have a lot more respect for the church if it is trying to keep itself clean than it will have for a church which tries to hide its sins. People magnified the church and believers were added to the Lord because of the discipline of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:13-14). When a man of the world can truthfully say that he lives a better, cleaner life than the average church member, or when he can truthfully say there are too many hypocrites in the church, we may know that the church is not exercising discipline as it should.⁴

A fourth purpose of withdrawal of fellowship is to cause the rest of us to examine our own lives. Paul told Timothy, "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:20). If all members were

informed as to what to expect when sin is allowed to rule in their lives, very little corrective discipline would ever be needed.

UPON WHOM IS CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE TO BE ADMINISTERED?

Broadly speaking, all that walk disorderly are to be disfellowshipped. "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). A disorderly person is any church member that is walking contrary to the truth, i.e., "not after the tradition which he received of us."

Discipline is to be exercised toward those that will not work. These were the disorderly ones in the church at Thessalonica. Paul had commanded work (2 Thess. 3:12) and had set the example before them (2 Thess. 3:7-8). "For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies" (2 Thess. 3:11).

Those that teach things contrary to sound doctrine are to be disciplined. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17).

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians he lists fornicators, covetous, idolaters, railers, drunkards, and extortioners as some upon which discipline is to be exercised (1 Cor. 5:11).

One who habitually forsakes the assembly is walking disorderly. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is..." (Heb. 10:25). Forsaking the assembly is not the "worst" sin among brethren, but it is probably the most widespread. Forsaking the assembly is usually one of the first steps toward involvement in other sins.

WHAT IS THE SCRIPTURAL PROCEDURE IN CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE?

First, the certainty of the guilt or innocence of the accused must be ascertained. In the Old Testament we read that if charges were made against the inhabitants of a city (such as serving other gods) they were to be smitten. But before this was done, "Then shalt thou inquire, and

make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such admonition is wrought among you" (Deut. 13:14). "And it be told thee, and thou hast heard it, and enquired diligently, and behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel" (Deut. 17:4).

Second, the disorderly must be warned and vividly impressed about his conduct. "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly..." (1 Thess. 5:14). "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone..." (Matt. 18:15) [private, but it includes the idea of warning].

Third, there must be diligent effort made to restore the individual. "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). "Brethren, if any of you 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" (Jas. 5:19-20).

Fourth, the Lord's discussion of private and public offenses reveals some steps involved in corrective discipline.

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. 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. 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 an heathen man and a publican (Matt. 18:15-17).

This starts out as a private matter, but may grow into a public matter. Remember that every step taken is for the purpose of gaining the brother. If all efforts fail then "let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

Fifth, if after guilt has been established, warning has been given, efforts to restore have been exerted, the disorderly refuse to repent, then fellowship must be withdrawn as the final effort to lead one to repentance.

WHAT IS TO BE OUR ACTION TOWARD AND TREATMENT OF ONE DISFELLOWSHIPED?

First, the whole church must administer and support the action. "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:4-5). The full assembly of the church was required, for discipline was to be administered by the entire body. Since the church is expected to concur in the action taken, every mature member is entitled to know the facts on the case. The elders will have the facts well in hand, and even witnesses if necessary, to present to the congregation. Once the case is presented and proven, God expects every member to support the action so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Second, he is to be treated as a heathen and a publican. "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 an heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:17). In other words, when all efforts have failed to restore him and fellowship is withdrawn, he is to be treated as we properly treat heathen men and publicans, or men of wicked habits.

Third, he is to be avoided. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). Our action toward such a one should leave no doubt that we love him, but fellowship cannot be restored without repentance.

Fourth, we are to have no company with such a one. "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" (2 Thess. 3:14-15). "To keep company with harlots" (Prov. 29:3) means to feel, enjoy, have delight.

The withholding of fellowship so dear to the hearts of men brings forcefully to the offender's conscience a sense of guilt which he must feel before he is willing to repent. In view of the fact that our action is for the purpose of bringing the disorderly one to a sense of guilt, we are not to regard him as our enemy but as an erring brother who in an unrepentant state is his own worst enemy. Accordingly, we are to admonish him not as an enemy but as a brother whose soul is precious in our

sight, as well as in the sight of God. We can admonish and exhort with tenderness, sympathy, conviction, and humbleness, but at the same time our firmness in adhering to the word of God is shown by our refusal to share companionship and association with the fellow who has broken ranks as well as might a soldier in an army.⁵

Fifth, we cannot engage in a social meal with him. If you think you can, then consider: "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if an man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an exhorter; with such a one no not to eat" (1 Cor. 5:11).

Sixth, we must stand ready to forgive and receive back into fellowship when he repents. Paul, talking about the same brother of 1 Corinthians 5, gives this inspired admonition. "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow" (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

WHAT ARE SOME OBJECTIONS TO CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

First, some elderships refuse to practice corrective discipline for fear of "trouble" in the local church. We must obey God regardless of the cost (Acts 5:29). We must have faith and courage to obey God regardless of the opposition. We must believe that our brethren will not "run off" if properly taught about discipline and the case is handled right. We must realize that if a member constantly opposes obedience to God's will on this point, even after proper teaching, such a one will probably oppose some other point with which he does not agree.

Second, some argue that withdrawal is not necessary, but simply refuse to use the brother. If such be true then we withdraw from 90% of the congregation at every service since they are not used. Such an objection reveals total ignorance about the nature and purpose of discipline.

Third, when one ceases to assemble with the saints, he has withdrawn himself and the church does not need to take any further action. The purpose of discipline fails when this attitude is followed. The one that has withdrawn himself is still lost (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:5-7).

Failure to withdraw from one who has withdrawn himself is failure to obey God's commandment (1 Cor. 5:4-5; 2 Thess. 3:6). It is the church that withdraws: not the sinner. Bobby Wade, in the Firm Foundation, July 18, 1967, lists the following things that are not accomplished when the disorderly "withdraws himself."

1. The offender does not know he has been withdrawn from.
2. He does not realize he has been delivered "back to Satan" (1 Cor. 5:5).
3. The faithful members of the church do not know he has been withdrawn from and may even disobey a divine command.
4. "He is not ashamed" but usually "puffed up" (2 Thess. 3:14).
5. The primary purpose of all discipline is not accomplished (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:5-7).
6. The church is subjected to corrupting influences (1 Cor. 5:2).
7. The world doesn't know he has been withdrawn from. So far as they know, our silence equals condoning his behavior, and like David of old, we have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

To leave those above, who have withdrawn from us, is to remove the last hope for them who are in the throes of hell.

Fourth, "we are not to judge." Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7:1). There are certain types of judgment commanded by God (Matt. 7:15-20; Rom. 13:4; 2 Tim. 4:1-4; Matt. 15:9-13). The judgment condemned here would be harsh, critical, condemning judgments based upon guess, surmise and speculation. It condemns judgment by one doing the same thing (cf. Rom. 2:1ff). Judging the right or wrong of what others are doing by our own likes and dislikes is forbidden (cf. Rom. 14). Judging the motives behind the deeds is forbidden.

Fifth, the parable of the tares teaches that both wheat and tares are to grow together until the harvest (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). This parable has absolutely nothing to do with withdrawal of fellowship. Furthermore, the field in which both good and bad seed were sown, and the kingdom out of which both were gathered, are the same; but the field is the world, and therefore the kingdom is the world.

Sixth, we all sin, therefore no one has the right to cast a stone at another (cf. John 8:7). An individual that is practicing the sin that he condemns in another does not have the right "to cast a stone" and is without excuse (Rom. 2:1). But there is a vast difference between one that sins through ignorance and weakness and one that willfully practices sin. The law of Moses made provision for those who sinned through ignorance (Lev. 4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:15-19), but the soul that sinned presumptuously was to be cut off (Num. 15:24-31; Deut. 17:12). David asked forgiveness for secret sins but asked to be kept back from presumptuous sins (Psa. 19:12-13). Even an envious, divided church like Corinth (1 Cor. 3:1-3) was to exercise discipline which they could not have done if this objection be true. Those who confess their sins daily (1 John 1:9) and recognize their own weakness (Gal. 6:1) not only have the right to "fruit inspect," but are commanded to do so (Matt. 7:13-15).

WHAT ARE SOME SUGGESTED HELPS OR PROCEDURES IN DISCIPLINE CASES?

- A. Follow the steps outlined in the lesson material.
- B. On the final visit before withdrawal actually takes place, the following procedure has proven very successful.
 1. "Bro. or Sis. _____ it has been _____ months since you attended the services." "Bro. or Sis' your conduct has, and continues to bring reproach upon the Lord and His church."
 2. "You realize that as a Christian, you have a responsibility to God and to the church."
 - a. *Answer.* _____
 - b. They should answer yes. If not, explain.
 3. "Do you consider yourself a faithful Christian?"
 - a. *Answer.* _____
 - b. If proper efforts have been taken he should be fully conscious that he's very unfaithful.
 4. "How many people have been to see you and talk with you about your unfaithfulness?"

- a. *Answer* _____
- b. By the time this question is asked, if the elders, the preacher, and the mature members have done their job, he should be able to name several.

5. "Have we failed you in some way? Have we been patient with you?"

- a. *Answer* _____
- b. He may name something that the church has done or not done that's been a stumblingblock. If valid, try to correct it. Enough time should have elapsed that it is obvious patience has been manifested.

6. "Do you know what the Bible teaches is the church's responsibility if you continue your present course of action?"

- a. *Answer* _____

b. Some will know and some won't.

7. "We'd like to read a few verses from the Bible with you."

- a. Deut. 13:14. "There is no doubt about your guilt, is there?"
- b. I Thess. 5:14. "How many times have we warned and exhorted you?"
- c. Gal. 6:1. "We have tried time and time again to restore you."
- d. Jas. 5:19,20. "We have tried to convert you from the error of your way."
- e. Since all these efforts have failed, then, if you continue your present course, we must obey these scriptures.
(1) I Cor. 5:5, 11-13. Read them.
(2) II Thess. 3:6. Read this.
(3) II Thess. 3:14. Read this.

8. "Do you want us to withdraw fellowship from you?"

- a. *Answer* _____

- b. If *no*, then ask him when he plans to change his life and be restored. Get a definite commitment.
- c. If *yes*, or *I don't care*, then tell him that he leaves us no choice.

8. Leave two thoughts with him:

- a. Unless you are restored and change your life in ten days or two weeks (set a definite time) your name will be read publicly and withdrawal will take place.
- b. If this final step becomes necessary, we want you to know that we still love you and will be praying for your restoration (1 Cor. 5:1-5).
- c. We will stand ready to receive you back into fellowship, but the next step will be up to you.

C. After this final visit is made and before withdrawal takes place let the congregation know.

- 1. Inform them of the efforts put forth toward brother or sister
_____.
- 2. Ask the congregation to try to reach them.
- 3. This procedure does several things:
 - a. It obeys the Lord's command to tell the church, Mt. 18:15-18.
 - b. It gives every member an opportunity to put forth an effort and one might succeed where others fail.
 - c. It keeps down later criticism such as "I wish I'd known about it. I believe I could have led them back."
 - d. It lets the congregation know that all efforts are being exhausted to lead a brother or sister to Christ.

D. If at the end of the time given the brother, he still has not been restored, public announcement of withdrawal is made, and the

congregation is urged to support the action in the hope that the brother might be brought to repentance.

CONCLUSION

1. First Corinthians five contains the best definition and actions of church discipline by the church found in the entire New Testament. First, it tells us what church discipline is (verses 2,5,7,8-11,12,13). Second, it tells you that church discipline is to be exercised with urgency (verses 3 and 7). Third, church discipline is to be exercised by the authority of Christ (verses 4 ad 5). Fourth, church discipline is to be exercised by the church and that publicly (verse 4). Fifth, the purpose of church discipline is clearly set forth: the immediate purpose is to the destruction of the flesh and the ultimate purpose is the salvation of the souls in the day of the Lord Jesus. It was also for the purpose of keeping the church pure and preventing sin from spreading (verses 5, 6 and 7). Sixth, it clearly tells you upon whom discipline is to be exercised (verses 9-11). Seventh, it tells you what our treatment should be toward those disciplined (verses 9 and 10). Eighth, all objections raised on the exercising of church discipline are clearly answered in this chapter. Ninth, it along with 2 Corinthians 2:6-8 shows clearly that church discipline will work. Tenth, it, along with 2 Corinthians 2:6-8, shows the treatment we should extend to those who return. Eleventh, it makes it very clear that discipline is a test or proof of us before God.⁶

2. In all of these scriptures the apostle teaches that Christians cannot afford to fellowship wicked men in the church. That some by their sins become unfit for the association of the Christian. They are to be put away from among Christians to the end that they understand they are no longer accepted in the company of God's people. They have cast their lot with the devil, and are therefore turned over to the devil. This attitude of the Christian toward a sinful brother is for the purpose of putting him to shame and bringing him to repentance. So long as his sins are overlooked by his brethren in the Lord, he is not likely to feel the need to turn from them. He must be made to understand that he will be lost if he does not repent. Furthermore, sin cannot be countenanced in members of the church lest the church suffer. The church must be kept pure, as much as it is possible for us to do so, and the truth must not be compromised, if men are to be saved in the day of the Lord.⁷

¹Thomas Warren, "Church Discipline," The Minister's Monthly, Vol. VI, No. 11 (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1961).

²All quotes are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

³Roy Deaver, Gospel Advocate, August 16, 1962.

⁴Annual Lesson Commentary, 1956, p. 22.

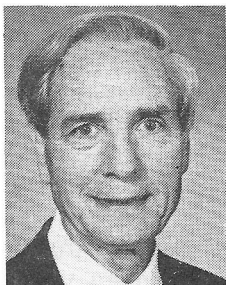
⁵Clinton D. Hamilton, "Withdrawing From A Brother," The Preceptor (Tampa: Preceptor Book House, April, 1952), Vol. II, No. 6, 1952.

⁶Most of the material in this lesson is taken from my book, A Study of Church Discipline, by James Meadows.

⁷J. Roy Vaughn, "Discipline," Gospel Advocate, September 16, 1954, p. 727.

FAMILY AND CHURCH GROWTH

CHARLES L. BROWN



Charles L. Brown was born in Henderson County, TN. He and Jane (Pierce) have three children: Steven, Tim and Karen Green, and six grandchildren. Brother Brown 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 4000 times on the radio. He has appeared on numerous church and college lectureships. Teaching has been done at FHC and OVC, and at ETSP since 1991, where he is also Dean of Admissions.

Strong Christian homes will result in strong churches, strong communities, strong schools and strong nations. The family was formed by God when He united Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:22-25). It is the basic building block upon which all other institutions are founded. Troubled and weak families will have a negative impact upon the church, and upon the whole of society. Not only does Jesus need to become the Savior of the parents and accountable children, He must become Lord of the saved, Lord of the family.

Living without God and His word always results in sinking deeper and deeper into an immoral state. Both secular and biblical history verify this. Homes that faithfully bring up their youth in accordance with Ephesians 6:4 are necessary to have a morally strong nation and strong churches.

In his book My Life Without God, William Murray, son of atheist Madelyn Murray O'Hair, vividly recounts what takes place in a home when God is shut out. He recalls the anger, hatred, cursing, fighting, screaming, etc., that occurred on a daily basis. As a twelve-year-old Baltimore, Maryland, schoolboy, William was used by his atheist mother to effectively ban prayer from public schools in America. Fortunately, in later life William turned from atheism.¹

From the time Cain killed his brother, Abel, and "went out from the presence of the Lord" (Gen. 4:16), he and his descendants were on a downward moral spiral. The downward plunge climaxed in the days of Noah causing God to cleanse the earth with water (Gen. 6:3-7).

During the age of Abraham, the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah corrupted themselves with the practices of homosexual sins, and a host of other sins: ignoring "the poor and needy," pride, wrath, lies, etc. (Ezek. 16:49-50; Isa. 16:6). Because God and His word were not in the cities of the plain, their moral corruption brought down God's wrath, destroying the cities with fire and brimstone (Gen. 19:24).

Before entering Canaan, Israel was forewarned by Jehovah, "And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things [sins enumerated in the preceding chapters] and therefore I abhorred them" (Lev. 20:23). The Ten Commandments reflected the common moral failures of mankind, not just in the days of Moses, but in all ages.

The New Testament continues to reveal the moral bankruptcy that results when God is abandoned. Nowhere is this more vividly shown than in Romans 1:18-32 where is recorded the downward moral descent of the Gentiles who rejected God. A host of other New Testament scriptures identify a life lived without God (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5-6; Rev. 21:8, etc.).

During the last half of the twentieth century, since World War II, American morals have been in a steep decline. Senator Moynihan, NY, addressed a gathering in New York City regarding the city changes in the preceding half century. After recalling that in 1943 they had good housing, schools, subway system and citizens. Then he said:

In 1943, there were exactly 44 homicides by gunshot in the city of New York. Last year, there were 1,499. The decline since then in our social institutions is without equivalent. Most important is the decline of the family, those small platoons without which a society cannot function. In 1943, the illegitimacy rate in New York City was 3%. Last year it was 45%, 80% in some districts. This was a much poorer city 50 years ago, but a much more stable one.²

Sadly, what the Senator said about New York City reflects all of America. Because of the breakdown of the family, crime and violence are rampant, especially among our youth.

During my school days, reading about the deplorable morals during the Roman Empire caused me to thank God I lived in Twentieth Century America and not during the days of Rome. But today America has become a modern-day Rome in depravity practicing such sins as fornication, adultery, divorce, abortion, suicide, euthanasia, brutality, etc. Left to himself, man is incapable of living a godly life (Jer. 10:23; Prov. 16:18,25; Prov. 14:12).

How can we possibly have hope in the midst of such moral corruption, especially as it involves our youth? God is our hope and the home is the key. The home is the basic unity of our society. As the home goes, so goes the nation. Give a nation godly homes where morality is founded upon the will of God, not of men, and good things will happen. Biblical foundations for the home supply the answer (Psa. 127:1; 11:3).

It all begins with a divinely approved marriage. Any marriage without divine approval has an inadequate foundation and no building is better than its foundation. Jesus gave a series of divine requirements for marriage in Matthew 19:4-9. These divine marriage laws have been in place "from the beginning" (vv. 4,8). Marriage is heterosexual, not homosexual (v. 4); monogamous, not polygamous (v. 5); for the mature, not children (v. 5); divinely formed, not merely human (v. 6); leaving and cleaving, not aloofness (v. 5); and unity, not division (v. 5). Jesus gave only one acceptable reason for divorce and remarriage. A marriage partner guilty of fornication gives the right of divorce and remarriage to the innocent party in a marriage (v. 9).

Three biblical reasons are given for marriage. These are for (1) companionship (Gen. 2:18); procreation (Gen. 1:28); and sexual fulfillment (1 Cor. 7:2). A marriage founded upon another reason would be built on a faulty foundation.

The all-wise God has given extensive instructions for the man and woman, husband and wife, father and mother, in the family.

The wife is admonished to submit to her husband who is to love her as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:22). However, both husband and wife are told to submit to each other (v. 21). Submission is not an indication of inferiority. The Son submitted himself to the heavenly

Father, the slave to his master, a child to his parents, a Christian to the Elders, but neither the Son, slave, child, nor Christian is inferior to the one submitted to. In 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" (Gal. 3:28).

The wife is exhorted to love her husband (Tit. 2:4). While the husband is exhorted to love the wife in a number of places, this is the only time the wife is admonished to love her husband. Perhaps this reflects man's greater need for the exhortation. She is also told to reverence, honor her husband (Eph. 5:23). He must always strive to deserve this respect. Both husband and wife are reminded to fulfill marital rights and not to "defraud" the other (1 Cor. 7:1-5).

Instructions for the husband require him to love his wife as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25) and as he loves himself (v. 28). The child of God is told to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). This is especially applicable to husbands for the context of that admonition shows humility to be the underlying trait of the mind of Christ. In verses 6-8 Paul explains how the humility of Christ caused him to sacrifice (v. 6), to serve (v. 7), and to submit (v. 8). The willingness to sacrifice, serve and submit will work to make a successful husband.

The husband is to honor his wife (1 Pet. 3:7) living with her in accord to divine knowledge. Respect for the wife honors her as the "weaker vessel." She is weaker only physically and to be considered as an equal heir of eternal life; therefore, the wife is not spiritually inferior. Without these attitudes, prayers will be hindered. The husband who honors his wife shows compassion, understanding, consideration, trust, tenderness, love, friendship, etc.

The husband is to be faithful to his wife (Heb. 13:4), remembering the sinfulness of a violation of the marriage contract (Gen. 39:9), remembering the great loss sustained with God and man. The solemn commitment made in the marriage ceremony cannot be broken without penalty.

The husband is to support his wife as ability and opportunity permit (1 Tim. 5:8). He is to be the head of the wife (Eph. 5:23).

The home as God designed it, composed of a husband and wife, father and mother and children, is perfectly equipped for the rearing of children. While it is true that the whole of society has a tremendous influence upon all, child rearing is primarily a family responsibility.

During the age of the Patriarchs, God expressed his confidence that Abraham would fulfill this expectation (Gen. 18:19). During the age of Moses the same God charged the fathers of Israel to teach and train their children in the way of Moses (Deut. 6:1-9). During the Christian age the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has charged fathers with the same responsibility (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21).

The rearing of children requires teaching by word (Eph. 6:4; Isa. 28:10), teaching by example, and teaching by corrective discipline (Prov. 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17; Heb. 12:6). It is an hour-by-hour, a day-by-day, work as suggested in Deuteronomy chapter six. To be successful it requires "tough" love, fairness, consistency, and time, and much, much more.

Two biblical examples of mothers who were especially successful in child rearing are Hannah (1 Sam. 1) and Eunice (2 Tim. 1:15). Their godly sons, Samuel and Timothy, bore the imprints of their godly mothers. Some biblical examples of successful fathers include Noah (Heb. 11:7), Abraham (Gen. 18:19), and Joshua (24:15). The father of the prodigal son (Luke 15) shows how fathers are expected to love their children, provide for their children, care about their children, accept and forgive their children. He shows us our heavenly Father, the perfect role model for every earthly father.

Successful parenting demands godly living. Abraham was a good father because he was first, a good man. He was a friend of God (Isa. 41:8; 2 Chron. 20:7; Jas. 2:23). He was a man of great faith in God (Rom. 4:3,9,11-12; Gen. 12:1-2; 22). He was a good father because he faithfully obeyed God (Gen. 12:4; 22; Heb. 11:8). Today, parents should not just be Christians in name only, but those who reflect the Spirit of Christ in word and in action. Godly parents living faithful Christian lives will produce godly offspring.

The Supreme Court of the United States in the case of *Murphy vs. Ramsey* (1885) placed the following stamp of approval regarding the vital role of the family in society:

Certainly no legislation can be supposed more wholesome and necessary in the founding of a free, self-governing Commonwealth...than that which seeks to establish it on the basis of the idea of the family, as consisting in and springing from the union of life of one man and one woman in the holy estate of matrimony;

[the family is] the sure foundation of all that is stable and noble in our civilization.³

However, today there are avowed efforts to destroy the biblical family. The married woman is considered a slave by liberal feminists: "Men are the oppressors; women are the oppressed."⁴ Salvation, liberal feminists say, is saving the married woman from male domination. They equate her oppression with "sin."

If oppression is the new definition of sin, their liberation is the new definition of salvation. This is a recurring theme in theology today, says Russell, namely: "that salvation today has to do with liberation now from all those things which keep humanity in slavery."⁵

Radical feminists believe "The Bible is the chief obstacle to women's equality and the major hindrance to the cause of women's rights."⁶

A New York marriage bureau was picketed by feminists who distributed leaflets calling the wife a prisoner of her husband. Marriage was called a "slavery-like practice." They even went so far as to say: "We can't destroy the inequalities between men and women until we destroy marriage."⁷

In addition, there are those attempting to redefine the family. Leaders in this effort are supporters of homosexual practices.

In California, the state Joint Task Force on the Changing Family issued a report in 1989 in which they judiciously refused to define "family." Instead, they choose to define the functions of a family: "To care for the emotional and physical needs of its own; provide them with love and security; shape their values and social skills, and provide a haven from outside stresses." Naturally, that allows room for lesbian and gay "families" who supposedly can perform all those functions.⁸

The attempt to redefine the biblical family ordained by God and embraced by the Jews and Christians through the ages is a major effort in our society. They wish to replace "a husband or wife" with a "significant other as portrayed in such children's books as Daddy Has A Roommate and Heather Has Two Mommies...."⁹

Contemporary mothers likely find the pressures of motherhood almost unbearable. If, out of necessity, they return to the workplace, they may likely feel guilty about not being at home with their children. If they can elect to stay home, they may be led to feel inferior as stay-at-home mothers. The mother who works outside the home is attempting to do the nearly impossible, working forty hours outside the home and then striving to meet the demands of the family made on a wife and mother.

The importance of the mother as the primary caregiver for her children cannot be over emphasized.

Babies learn personhood through a wonderful God-given cycle of experience, which is tied directly to their mothers. Babies go through this cycle of experience about every four hours. By the time a child is six months old, the cycle has been completed hundreds of times. This cycle actually locks in associational patterns with the world around them. While those associational patterns are on the unconscious level, they dictate many of life's actions. The cycle works through four stages.

First, the baby experiences some kind of need....

The second stage is the expression of that need....

The third state is that of relief....

The fourth stage: contentment and trust.

David Moore adds, "This cycle imprints upon a child a sense of security and belonging.... Babies actively seek bonding contact with their primary caregiver." No one can provide this care better than the mother. By the end of their first year, Moore states that babies will:

Develop 50 percent of their potential to be positively attached to their world. That means that by the end of the first year of life, children have learned half of all they will ever know about life's most crucial relational issues: Am I loved? Am I special? Can I trust? Is it safe to feel? Will I love? Will I be giving? Do other people's feelings matter? During the second year of life, a child learns half as much as the first year, and during the third year, they learn half as much again. The profound fact of all this is that 87 percent of everything a child will learn

about relating to himself and his world has been internalized before his fourth birthday.¹⁰

We need to work at developing a society that treasures and encourages mothers to give first priority to the needs of the child and not to be made to feel inferior by doing this.

While almost no one questions the importance of the mother in the life of the child, there are multitudes who question the value, the importance of a father in the life of a child.

The media continually belittles fathers, generally portraying them as stereotypical goofballs and misfits with multiple hang-ups and glaring idiosyncrasies. With few exceptions, dads are mocked and criticized as profoundly incompetent. In three short decades we have gone from "Father Knows Best" to Al Bundy to Homer Simpson.¹¹

Margaret Meade has described man's role in today's society as "uncertain, undefined, and perhaps unnecessary...." Elizabeth Gould Davis, Feminist, claims maleness "remains a recessive genetic trait like color-blindness and hemophilia, with which it is linked." She went on to suggest that recent genetic tests "strongly support" the idea that "congenital killers and criminals" have a "double dose" of "undesirable maleness."¹²

From the beginning God had a vital role in the family for man to fill as husband and father and when man does not fill these roles serious consequences prevail.

Fathers who walk out on their families affect the lives of their children negatively in every way—socially, educationally, and emotionally as evidenced by the following statistics:

Sociological ramifications:

Fatherless daughters are 53 percent more likely to marry as teenagers, and 111 percent more likely to have children as teenagers. They are 164 percent more likely to have an out-of-wedlock birth. Those who marry have a 92 percent higher divorce rate.... Fatherless sons are 35 percent more likely to experience marital failure.

Educational ramifications:

Fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of high school. Chances of being a high achiever are cut in half.... Fatherless children are also 50 percent more likely to have learning disabilities.

Emotional ramifications:

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, fatherless children are anywhere from 100 to 200 percent more likely to have emotional and behavioral problems. Fatherless young adults are twice as likely to need and receive psychological help. In fact, according to our nation's hospitals, over 80 percent of adolescents admitted for psychiatric reasons come from fatherless families. Fatherless sons are 300 percent more likely to become incarcerated in state juvenile institutions—70 percent of all juveniles in state institutions today come from fatherless homes.¹³

In a newspaper column titled "Father Absence at root of social problems," William Rasberry quoted David Blankenhorn, head of the Institute for American Values: "The most important predictor of criminal behavior is not race, not income, not religious affiliation. It's father absence. It's boys who don't grow up with their fathers."¹⁴

A year earlier, Rasberry had cited Blankenhorn's two concerns why boys need a masculine role.

Two things—or, rather, two categories of things. The first is more noticeable among the overwhelming fatherless "underclass," where boys, denied the traditional male roles of provider and defender—often denied any utility whatever—turn to increasingly anti-social behavior. Boys who have no father to guide them into manhood learn their manhood from the street, to the peril of us all. The second category in values doing the best for the children themselves. It is not a question of right or wrong but of difference that a mother seeing her small child on a jungle gym is more likely to say, "Be careful!" While the father may say, "Can you climb to the top?" The mother who asks "where does it hurt" is not

wrong, but neither is the father who says "You're OK, shake it off."

"Here is the point," Blankenhorn said in a recent interview. "Pity the boy or girl who does not receive BOTH of these types of love. Neither by itself is sufficient. But together, they will add up to what a child needs. This is the most basic reason for the importance of the two-parent home."¹⁵

Our society has been terribly impacted by Secular Humanism that rejects the God of the Bible, the Son of God, and the Word of God. Man, they say, is a product of evolution, not creation; therefore, he is just another animal without any divine likeness. He is only different from the animal world by degree, not in kind. They reject any divinely given moral principles.

If, as Simpson contends, there are no "universal, eternal, or absolute ethical criteria of right and wrong...", then every man becomes his own law—actually then, his own god! This is precisely what the Humanist Manifestos I and II allege. These infamous documents say: "Ethics is autonomous [meaning, "self-law"] and situational...."¹⁶

While the church makes a significant contribution, it was not designed by God to replace the home as being primarily responsible for the training of our children.

Sociologist Albert Seigel stated that there are only twenty years to train our children and that "every society is only twenty years from barbarism. Deteriorating families fail at making human beings human." Seigel then gives these disturbing facts on the decline of family life:

Every year, the Fordham Institute combines a host of factors to rate the social health of children. The scores range from zero to 100. In 1970, the rating was 68. Twenty years later, the index had dropped to 37. They described 1990 as "the worst year for children in two decades," and we're not doing any better today. The bipartisan National Commission on Children wrote "The unmet needs of American youngsters is a national imperative as compelling as an armed attack or a natural disaster."¹⁷

Thomas Sowell, newspaper columnist, wrote "a message for Michael" recounting some unpleasant experiences with a five-year-old boy and his father on a tennis court. The boy exposed himself to danger, ignoring Sowell's warnings, and with a minimum of effort by the father to restrain him.

Following that experience he read in the newspaper about a local teacher awarded for her work in the classroom. Sowell wrote:

Was this because her students had learned more than other students? Not at all. Her greatest claim to fame was that she concentrated on giving her students self-esteem. She didn't believe in a lot of academic demands, grading and homework. All that might have hurt the little darlings' self-esteem. For all I know, Michael may have been one of her students. Certainly he was far less likely to have his self-esteem hurt by his father than to have a couple of teeth knocked out by a tennis ball shot out of a machine.

Then, that night on TV Sowell saw a news report of a riot by students following a university football game. A policewoman was interviewed stating "that it was impossible to physically restrain a mob that size when they get carried away." Sowell then observed:

Of course it is impossible to control everybody. That is why people used to teach their children self-control and obedience to rules and authority. Today, that kind of talk only gets you a condescending smile, at best.

Our award-winning teacher had a sign on her classroom wall saying, "Question authority." Today, there is barely enough authority around to question.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

The failure to train children to respect authority in the home produces offspring who will rebel against law enforcement officers, schoolteachers, elders, etc. Failed homes will more likely produce failed children. Many years ago the claim was made that when both parents attend church services regularly, 72% of the children remain faithful to the church; if only the father attends regularly, 55% of the children will be faithful; the mother alone attending results in only 15% of the children

remaining faithful and if both parents are irregular in attendance, only 5% of the children will be faithful. Fathers, like Abraham, need to walk daily with God, teach the way of Christ by example and in word, using discipline as God instructs. Daily, parents and children need to give praises and thanks to God, something the Gentiles failed to do and suffered the consequences (Rom. 1:21).

¹William J. Murray, My Life Without God, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992).

²David T. Moore, Five Lies of the Century (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1995), p. 35.

³Moore, op. cit., p. 73.

⁴Jack Cottrell, Feminism and the Bible (College Press: Joplin, MO, 1992,) p. 163

⁵Cottrell, op. cit., p. 164.

⁶Cottrell, op. cit., p. 23.

⁷Cottrell, op. cit., p. 68

⁸Cottrell, op. cit., pp. 192-193.

⁹Moore, op. cit., p. 73.

¹⁰Moore, op. cit., pp. 80-82.

¹¹Moore, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

¹²Moore, op. cit., p. 88.

¹³Moore, op. cit., pp. 89-90.

¹⁴William Rasberry, "Fathers Absence at Root of Social Problems," Knoxville News Sentinel, May 14, 1993.

¹⁵William Rasberry, "The Superfluous Father," Memphis Commercial Appeal, Jan. 27, 1992.

¹⁶Bert Thompson and Wayne Jackson, Christian Evidences (Montgomery: Apologetics Press, 1991).

¹⁷Moore, op. cit., p. 64.

¹⁸Thomas Sowell, "A Message for Michael," Knoxville News-Sentinel, March 20, 1993.

TEACHING ADULTS

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It is said that teachers may be placed into one of three categories: (1) those never remembered, (2) those never forgiven, and (3) those never forgotten. Those never remembered had little influence on the student, and they squandered precious time and opportunities. Those never forgiven may have been harsh, failed in communicating, and looked upon in "after years" in pity. Those never forgotten cared, prepared and shared.

A great deal of gratitude is owed to capable teachers. One recalls the great influence of Timothy's teachers about whom the apostle Paul wrote: "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (2 Tim. 1:5).¹ Paul further admonished Timothy: "And the things you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

We shall look at four major considerations of effective teaching: (1) Effective Teachers, (2) Effective Teaching, (3) Effectively Taught, and (4) Emphasis on Teaching Adults.

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

Effective teachers know the Master. "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent " (John 17:3). Effective teachers practice what they teach. "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:16).

Effective teachers know the message. They prepare. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (Jas. 3:1). One cannot teach what one does not know.

Effective teachers know the mission. Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Christ died to purchase the church (Acts 20:28). The gospel is to be preached to all (Matt. 28:18-20).

Effective teachers know the methods. Knowing people (human nature) is a must for effective teaching. Knowing possibilities (molding for eternity) is also a must for effective teaching. The parable of the sower shows that not all are alike (Matt. 13 and Luke 8). Knowing problems (challenges) is also a must for effective teaching. "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18).

EFFECTIVE TEACHING

The place and importance of the Bible school cannot be overemphasized! Teachers must be consecrated, dedicated and enthusiastic. The Bible school must be efficiently organized. The "spirit of evangelism" will characterize effective teaching.

Planned growth is a must. Students may not do as well as they are taught, but they will do no better than they are taught.

The price must be willingly paid. Sufficient funds must be available for needed materials. Teachers should not have to "beg" for adequate materials. No price can be placed upon the value of just one

soul. Some congregations spend more on a three-day gospel meeting than is budgeted for the annual educational work of the church.

Personal contact is a must. Visit! Visit! Visit!

Prayer should be a part of the teacher's daily life.

EFFECTIVELY TAUGHT

The results will follow when proper teaching is done.

Reaching out by the local church through the Bible classes enables the church to evangelize. The church is a teaching institution.

Respect will be bestowed upon the effective teacher. Effective teachers will be honored by students who "rise up and call him/her blessed."

The realization by the teacher that the future of the church is in his/her hands should challenge the teacher to do the very best.

EMPHASIS ON TEACHING ADULTS

God has spoken concerning the importance of teaching His word.

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds (Heb. 1:1-2).

And Jesus came and spoke to them saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is

written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught of God." Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me (John 6:44-45).

God Places Great Importance On Teaching His Word

The greatest work on earth is teaching God's Word! Christianity depends upon it! Salvation depends upon it!

Nicodemus' tribute to Jesus was, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God is with him" (John 3:2).

Jesus was the ideal teacher. He chose teaching as the method of spreading his kingdom (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). Jesus was the Master Teacher. Of all the things Jesus may have been, it was heaven's decision that He be a teacher. Jesus became known as "the Teacher," "the good teacher," and "the Master Teacher." Jesus was "the Master Teacher" because He knew what He taught (John 2:25); He knew those he taught (John 2:25); He knew the art of teaching (Matt. 7:28-29); and He lived what He taught (Acts 1:1). Christ attracted attention in a variety of ways: through his **message**, **manner** of teaching, **mastery** of his subject, his **methods**, and his **manner** of life.

Teaching God's Word is ordained of God. "And He himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11). "Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers..." (Acts 13:1).

Teaching is important because of what is taught. Teaching God's Word is the means of bringing people to Christ. "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me" (John 6:44-45). "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). "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 complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Teaching God's Word is the means of spiritual growth. "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Pet. 2:1-3). "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you unless you believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:1-2).

Teaching God's Word is the means of keeping Christians saved. "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21). See again First Corinthians 15:1-2.

Teaching God's Word carries grave responsibilities, untold possibilities and eternal consequences. God does not look favorably upon reluctant teachers. "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God" (Heb. 5:12). "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship" (1 Cor. 9:16-17). See Jonah 1-3.

The Church Must Place Great Importance on Teaching God's Word

"The church of the living God" is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). Christians are to teach the gospel. "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

Great importance must be attached to the Bible school because of the value of souls. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul" (Matt. 16:26)?

Great importance must be attached to the Bible school because of the socio-economic factors. Good Bible schools cost.

Great important must be attached to the Bible school because of its success. It is said that 80% to 90% of converts come through the Bible school. Often more "outsiders" attend a Vacation Bible School than a gospel meeting. It is estimated that we are losing between 40% and

50% of our numbers every seven years! God has placed before us two great possessions, time and souls. God expects us to use our time, talent, and treasures in carrying the gospel to the lost.

Some Qualities of the Christian Teacher

Second Timothy 2:2 sets forth two necessary qualities of the good teacher: (1) full of faith (sound in the faith), and (2) faithful (faithful in soundness).

The good Bible teacher has great vision. He/she is not just teaching a lesson, but molding souls for eternity.

The good Bible teacher must have great vision and good measures of patience.

The good Bible teacher is filled with love for God and his fellow man. He is a person of prayer.

The good Bible teacher observes the "laws of teaching":² (1) the law of the teacher—the teacher must know that which he/she would teach; (2) the law of the pupil—the pupil must attend with interest to the lesson to be learned; (3) the law of the language—the language used in instruction must be common to the teacher and student; (4) the law of the lesson—the truth to be taught must be learned through truth already known; (5) the law of the teaching process—the teacher is to excite and direct the self-activities of the student; and (6) the law of the learning process—the student must reproduce in his own mind the truth to be learned, and then express that truth in his own words.

Adults Are Most Important To The Church

The Bible is primarily a book about adults! The conversions in the book of Acts were primarily adults.

Adults have much to offer the church. It is said that ninety-five percent of church problems come from adults (attendance, financial, spiritual, etc.).

Adults have important interests and needs. Adults live in "down-to-earth" situations (leaky roof, car payments, doctor bills, unfriendly

neighbors, loneliness, boredom, etc.). Their spiritual and moral needs may be hidden; yet they are basic. (Apply Matthew 7:12 and Romans 12:1-21.) Adults need self esteem, social approval, sense of belonging, affection and maintaining an active personal faith.

Each of the divisions of adulthood has specific needs: (1) young adulthood; (2) middle adulthood; (3) later adulthood; and (4) senior adulthood.

Adult Curriculum

"Curriculum" is defined as "all the courses of study...A group of related courses, often in a special field of study...."³ A limited definition of "curriculum" is "subject matter." A broader definition of "curriculum" is "all of life." A more adequate view of "curriculum" is "all of the activities under the supervision of the agency concerned." "Curriculum" is a "course" through which the student goes.

Curriculum material must be carefully evaluated: (1) Is it in harmony with the Bible? (2) Will it aid in Christian growth? (3) Is it Bible centered? (4) Does it deal with day to day life of the Christian? (5) Does it teach the student to study the Bible?

Some types of curriculums are: (1) Uniform lessons where all departments study the same subject and scriptures; (2) Teacher planned curriculum where the teacher plans and prepares the lessons; (3) Subject studies of the great Bible themes; (4) Specialized studies of Bible customs, Bible geography, Bible history, etc. and (5) Bible textual study of the Bible book by book.

Means and Methods of Instructing Adults

1. Lectures. The teacher can be sure that due emphasis is placed where it is needed. The teacher can explain difficulties in the material to be studied, etc.
2. Question and answer. Bible questions may be presented with the student doing the research both in class and at home. Questions should be short and clear. Generally it is best to avoid questions which may be answered with a "yes" or "no."

3. Discussion. The whole class has an opportunity to participate in sharing information and experiences.
4. Story or illustration. Jesus used parables most effectively. Long, involved stories should be avoided.
5. Scripture search. This is a good method to use in conjunction with other methods of teaching.
6. Panel and symposium. Two, three or more may be assigned to prepare and discuss a chosen topic with the class having the option of entering into the discussion and asking questions.
7. Research and report. A topic is assigned for special study for the next class period.

"I Touch The Future"

"The *Challenger* shuttle crew, of seven astronauts—including the specialties of pilot, aerospace engineers, and scientists—died in the explosion of their spacecraft during the launch of STS-51-L from the Kennedy Space Center about 11:40 a.m., EST, on January 28, 1986. The explosion occurred 73 seconds into the flight as the result of a leak in one of the two Solid Rocket Boosters that ignited the main liquid fuel tank."⁴ "The last member of the crew was Sharon Christa McAuliffe, the first teacher to fly in space...selected from more than 11,000 applicants from the education profession." On her application form she wrote, "I watched the Space Age being born and I would like to participate."⁵

Linda (our oldest daughter), my wife and I were among those who personally witnessed this tragic scene. A stunned world saw the explosion via television. The scene is as fresh in my mind as if it were yesterday.

In his lecture on "Reflections: My Life in Preaching," during the 1998 Annual Freed-Hardeman University Lectureship, George W. Bailey said, "One of the astronauts who was onboard that fatal launching was a schoolteacher. She often wore a T-shirt with the words: *I touch the future—I teach*. I would like to say...*I touch eternity—I preach!*"⁶

The teacher of God's word touches eternal souls with the eternal message that "will by no means pass away" (Matt. 24:35).

"And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

ADDENDA

APPLICATION FOR TEACHERS

The following is given as an example of some information that elders would want to consider in teacher selection for an adult Bible class or any Bible class.

NAME: _____ DATE _____

ADDRESS: _____ PHONE _____

MARRIED _____ SINGLE _____ NAME OF MATE _____

NAMES OF CHILDREN AGE? AT HOME? MEMBER OF CHURCH?

(1) HAVE YOU BEEN PREVIOUSLY MARRIED? _____

(2) WHEN WERE YOU BAPTIZED? _____ WHERE? _____

(3) HAS YOUR MATE BEEN PREVIOUSLY MARRIED? _____

(4) WHERE DID YOU WORSHIP BEFORE COMING TO THIS
CONGREGATION? _____

ACADEMIC TRAINING

(5) INDICATE YOUR EDUCATION:

ELEMENTARY _____ HIGH SCHOOL _____ COLLEGE _____

(6) TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

BIBLE SCHOOL: _____ WHEN? _____ GRADE? _____

WHERE? _____

PUBLIC SCHOOL: _____ WHEN _____ GRADE? _____

WHERE? _____

ATTITUDE

(7) ARE YOU IN AGREEMENT WITH THE PROGRAMS OF THIS CONGREGATION? _____

(8) DO YOU HAVE A QUESTIONABLE HABIT YOU CANNOT RECOMMEND TO THE CLASS? _____

(9) ARE YOU FAITHFUL IN ATTENDING THE SERVICES OF THIS CONGREGATION? _____

ADMINISTRATIVE

(10) SPECIFY THE AGE LEVEL YOU PREFER TO TEACH

(11) SPECIFY THE TIME PREFERRED:

SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE CLASS _____

WEDNESDAY NIGHT BIBLE CLASS _____

FAMILY VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL _____

AFFIRMATION

*"If selected as a teacher, I will do the best I can to keep the church pure by both my life and teaching."*_____
(Signature) DATE _____

¹All Bible quotations are from the New King James Version.

²Glenn M. Lee, "Adult Bible Instruction," unpublished.

³American Heritage Dictionary, Computer Edition.

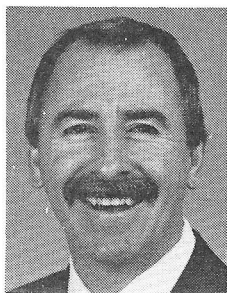
⁴<http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/pao/office/History/Biographys/challenger.html>.

⁵Ibid.

⁶1998 Freed-Hardeman University Lectureship, p. 21.

INVOLVING EVERY MEMBER

RANDY KEA



Randy Kea was born in Sanford, NC, and reared in Louisville, MS. He has a B.S. in Bible from FHC and has preached for 25 years in MS, FL, OK, LA, AR, TN and GA. He and Debbie (McManus) have two children, Clint and Christy. He has preached for the Forest Park, GA church since 1996.

I appreciate the invitation and opportunity to speak on this lectureship. My assigned topic is "Congregational Involvement." Every member of the church should be involved in some way in the work of the local congregation. This presentation will show that this is what God requires in order to please him. Unfortunately, many congregations have only a small percentage of members who do most of the actual work.

GOD'S PLAN = CONGREGATION INVOLVEMENT

God's plan for the New Testament church is that every Christian should be a member of a local congregation. Biblically speaking, there is no such thing as being a member of the church "at large."

Each congregation of the Lord's church is to have its own elders (pastors, bishops) (Acts 14:23; 20:17-28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Tit. 1:5-9; Heb. 13:17). The elders are to oversee the work of the local church and watch for the soul of each member.

Fully organized local churches are to have deacons to assist the elders and serve the congregation (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). Deacons are appointed servants with specific works assigned to them. However,

it is clear that all members of the local congregation should be involved in the work of the Lord. Every Christian is a servant (Matt. 20:25-28).

Preachers (evangelists) are to proclaim the word of God. Preachers should spend the necessary time to study and prepare for their lessons. Much of the work done by preachers today should be done by elders (who are the true pastors of the church), deacons, and other members. The primary work of the preacher is to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2).

THE CHURCH = THE BODY = CONGREGATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

In 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 we have the longest discussion of spiritual gifts (miraculous powers) in the New Testament. In chapter 12 Paul itemizes the gifts. In chapter 13 he discusses their temporary nature in contrast with the eternal quality of love. Then in chapter 14 he gives the regulations that would govern their use while they were present in the church.

In his discussion of spiritual gifts, Paul describes the church as "the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27). Consider the following points made by Paul on the importance of each individual member of the church.

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body (1 Cor. 12:12-20).

In Romans 12 Paul again stresses the importance of each member of the church. Here also he describes the church as a body and emphasizes that each member of the body has a function:

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. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness (Rom. 12:4-8).

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS TEACH INVOLVEMENT

In the New Testament the church is described under various figures of speech. It has been previously noted that the church is the body of Christ. However, there are other scriptural designations that teach the importance of each member and that all Christians should be involved in the work of the Lord.

First, the church is described as a spiritual house made up of individual stones:

Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:1-5).

By inspiration the apostle Peter pictures the church as a spiritual building composed of individual "lively stones" (living stones). In other words, every stone is alive and important to the structure as a whole.

Second, the New Testament portrays the church as an army engaged in a spiritual battle:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God,

that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (Eph. 6:10-13).

The command to put on the whole armour of God is addressed to brethren generally, not just to preachers and elders. All Christians are to stand and fight in this warfare. Many members of the church do not even know that there is a battle going on, much less engage the enemy. Members everywhere should arise out of their apathy and indifference and fight for truth and righteousness.

Third, the kingdom (the church) is presented in the New Testament as a "vineyard."

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward. Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the Goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden

and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen (Matt. 20:1-16).

As one reads this parable it becomes clear that when a person enters the kingdom the Lord expects that person to be active as a "labourer" in the church. To please the Lord all Christians must labour in the kingdom.

Fourth, the Lord's church is identified as a "royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9). Further, Peter refers to the church as a "holy priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5). If the whole church constitutes a priesthood, then it follows that each Christian is a priest. As a priest each Christian is to engage in "spiritual sacrifices" (1 Pet. 2:5). These spiritual sacrifices would include giving (Phil. 4:15-19), worship (Heb. 13:15), and even evangelistic activities (Rom. 15:16). You cannot separate priesthood from sacrifice and sacrifice means involvement.

VARIOUS INSTRUCTIONS TEACH CONGREGATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

As Christians we have various responsibilities and obligations. Specific instructions are given in the New Testament concerning these matters. For example, Paul concludes the great chapter on the resurrection by issuing a direct command: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). Note here that the command to be involved in the work of the Lord is given to the "brethren," not just to preachers, elders, and deacons.

Another example of this would be in the obligation that the church has to try to "restore" those who have become unfaithful. In Galatians 6:1 Paul places this responsibility upon all of the "brethren." While it is true elders are primarily responsible for each soul under their care, all Christians should assist them in reclaiming brethren who fall away (Jas. 5:19-20).

A third example of congregational involvement would be in connection with the process of church discipline. Consider these passages:

For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:3-5).

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).

It is clear from these verses that withdrawing fellowship is a congregational action including every faithful member.

WHY BECOME INVOLVED?

Many times people are baptized and all they do is occupy a pew for one hour a week for the rest of their lives. We should want to be involved. We should teach people before we baptize them that the Christian life involves daily denial, sacrifice, and putting first things first (Luke 9:23; 14:25-33; Matt. 6:33). The Bible places before us three reasons why we should become involved.

First, we should be actively involved in the work of the Lord because of his great love and sacrifice for us:

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

When we consider the cross and the great love demonstrated there for each of us, how can we remain inactive in the church? He gave himself for us, let us live for him.

Second, God has revealed in his word that there will be a day of accounting and judgment. The Lord Jesus previews this during his personal ministry. Consider the parable of the talents:

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into

outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:14-30).

It should be pointed out that all three of the servants had responsibility and did give account to the Lord for their action or lack of action. The Lord expects all of his servants to be involved in his work.

A third reason for being involved and active in the service of the Lord is the prospect of reward. One day Jesus is coming back to claim his own (John 14:1-3). Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people. Paul says our hope is "laid up" in heaven (Col. 1:5). Peter declares that our inheritance is "reserved in heaven" (1 Pet. 1:4). The Bible teaches we will be rewarded according to our works:

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works (Rev. 20:11-13).

God will bless us eternally for the work we do for him.

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

Jesus is our example and we are to "follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). We cannot remain inactive and claim to follow the example of Christ. Jesus said, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work (John 9:4). At the end of his earthly ministry Jesus could say, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). Jesus worked tirelessly in his service to God. The church today needs to have this same disposition.

A SUGGESTED PROGRAM

We have recently implemented a member involvement program at Forest Park. Following are the details of this program:

First Step

The ultimate goal of any program is to get 100% involvement by the members of the local congregation. Although this is virtually impossible, this should always be the goal for which a congregation should strive.

First, a survey should be conducted by using a member profile to determine who is involved in what. This profile would also reflect what each member would like to be involved in.

Second, this information is then put on a computer data base. The elders can then know what each member is currently active in and what other areas they would like to serve in.

New Members

Consideration must also be given to new members. Churches obtain new members by conversion or transfer of membership. Elders should meet with all new members and discuss the fact that they expect them to be active in the work of the Lord. Each new member is given a profile to complete and this information is added to the data base. Also, when anyone is restored they should go through the same process. In this way the data base is constantly updated and will be available as a continuing source of workers for various activities.

The following sample of a member profile is not intended to be exhaustive. Every congregation has different details concerning the programs they have in place. However, the profile should be as specific as possible.

MEMBER PROFILE (Example)

<u>Area</u>	<u>Active</u>	<u>Interested</u>
Elder	_____	_____
Deacon	_____	_____
Teaching		
Adult	_____	_____
Teen	_____	_____
Primary	_____	_____
Preschool	_____	_____
Ladies	_____	_____
Publications		
Printing	_____	_____
Collating	_____	_____
Tracts	_____	_____
Tapes	_____	_____
Library	_____	_____
Youth		
Director	_____	_____
Chaperone	_____	_____
Evangelism		
Bible Correspondence Course	_____	_____
Bible Videos	_____	_____
Prison Ministry	_____	_____
Personal Studies	_____	_____
Building/Grounds	_____	_____
Transportation	_____	_____
Office Volunteer	_____	_____
Nursery Helpers	_____	_____

Worship

Lord's Table	_____	_____
Prayer	_____	_____
Read Scripture	_____	_____
Preaching	_____	_____
Benevolence	_____	_____

GROW OR DIE

The book of Acts records the growth and development of the New Testament church. Luke records both the numerical and spiritual growth of the Lord's church:

Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47).

And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).

But the word of God grew and multiplied (Acts 12:24).

And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily (Acts 16:5).

The church grows as individual Christians grow. Individual Christians grow as they study the word of God and become involved in the work of the Lord (1 Pet. 2:2; 1 Cor. 15:58); Tit. 3:1). It is the obligation of the elders to lead, tend, and oversee the church to this end. Each Christian should desire to serve the Lord faithfully in keeping with the talents he possesses. Remember there will be an accounting one day (John 12:48; Matt. 25:14-30).

VISITATION

TIM FORLINES



Tim Forlines was born in Charleston, WV. He is a graduate of Bluefield State College and East Tennessee School of Preaching. For the past eight years, he has preached for the Claxton Church of Christ, Powell, TN. Since 1992, he has been an adjunct instructor for East Tennessee School of Preaching. Tim and his wife Kathy have two children, Ashlea (9) and Janie (6).

INTRODUCTION

We recognize a relationship between visitation and a strong and growing church. That brethren are aware of the connection is readily seen in the presence of visitation programs in many congregations. Books dealing with church growth emphasize visitation. Preachers are expected to visit, and wise elders spend much time in visitation. Leaders in congregations seek ways to involve more of the members in visiting. We are interested in visitation, and rightly so. It is hoped that the present study will help to encourage a more effective ministry of visitation.

Visitation in the Bible¹

It is an interesting study in itself to find the occurrences in Scripture of the various forms of the English word "visit." Perhaps an examination of the use and meanings of the word in the Bible will help toward greater effectiveness in visitation.

The word is sometimes used in the Old Testament with regard to God's care for His people. In Genesis 21:1-2, the Lord "visited" Sarah, wife of Abraham, in granting Abraham "a son in his old age" (cf. 1 Sam. 2:21). At the end of his life, Joseph told his brothers that the Lord would someday "visit" them in Egypt and take them to the land He had promised (Gen. 50:24). Centuries later, God instructed Moses to tell His people in Egypt that He had indeed "visited" them, for the aforementioned purpose (Ex. 3:16-17). Naomi returned to Israel because she had heard that "the LORD had visited His people in giving them bread" (Ruth 1:6). David pondered why the God who created the universe would "visit," or care for, man (Psa. 8:4; cf. Psa. 65:9). David also wrote of how God had "visited" him in the night, in the context of testing David's heart (Psa. 17:3). The word is also used in the context of punishment delivered by God for breaking His commandments (Ex. 20:5; cf. 30:34; Psa. 89:32). Job spoke of God as One who "visits" man with trials (Job 17:18). We also read of one person visiting a place or another person, in much the same sense as we use the term today (cf. Gen. 38:1; Jer. 6:3). The prophetic books continue the use of the word in the ways already mentioned.

In the New Testament, the word most often translated "visit" is episkeptomai, and means "to look upon," or to "inspect."² This word is found in Luke 1:78, where God is said to visit with His blessings, in sending Jesus. In Acts 7:23, we read that it came into Moses' heart to "to visit his brethren, the children of Israel." He had, until that time, lived a different kind of life than theirs, and would now "inspect" their state. Similarly, this word is found in Acts 15:36, referring to Paul's suggestion to Barnabas that they now "visit" the congregations they had planted in various cities, the stated purpose being to see "how they are doing." The presence of this word in Matthew 25:36 and 43, and James 1:27 sheds light on the way we should understand the word "visit," with regard to our work in the church. These passages mention visiting those who are sick and in prison (Matt. 25:36, 43), and those who are widows and orphans (Jas. 1:27). The idea is that of visiting "to see" how one is, with the purpose of *helping* that person. In fact, in the judgment passage in Matthew 25, the response of those to whom Jesus said "you did not visit Me," shows that they understand Him to be referring to their failure to *minister* to Him (v. 44).

Visiting is normally thought of in either a social or geographical context. Socially, we think of visiting friends or relatives, for the purpose of spending time with those with whom we have close ties. Geographically, we might think of visiting a national landmark or a popular vacation spot for the purpose of seeing a significant place or

thing, or for the purpose of relaxation. Actually, both ideas bear a relation to the biblical idea of visitation, as seen in the passages we have considered. The first involves *contact* with people and the second involves *going*. Both involve *purpose*. The biblical idea of "visiting" helps us to see what the purpose of our visiting in the church should be: to be in the presence of other people, in order to see how we can serve them.

THE PURPOSE OF VISITATION

Why visit at all? What does visitation accomplish? How does visitation contribute to the growth and stability of the church? We have seen that the biblical uses of the word "visitation" often involved God "visiting" something upon an individual or a group. Recall, for instance, the various Scripture references where God is said to have visited someone with His *care*. Next, recall those references where visitation refers to what one person is said to have done (or not to have done) for another. Certainly, our visiting is a means of taking God's concern and help to others. Some things that God wants done for people, He expects His church to do. Our practice of visitation is simply a means of doing that very thing. In feeding the hungry, or caring for the sick, is it not fair to say that one way God "visits" His care upon these people is through His church?

It is here that we find the test of whether visitation fulfills its purpose. Do we visit for the sake of visiting, or do we visit for the sake of caring for and assisting others? When help is needed, more than a social visit is needed. I recall seeing a bulletin article which told of some Christians going to see a woman who was ill, and socializing while there was an obvious need for help with the housework. It is clear that such a visit misses the mark when it comes to fulfilling the biblical idea of visitation.

HOW VISITATION HELPS THE CHURCH

The late Ira North related a conversation in which a realtor told him the secret to successful real estate buying, which he stated in terms of three rules: Location, Location and Location. North adapted that thought in stating what he saw as the key factor in church growth — **visitation**.³ The relationship between visitation and church growth is not lost on anyone who has participated in the growth of a congregation.

The Church Grows Through Visitation

This idea of visitation being a means of taking God's care to others can be seen in the area of evangelism. The Bible teaches that God wants all men to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9). If there is ever an area where we might expect God to directly "visit" men, it is in evangelism. However, a study of conversions in the New Testament demonstrates that God uses His people in teaching others the gospel of Christ. Three classic examples show God actually sending men to teach: the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26ff), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:10ff) and Cornelius (Acts 10:9ff). Of course, we understand that God does not directly send us today. We are "sent" today when we read and understand those passages of Scripture that tell us to teach others. However, an important principle found in each of those passages where God directly sent someone is that He did not directly visit the one being taught!

The *numerical* growth of the church is accomplished through evangelism. Of course, there is more than one avenue in which evangelism takes place. The public preaching of the word is at times evangelistic in its thrust. The Bible school has great potential for the addition of souls to the kingdom. Various programs have been implemented by congregations with the purpose of reaching out into the community with the gospel. Often, however, such works are not as effective as they could be because of the absence of an essential element: personal contact. Our worship services and programs of work introduce us to people who are not members of the Lord's body.

The irony is that we can be in the presence of people week after week (as in the case of repeat visitors to worship assemblies, for instance), and still not learn how to begin to reach them with the gospel. In commenting on Paul's house-to-house ministry of teaching, Burton Coffman writes:

Only by face-to-face, person-to-person contact with souls who would be won for the Master can there be the development of the ties of brotherhood and affection which so clearly distinguished the relationship between Paul and his converts. . . . So-called "experts" who advocate methods of church building which do not include personal visitation on the part of ministers, elders, and all who are active in the church, are advocating "theories" only; for there are no examples of

churches anywhere that were ever built up without personal visitation.⁴

Many people will more readily take us into their lives when we visit them in their homes than they will when they visit us in our assemblies. This is not difficult to see and understand. Is it not true that close friendships are better formed and nurtured in the more intimate setting of in-home visitation?

It is sometimes the case that visitation provides us with the initial contact for reaching others with the gospel. This is especially true of hospital visitation, and visits to people in times of crisis. In times of difficulty, people appreciate personal expressions of genuine concern for their well-being. Sometimes we find that, in attempts to become better acquainted with others, they have been unreceptive — *until they were visited during a time of sickness or the loss of a loved one*. It is not at all uncommon to hear of such experiences.

The Church is Strengthened Through Visitation

There are several ways in which the church is strengthened through visitation. Visitation plays a part in reaching the weak and wayward, of course (cf. Gal. 6:1-2). This kind of visiting, though difficult, is necessary in much the same way as visitation in connection with evangelism is necessary.

Ties of fellowship are strengthened in the simple practice of social visitation among the members. One of the early descriptions of the daily life of the church relates that "breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart" (Acts 2:46). Bonds of Christian friendship are formed and strengthened through this kind of togetherness. In his discussion of the value of a Brother's Keeper ministry, Mac Layton includes a poem (author unidentified) which ponders the results of Christians knowing each other better. An excerpt from that poem has a place in our present study:

If we knew each other better,
We would praise where now we blame,
We would know each bears his burden,
Wears some cross of hidden shame.
They so long alone have borne,

If we knew each other better
We would praise instead of scorn.
If we knew each other better
We would feel the heartaches bitter
You and I and all the rest,
Seeing down beneath the surface
To the sorrows all unguessed,
We would quit our cold complaining
And a hand of trust extend,
If we knew each other better
We would count each one a friend.⁵

Occasionally someone will make the remark that we as members of the body of Christ need to engage in more visitation among ourselves of a simple social nature. It is hard to disagree with that observation in light of the inspired record of that kind of visitation among early Christians.

The church is also helped through visitation to the extent that the *individual doing the visiting* is helped by it. Visitation helps the Christian to overcome selfishness and ingratitude. When we reach out to help others, it helps us place our own problems in perspective! In his last meeting with them, Paul reminded the elders of the Ephesian church of something Jesus had said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Christians who become involved in visitation find that it is one area in which those words are proven to be true.

INVOLVEMENT IN VISITATION

On the practical side, not all congregations have visitation programs. It is quite possible, however, that a congregation having no visitation program will have a few members who are nonetheless active and experienced in visitation. These members can be a valuable resource in helping members learn how to serve others in visitation. In fact, it is often the case that a member will be hesitant to visit others on his or her own, but would gladly accompany one more experienced. Even those congregations which have visitation programs can involve more members through sending them out in pairs.

Back of this, however, is the attitude necessary to prompt one to become involved in visitation to begin with — an attitude of servitude.

We have seen a number of reasons for visiting others. All of them involve *service* to others. Paul considered himself a "servant to all" (1 Cor. 9:19), and he taught Christians to serve one another (Gal. 5:13-14). The word Paul uses in both of these passages is the word for bond-service. Another word for service is *ministry*. Paul made mention of the household of Stephanas, who had "devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints" (1 Cor. 16:15). Even the use of spiritual gifts in the first century was for the purpose of ministry, not just by preachers, but by all members of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12). "Ministry" is not a word that we should avoid, but a concept that we should embrace. In fact, would it not be better to refer to the visitation program as the visitation *ministry*?

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As with so many other areas of our work, visitation has its practical side. Our visitation efforts being for the benefit of others, we should be reminded of the need to be as effective as possible. This will demand that we approach visitation in such a way as will afford the best sustained reception to our efforts. In other words, there is always the need to be *considerate*.

Be Considerate of Lifestyles and Schedules. In a later section, we will give attention to certain aspects of our current culture which make the "drop-in" (unannounced) visit less effective than in bygone times. Whether an unannounced visit must nevertheless be made, or even in the arranging of visits, certain things should be remembered to insure that we remain considerate of others. Not everyone gets up as early, stays up as late, or works the same schedule as everyone else. For this reason, it is necessary to give attention to properly scheduling a visit. It is wise to avoid going too early, too late, or during meals and other family activities. [As a general rule, no earlier than 1 P.M. and no later than 7:30 P.M. are the guidelines I personally have tried to follow.] It will sometimes be evident that one has come at an inconvenient time; if such is the case, it involves the simple matter of excusing oneself and trying to reschedule the visit. As self-evident as this should seem, there have been cases where brethren making visits were remembered only for their apparent rudeness. Furthermore, we should not become an annoyance to others in making a visit too lengthy. In deciding how long a visit should be, it is better that it be too brief than too lengthy.

Be Considerate of Feelings. Some of our visiting will be for the purposes of evangelizing the lost and restoring the wayward. Our words are always important, and this is no less true while visiting, especially in these situations. This is not to say that we should not say some things that need to be said, or that we should withhold the truth for fear of hurting one's feelings (cf. Luke 7:36ff). Our approach, however, is more important than some might think. Simply keep in mind the following:

1. Some things are better left unsaid at all times.
2. Some things are better left to be said another time, and perhaps by another person.
3. Things that need to be said should be said with the utmost respect for the other person (Eph. 4:15).

Be Considerate of The Privacy of Others. We must always remember that people we might hope to visit have the freedom of choice. Jesus did not force Himself into anyone's home or life. This is not to say that He did not warn men of the consequences of rejecting Him. However, when people either request, or make it otherwise clear that they do not wish to be visited, we should respect those wishes. We are proclaimers and ambassadors, not enforcers, of the gospel. We are servants of men, not intruders into their lives.

We have many opportunities to glorify Christ and teach and edify others through visitation. Of course, as with most other things, visitation involves trial and error, and flexibility. No two people are exactly alike. Anything worth doing is worth doing well; for this reason, we should strive to make the most out of our visitation efforts.

CHANGES IN THE DYNAMICS OF VISITATION

For fear of contradicting anything already set forth, it is necessary to consider one thing more. We live in a changing society. While the purpose of the church in bringing glory to God through Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:21) and the message we are to share with the world (1 Cor. 1:23) are changeless, our methods of reaching out to and serving others cannot in every case remain the same across the decades. Visitation is surely one part of our work as Christians that has been affected by a changing culture. It was once the case that visitation had a

prominent place in the life of a community. Today, however, it is often the case that both spouses work outside the home, and the children are busier with activities outside the home as never before. This leaves little time for family and relaxation in many families. A soaring violent crime rate has resulted in people being more suspicious of others (particularly strangers), and increasingly hesitant to invite new people into their lives and homes. We would be naive to think that such things have not had a negative effect on the practice of visitation. It is particularly true that the drop-in, unannounced type of visiting is not welcomed as much as it once was, in this age when people guard their privacy and their time more closely.

What is the answer? Has visitation outlived its usefulness? Not if we understand what visitation is meant to accomplish. Throughout all that we have considered, a common thread of purpose with regard to visitation should have become evident. That purpose is *contact*. There can be no conversions to Christ or service to others apart from personal contact at some point. A society turned inward does not change the fact of the need for contact in the work of the church. In dealing with the obstacle of increased isolation among people, at least two solutions come to mind. First, as with all areas of our work in the church, we should give greater attention to planning our visitation, with particular emphasis upon arranging visits ahead of time, thus avoiding the unannounced visit that might further isolate people. We can be reminded in this of Jesus' admonition to His disciples to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16). Second, we might consider the use of our own homes for hospitality toward others, as an alternative to inviting ourselves into theirs. These are merely suggestions, of course. They are offered in the hope that, rather than become discouraged by obstacles, we will learn to be creative in our approach.

CONCLUSION

Visitation plays an important role in the growth and strength of a congregation. Christianity is, first of all, Christ-centered. It is, second of all, people-oriented. These two ideas are so closely related in Scripture that we cannot make claims to the first apart from the practice of the second (Matt. 22:37-40). Visitation is a means of serving God through our service to others. May we learn to be more diligent and effective in its practice.

¹All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

²Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Baker Book House, 1984).

³Ira North, Balance: A Tried and Tested Formula for Church Growth (Gospel Advocate Company, 1983), pp. 149-150.

⁴James Burton Coffman, Commentary on Acts (Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1977), p. 391.

⁵Mac Layton, How to Build a Great Church (1987, Resource Publication), p. 255.

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Ephesians 4:13

ROBERT COWLES



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INTRODUCTION

Everyone has had the experience of knowing a young man who was not promising but who later became an outstanding leader. When Thomas Edison was young, his teachers gave up on him. Later he would spend eighteen hours a day in his laboratory. The secret of such a change lies in new goals. When one sees the advantage of becoming a respectable husband, or a responsible businessman, a new motivation can mean the difference between life and death.

There are two ways to create the motivation for a spiritual life. One may describe sin in such realistic and ugly terms that its nature becomes repulsive, and we avoid it. Or, he may plant a higher, nobler goal in the human spirit. Once we see ourselves as we are, and as we could be, the ideal becomes challenging. Christianity is primarily spiritual in its nature and impulses, and its design is to make us spiritually mature disciples.

If growth in numbers and in quality of service is to take place in the church of our Lord, Christians must be consistent in their spiritual growth and development. Where Christians are growing and maturing in faith and service, local congregations are enlarging the borders of the kingdom and people are being converted to Christ. However, in places where saints have not grown in faith and love or developed their talents for use in the work of the Lord, there is an embarrassing shortage of qualified leaders and corresponding lack of zeal in the churches. It takes both good leadership and enthusiastic fellowship for a congregation to grow as it should.

THE NEED TO GROW

Spiritual growth in Christ begins when one becomes a Christian. Peter said,

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God (1 Pet. 1:22,23).

When one hears the message of the gospel, believes, repents of sins, and is baptized into Christ, he emerges from the grave of baptism as a new creation in Christ, having been born anew of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). Living the new life, he is expected to grow, develop, and produce good fruit. The test of true conversion is acceptance of the truth and a changed life that bears the fruit of the Spirit of God.

The growth of a Christian toward maturity in Christ is the gradual, consistent increase in knowledge of God and His will, in faith, love, devotion to God, and consecration to the responsibilities of a Christ-like life. Growing toward maturity in Christ is one of the most important aspects of the new life. Everywhere in the brotherhood there is a crying need for spiritually mature Christians.

Take a look at some of the feeble, dwarfed members of the body of Christ today who cannot be depended on to assume the most elemental responsibilities. Not only will they not do some of the important works that need to be done in the church, they cannot. They have not grown and developed in the Lord to the extent that they can assume some of the important tasks that are necessary for the efficient functioning of the church. For example, why are there so few men who are good leaders? Why are

there so few who are qualified to shepherd the flock? Why are there so few truly good teachers? Why are there so few truly good song leaders? Why are there so few who can lead a public prayer and do it well? Why are there so few who are adept at teaching non-Christians the way to become a Christian? I Can tell you why! Because so few have grown and developed spiritually to the extent that they can do these good works. Of course, this is a sad index to the failures of the Lord's people to provide the proper elements that are essential for the development of new Christians.

To become like Jesus is to lay down one's life in service to others. To become like Jesus is to seek and save the lost. However, only those who sit at the feet of Jesus and take time to become like him will have the power and spiritual strength to sustain their service to others. Christian maturity is just like physical maturity. We begin as infants and grow into adolescence and hopefully spiritual adulthood. If we assign the jobs of the church to the infants, what will happen? If we fail to train the infants and feed them and help them grow, what happens? If we fail to train them to be responsible in those pre-teen and adolescent years, what will happen?

INVESTIGATING PRINCIPLES TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

Spiritual growth cannot be answered by time. We all know new Christians who are maturing rapidly in their new life, and we also know brothers and sisters who have been in Christ many years and still need milk. Now that is not how it should be, but that is how it is in many cases.

A lack of bad activity will not guarantee spiritual growth. While we would not endorse bad activity, it should be noted that the absence of badness could also be a sign of death. The Pharisees would not endorse bad activity, but that did not guarantee them righteousness. One can avoid doing bad things and at the same time not be developing spiritually.

Even the presence of good activity does not necessarily confer Christian maturity on anyone. While mature Christians will engage in good works, good activity does not guarantee that one will be a mature Christian. When the goal of any ministry is to earn status, it may be zealous, but it is certainly not spiritual.

Knowledge of God's Word is indispensable to genuine personal spiritual growth. Yet, when people speak of "Bible knowledge," they do not always speak of the same thing. For some, it means the ability to memorize and quote scripture. For others, it means having an answer for every

question that challenges his theology. Still others delight in the latest fads of the day in the theological marketplace. Now, I am not discouraging Bible study, but it should be remembered that one does not even have to be a Christian to have what some call "Bible knowledge."

Spiritual men do recognize spiritual growth. However, it needs to be remembered that much of the praise in the Christian community is based on the physical standards and status principles already mentioned. Perhaps that is why Jesus said, "Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26).

By now, my point should be made: you cannot legitimately measure spiritual growth using physical criteria. Nevertheless, we have not accomplished much if we only consider what does not represent genuine spiritual growth. We turn now to a consideration of what does.

In Matthew 19:16-20 a young man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" It seems that one day, one of the "Outstanding Young Men of Palestine" came to visit Jesus. In his own eyes, he was one good man wishing to talk to another good man about the subject of goodness. Now, the problem is not with his goal, but with the way he wishes to measure his development. Jesus' reply indicates that the young man has a very superficial view of the whole picture. The young man asks, "What do I still lack?" or "What is the next rung up the ladder?" Jesus knew if this young man was to be helped, he would have to come to terms with spiritual maturity. Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Matt. 19:21). In this particular instance, I believe Jesus was considering the needs of the man, and not only the needs of the poor. Riches were his tangible security, and thus his obstacle to growth. However, let me add that Jesus will demand of every prospective follower that he release something. To grow, you must let go.

"When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth" (Matt. 19:22). Now, by physical standards, he was an excellent recruit. He was rich, he was moral, he was religious. However, Jesus knew that there was a great impediment to development in the young man's life. No one can follow unless Jesus is Lord of his life. Could it be that the church today needs to learn to let some leave in sorrow?

By trusting in God is the only way a man can be saved. In human terms, it is impossible to save one's self. The sooner we accept that, the sooner the growth process will begin. The problem with many of our

securities is that they tend to erode the qualities indispensable for kingdom relationships and spiritual growth.

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The children born into your family and mine require certain elements that are necessary for physical growth to maturity. A child must have proper food in proper quantities, a certain amount of exercise, an environment conducive to growth, and freedom from harmful and crippling diseases. The same is true of a plant. Our garden vegetables and flowers must have nutrients, proper cultivation, and freedom from cumbersome weeds and blighting diseases and insects. This also is true in the case of a Christian's growth toward maturity. In order to develop spiritual strength and do what God has designed for us to do, we must have the right kind of spiritual food in sufficient amounts. Peter admonished young Christians, "like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (1 Pet. 2:1,2).

In Hebrews 5:13, 14, the writer explains that "solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." Infants partake of milk before solid food. Babes in Christ need the spiritual milk of God's Word before being ready for the strong meat of the Word.

Spiritual growth requires that one grow in the knowledge of God that comes by the regular use of the Word of God. **Read and study your Bible daily.** There can be no advancement in the things of Christ apart from Holy Scripture (1 Pet. 2:2). When one takes time to reflect on the things that the Word is able to do for the child of God, he understands why it is so crucial to spirituality. Knowing and doing the words of Jesus will set one free from sin (John 8:31-32). The Bible is the only competent guide in right living (Psa. 119:11). Meditating on it equips one for doing good in service to God.

Christians need to set aside a fixed amount of time every day for their personal study of the Scripture. Let your concern be to know not only the meaning of the passage in its context but also its application to your life. As you spend time reading the Bible, keep your heart open, teachable, and humble so that what you are reading can produce a positive change in your heart and actions. As you continue to grow in knowledge, your life will be changed in a marvelous way.

Plenty of exercise is essential for the growth of a Christian just as it is for a growing child. Paul said, "for bodily exercise is profitable for a little; but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:7,8). Another step toward maturity in the faith is **soul-winning**. The ability and willingness of a Christian to share his saving knowledge of the gospel with someone else is the ultimate means to true spirituality. A pure life, study of the Scripture, prayer, and fellowship are designed to equip one for and move him toward the exercise of soul-winning. Becoming involved in taking the gospel to the lost will then insure his continued involvement in these activities.

About forty years ago, *Time* magazine reported that churches of Christ were the fastest-growing religious group in America. Today we no longer have that distinction. Several studies within our fellowship have indicated that we are hardly growing at all. We are even losing ground to the rate of population growth. Do these statistics mean that we have lost our aggressiveness for souls? Have we become complacent about our responsibility to evangelize the world?

Evangelism is not the work of a select few in the church. It is something in which every Christian can and should participate. The sharing of Christ should be a natural part of the human relationships we have with family members, work associates, and friends. In fact, a term that is being used widely now is "friendship evangelism." People will care about what we want to tell them if they know we care about them. Evangelism is just that simple. You do not have to compromise the truth to be friendly. You do not have to embrace falsehood to demonstrate honest concern for someone. You do not have to be immoral to be compassionate to some soul whose life is in ruins because of wickedness.

Sharing the gospel is still the most urgent business in the world. We must realize that non-Christians cannot be saved without the gospel and that the gospel will not be preached to those people by anyone except those who already have received it. "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Rom. 10:14). We had best get about our task. We must train and discipline ourselves as soldiers in an army to fight the battle for the minds, hearts, and souls of men.

A new convert should begin to **participate in good works** for Christ as soon as he is converted. There are so many activities in which he can take a part. He can visit the sick and minister to their needs. He can

participate in any organized visitation program in the church. He can speak to others about his faith and the blessings he has found in Christ. He can begin training for greater service by enrolling in Bible classes and training classes, thus preparing for the opportunities that are sure to come in the future. He can use the special talents such as a good singing voice and a good speaking voice that he may have. If he sharpens his sword and keeps it sharp, the Lord will find a place for it to be used.

A growing Christian should **spend a lot of time in prayer**. Communicating with God is the mainspring of our daily fellowship with Him. We are taught to "be sober unto prayer," "to continue steadfastly in prayer," and to "pray without ceasing." Intimacy with our heavenly Father is a sacred heritage. I sincerely believe that prayer is our much neglected source of spiritual power. However, if one is to grow spiritually, regular, continual prayer is a must.

Many Christians admit that prayer is not a vital and regular part of their lives. In fact, many acknowledge that their prayer life is virtually non-existent. How can one be a faithful follower of Christ without spending much time in prayer? At the inauguration of his public ministry, Jesus prayed (Luke 3:21). When pressed by crowds and the cares they urged on him, Jesus rose before daybreak to seek a solitary place for prayer (Mark 1:31-25). Before choosing the Twelve, Jesus spent a whole night in prayer about the matter (Luke 6:12).

Most of us feel that we are so busy we cannot afford the time to pray. Our Savior had so much to do that he knew he would never get it all accomplished without prayer. Why can we not see the same necessity? Do we have hard decisions to make? Do our responsibilities ever pile up so high that it appears we will never see daylight again? When he was faced with similar situations, Jesus prayed. So should we.

Prayer, like profitable Bible study, requires discipline, forethought, and a workable schedule. Devout Jews set three specific hours of the day as "hours of prayer" (Acts 3:1) and observed them rigorously. The Roman centurion, Cornelius, imitated their practice and observed regular times of prayer (Acts 10:30). You will have to train yourself to such a practice, but the rewards of it are magnificent.

Fellowship is another key to spiritual maturity. The church is a (koinonia) fellowship of faith, love, and good works. Every member of the body of Christ needs the spiritual uplift that comes by being a part of a local church that has a positive and encouraging fellowship.

Take a close look at Hebrews 10:24-25. Public assemblies of the church are times of mutual encouragement, stimulation, and spiritual challenge. Thus, they are not to be neglected. In the particular context of the book of Hebrews, the writer says these meetings were the more urgent because of the great trials that were about to come upon those people. These people needed to be attending these services and storing up strength against the unknown but threatening future.

By the same token, none of us knows what great trials may be ahead for him or her. Thus we dare not neglect the assemblies of the church while it is within our power to participate in them. Turning local churches into the places of warm fellowship God intended them to be will build up the church and each individual member who shares in this sort of fellowship.

God has oceans of blessings available for us, but too often we merely sip rather than drink deeply. Jesus taught us to "Ask, seek, and knock." God promises us the spiritual blessings if we would only pursue.

OBSTACLES TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

What are some of the challenges that we have to face? All Christians, especially those recently converted, have to be careful about the people they associate with. Not all people are interested in our spiritual welfare. Some could not care less whether we go to heaven or not. Some will want to drag us down into a quagmire of moral corruption. Paul said, "Do not be deceived: evil companionships corrupt good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33). It is impossible to associate with our fellow man without being among some who are evil. Instead of allowing them to influence us for evil, we should try to influence them for good. It is easy to "follow a multitude to do evil" (Ex. 23:2), so Christians need to associate with other Christians. We should be selective about the people we associate with, but at the same time we must remember that it is necessary to associate with people in order to convert them to Jesus.

Christians must be free from destructive spiritual diseases that destroy faith, love, zeal, and hope. A Christian must be a disciplined follower of Jesus and trained in a life of righteousness and godliness in his progress toward spiritual maturity.

One way in overcoming obstacles to spiritual maturity is to burn your bridges behind you. What does it mean? It means cutting yourself off

from the things and people of your pre-conversion life that would tend to draw you back to forbidden ways. This step reduces the likelihood of being drawn back into sin.

Your commitment to Christ means that you have died to the world.

Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin...Even so reckon yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:6, 11).

Being "dead unto sin" simply conveys the notion of being unresponsive to sin. One who has genuinely repented of his past life is sorry about the things he has done against the will of God and is determined not to repeat them. It is this attitude which is the background for "burning your bridges."

It would be very poor judgment for a person to continue to associate with people who might make it easy for him to go back on his resolve to serve the Lord. Visits with immature Christians often turn up the fact that they never completely cut themselves off from their pre-Christian life. Pornography ought to be burned, drinking friends should be abandoned, past partners in immorality must never be contacted again, jobs or business partners which compromise Christian principles should be given up. Until you are willing to burn these bridges behind you, the likelihood of using one of them to go back into sin and away from Christ will restrict your attempts at spiritual maturity.

Christians must give up the old people, places, and things that characterized their lives prior to conversion. Carry through with the implications of your repentance, and make it clear to both God and men that you mean to be finished with sin.

Engaging in activities that are wrong and questionable, and succumbing to such diseases as jealousy, hatred, doubt, and indifference also will block the spiritual progress of a saint. Blindly following the crowd and letting one's passions run wild will certainly invoke the wrath of God. This type of exercise is nothing short of spiritual suicide.

DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL MATURITY

In the Middle Ages, a list was made of the "seven deadly sins." The

authors must have considered these seven sins worse than any others. They contained such expected sins as pride, envy, anger, greed, gluttony, and lust. But there is one surprising item from the Greek word (*accidie*), which is normally translated "laziness" or "sloth." Another characteristic of this word is a "could not care less" attitude. We have all seen the debilitating effects of not caring. Immaturity easily robs us of our will to go on with our obligations to God.

In Hebrews 6:12, "That you may not be sluggish...." One of the problems of those Christians was that they had "hands that are weak and knees that are feeble." Having lost their original intensity, they were vulnerable to new ideas or doctrines (13:9). This sluggishness was especially evident in the problem of lack of church attendance (10:25) and in their temptation to "neglect" their great salvation. Sluggishness was only the beginning of what could turn into apostasy (6:6).

There is more than one way to be sluggish. We have already noted some of the symptoms of sluggishness among the readers of Hebrews. Another aspect of sluggishness is found in 5:11, "You have become dull of hearing." Beginning at 5:11 and going through 6:12, the writer launches into the longest exhortation in the book. The church needed depth and roots if it was going to maintain its vitality for a long period of time. Therefore, Christians are expected to make progress in their spiritual lives. If this does not happen then there is a sound warning of condemnation for failure to grow.

It is easy to lose the balance between the tasks of informing and exhorting in preaching. A sermon that merely informs may never confront the audience with the demands of God on their lives. A sermon that only exhorts may easily be without substance. The author of Hebrews knows that a living church maintains its vitality through both exhortation and information. He recognizes that a church needs firm roots in solid, demanding study. He is not afraid of confronting Christians with challenging words. He knows that a faith that is easily reduced to a few slogans does not give a firm place to stand. There is a place in biblical preaching for a challenge to our minds.

Preaching should sometimes confront us with our responsibilities and indict us for our failures. The author of Hebrews says that the word is difficult to explain because, "you are dull in hearing." The Greek word for "dull" (*nothros*) is the same word that is translated "sluggish" in 6:12. This word was often used for a lazy student who refused to develop his mind.

The author might have said, "The fault does not lie in the word itself. The fault is yours. You have not developed the capacity to understand."

The readers had apparently been Christians for at least a generation. The readers had sufficient time to sharpen their minds and become competent to teach. Their problem was sluggishness manifested in a lack of physical and intellectual energy.

The answer for a sluggish church, according to Hebrews, is to be fed "solid food." Any Christian who remained at the beginning level for a long period of time caused serious problems. This was appropriate imagery for the author of Hebrews. After a generation, the readers were still in their infancy (5:13). Their diet consisted of milk, and they were unable to digest the solid food that God would offer. What do you say to strengthen their faith? After all the church can never maintain its identity unless it is grounded in the solid food of the Word of God.

Some Christians can distinguish between good and evil because their minds have been trained by the word of righteousness. Without this training, we have no way to evaluate new ideas. We may easily become prey for any new popular idea. Without disciplined training in the word of righteousness we cannot distinguish between the Christian faith and the many other claims.

Most of us have known people in the church with extraordinary competence in the academic, professional, or business world who have not grown beyond a few fundamentals in the Christian faith. In business they have shown their keen minds and capacity for growth. Nevertheless, they exhibit an unbelievable immaturity when it comes to faith. Sluggish minds do not give vitality to the church.

The preacher's indictment of his community is not the end of the sermon. Preaching also offers words of hope and encouragement. The Hebrew author gives encouragement by pointing to some signs of their growth. People must see a reason to engage in the action to which they are called. In this word of exhortation, there is a stern warning that appears in two other instances in Hebrews (10:26f; 12:17). His major point is that our faith is far too precious to throw away. We go on to perfection because without that progress we will die.

The preacher must provide the resources that will challenge the people to go on. First, God promises His blessing only to those who

discipline themselves to grow up in the faith. Second, we have invested so much of ourselves in the faith that it would be a tragedy to throw it away.

Our church life often appears unpleasant. Disagreements with others and dissatisfaction with the direction of the church can cause us to become disheartened and sluggish. We need to remember our previous investment in a cause in which we believed. By remembering that this is the work of God, we should be encouraged to become the spiritually mature people that God wants in His kingdom.

Does God expect less of us than he did of the first century church? If spiritual progress was expected of them, do we seriously believe that he will accept spiritual stagnation in our lives? Who can be so naive? Will our failure to mature into the likeness of Christ not bring us under condemnation? Finally, what evidence of progress can we point to in our spiritual lives?

CONCLUSION

It is not possible for spirituality to come to one mysteriously overnight and transfer him into a spiritual giant. The New Testament teaches that true spirituality comes about through gradual growth and changes brought about in us by the power of Christ. This is why no one of us has arrived spiritually. We are all seeking to walk with Christ more closely than ever before and to mold ourselves more nearly into his own likeness.

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13-14).

The principles of growth studies in this lesson are the ones that guarantee reaching the goal.

None of us will reach maturity in Christ overnight. It takes time. Personal spiritual growth is a lifetime process. The children of God can tell they are growing when they "outgrow" childish things, trust implicitly in the Lord's promises, and begin bearing fruit to His glory. Peter said, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

Several attributes of Christian character indicate that we are maturing in Christ: faith, zeal, hope, love, knowledge, humility, and steadfastness. All of us grow toward maturity in proximity to the way we imitate the example of Jesus. It is a lifetime process. It takes an attitude of determination to reach the pinnacle of maturity in Christ.

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TEACHING WITH SUCCESS

JODY MILLER



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What an awesome job to be responsible for teaching young souls about God and His will for their lives. It is serious business and we need to prepare ourselves to do it to the best of our ability. We have so little time with our students. If a child comes to Bible Class every time he has the opportunity from birth to 17 years of age, we only have 1,768 hours to teach him the most important things he will ever know. This is compared to 15,000 hours he will spend in school and 18,000 hours he will spend in front of the television. How, then, do we make the most of this time? What should be our goal in teaching our students? In order to determine this, let us compare our Bible School program to building a house. As we build this house, let us discuss what our teaching aims should be for each age level.

THE FOUNDATION

When you build a house, where do you start? You start with the foundation, of course. As we begin our spiritual house, let us think first about our youngest charges. Have you ever heard anyone refer to the Cradle Roll class as merely "babysitting"? Surely those people have

never been involved in such a class and seen the learning that takes place. Our goals for teaching this age group are really two-fold:

1. When building our foundation for our spiritual house we want to create a desire to attend Bible Class. We want these children to look forward to coming to Bible Class. The attitudes developed at this age will last a lifetime.
2. Also, we want them to begin to recognize a few words, such as Bible, God, Jesus, and a couple of key phrases like "Jesus Loves Me." Of course they will not understand the complexities of these words and they may chew on their Bibles, but remember we are laying a foundation for future knowledge.

FLOORING

Let us build the next level of our spiritual house with our pre-school students. Let us put our children ages four years old through about age 6 or 7 at this level. In our spiritual house, this group would be considered the flooring. At this age, our primary focus is basic Bible knowledge. It is at this age that they begin to learn facts like: Adam and Eve were the first man and woman; Noah built the ark; Moses went up the mountain to receive the 10 Commandments from God; and on and on. At this age we are taking the words that they learned while they were in our Cradle Roll class and learning the stories and facts surrounding them.

WALLS

The next level in our spiritual house will be our primaries. Children from age eight to 12 years old. This group will be considered the walls of our house. It is here that we begin to construct relationships and help our students put together the chronology of events in the Bible. We take those facts that they learned in the previous level and begin to weave them together into the entire story of the Bible. Stories move from isolated occurrences to a plan from beginning to end.

THE REST OF OUR HOUSE

Although our class is primarily about pre-school and primary age children, let us go ahead and look at the rest of our house. The teenage

years are the rafters to our house. Our primary concern is decision making. There are so many things facing today's teens. We need to help them take their Bible Knowledge and translate it into their everyday lives. Then, finally, we roof our house with our adults. We are equipping the saints for a long, fruitful Christian life.

CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR STUDENTS

Now that we know what the goals are along the way to building this house, let us talk in general about our students and how their characteristics affect our teaching methods. Understanding what our students are like can only improve the way we meet their needs. While there are many typical characteristics of the children we are discussing, let us focus on three:

1. How long can you keep the attention of one of our students? We all know from experience that it can be very difficult to keep our students still, seated, and interested in what we are trying to accomplish. There are some ways, however, that we can help keep our students occupied and interested. Plan your class activities so that they are varied. You should plan several short activities. Also, at this age, movement is very important. Those little bodies have a great deal of energy and need movement. Make this work for you by singing songs that require movement, having them act out stories, or moving them around the room.
2. Another wonderful characteristic of young children is their imaginations. This makes our job as teachers so much easier. We do not have to be the most creative, most artistic people in the world. Whatever we lack in skill, the kids make up for with their imaginations. Think about the infinite ways that you can use this to make your lessons come alive. I once told the story of the widow's mites to my class of first, second, and third graders using a decorative tin I had sitting around my house, a travel jewelry case and a handful of change. It did not matter that the items did not look like the Bible times' items. I gave them a likeness and they ran with it. To this day, I believe that they could recount the story to you. I also used the table and chairs in our classroom to simulate the city of Jericho. We pretended we were the Children of Israel and did what God told us to do. I did not spend hours making visuals. I just looked around and found everyday things that could be used along with my student's imaginations to help them learn.

3. Children at this age are also very visual. A picture truly may be worth a thousand words. It is important that we make our classrooms bright, colorful and inviting to our students. Use your creativity to make the room come alive. Also, make your story visuals and activity aids large and brightly colored. Making your presentation more attractive will make a huge difference in the amount of the message that gets through.

As teachers, we can greatly improve our effectiveness by understanding what our students are like and what our teaching goals should be at different stages. Our impact is far more reaching than what we immediately see – it is eternal.

SECTION III

Evening Sessions

YOUTH: CHURCH GROWTH

B. J. CLARKE



Bradley Joseph (B. J.) Clarke was born in Canton, IL. He has a B.S. and an M.A. degree from FHC. He is married to the former Tamela (Tish) Hall and they have three children: Daniel, Holly and Michael. He served as Youth and Associate Minister for the Etowah, TN church ('83-'85) and was the evangelist for the Ault Road church in Knoxville ('85-91) before beginning his work with the Southaven, MS, church. His first sermon was delivered at age 9. He has assisted in youth gatherings, gospel meetings, and lectureships. He was voted student "most likely to succeed" in high school; and in '85, was selected as one of the Outstanding Young Men of America. He held a public debate on Baptism and Apostasy in '87. B.J. was a member of the adjunct faculty of ETSP ('89-'90), and now serves as editor of POWER magazine and directs the annual POWER Lectureship in Southaven.

INTRODUCTION

When Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he envisioned the church/kingdom as a stone that became a "great mountain" and "filled the whole earth" (Dan. 2:35). In the parable of the mustard seed, the church is compared to a seed which, "when it is sown in the earth is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: but when it is sown, it groweth up and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it" (Mark 4:31-32). In light of these passages, there can be no doubt that God intends for the church of His Son Jesus Christ to grow—both numerically and spiritually. Each time that a soul is saved the church grows numerically. Every time that a Christian is edified the church grows spiritually.

The book of Acts chronicles the thrilling account of both the numerical and spiritual growth of the early church. For instance, the inspired penman Luke records that about three thousand souls were saved and added to the church (Acts 2:41). The spiritual growth of these

souls is announced in the next verse, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). After the day of Pentecost the number of the disciples continued to multiply (Acts 5:14; 6:1,7; 8:12; 11:21), and the spiritual growth and development of the church continued also (Acts 14:22-23; 16:5).

The passing of time has in no way lessened God's desire for the church to grow. Souls are every bit as precious today as they were in the first century (Matt. 16:26). Moreover, the decline in church growth in recent decades behooves us to give diligent and prompt attention to doing whatever we can to reverse this trend. Of course, the obvious question is, "What can be done to help the church of our Lord start growing again?" One thing is certain: if the church of Christ is going to grow, then every member must be willing to work—every member!

When the children of Gad and Reuben informed Moses that they were content to remain on the other side of the Jordan, with its good pasture land, instead of crossing the Jordan and fighting the battle, Moses retorted, "Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here? And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD hath given them?" (Num. 32:6-7). Having been properly rebuked the children of Gad and Reuben agreed to cross over the Jordan, fight the battle, and return back across the Jordan to claim their pastureland only after the victory was won.

The New Testament also clearly teaches that every member is needed if the church is going to grow. The Son of Man is compared to a man taking a journey and leaving "to every man his work" (Mark 13:34). Paul told the Corinthians that "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God..." (1 Cor. 3:8-9). Paul wrote the Corinthians, "Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:27). He reminded the Romans that "we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same office [function, NKJV]" (Rom. 12:4). He told the Ephesians that when every part of the body does its share, it causes the growth of the body (Eph. 4:16). The body is the same thing as the church (Eph. 1:22-23); hence, to be a member of the body of Christ is equivalent to being a member of the church of Christ. One becomes a member of the church of Christ by obeying the gospel of Christ (Acts 2:41, 47). When one is born of water and of the Spirit he/she enters into the kingdom of Christ (John 3:3-5), which is the same thing as the church of Christ (Matt. 16:18-19), the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). Accountable

people of various ages, both the young and the old, and the in-between, have obeyed the gospel. Our point is this: since many young people have obeyed the gospel, many young people have become members of the church, the body of Christ. Since many young people are members of the body of Christ, and each member is expected to do his/her share of the work, then young people are expected by God to contribute to the work of the church. Moreover, since the growth of body (the church) is caused by every member doing his/her part, then if every young member of the church does his/her part, the church will grow!

YOUNG PEOPLE CAN CONTRIBUTE

Someone may ask, "But what can young people possibly do to contribute to the growth of the local church?" We shall give a detailed answer to this question shortly, but first we wish to demonstrate that even a casual survey of the Sacred Writings reveals that God expects young people to remember him and honor him in their youth. The wise man penned the following words, "Remember now thy Creator **in the days of thy youth**, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Eccl. 12:1). The psalmist declared, "For thou art my hope, O Lord God: **thou art my trust from my youth**. By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of thee...O God, **thou hast taught me from my youth**: and hitherto I have declared thy wondrous works" (Psa. 71:5-6, 17).

Certainly, the premier demonstration of the difference that youth can make is embodied in the story of David and Goliath. David was the **youngest** son of Jesse (1 Sam. 17:14). His father commanded him to take provisions out to the battlefield where his three older brothers were encamped (1 Sam. 17:17-20). Not long after David arrived to talk with his brethren, the champion of the Philistines, Goliath of Gath, came before the Israelites and taunted them. When David watched the children of Israel flee in fear from Goliath, he asked, "who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam. 17:26). At this point, David's oldest brother Eliab angrily rebuked him, accusing him of coming to the battle just to see what he could see (1 Sam. 17:28). David asked, "Is there not a cause?" (1 Sam. 17:29).

Word quickly circulated to Saul about what David was saying and doing, and Saul sent for him. When David arrived, Saul bluntly announced, "Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with

him: **for thou art but a youth**, and he a man of war from his youth" (1 Sam. 17:33). Unfazed by Saul's lack of confidence, David told of his victorious conquest over a lion and a bear. Then he said, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (1 Sam. 17:37). Saul replied, "Go, and the Lord be with thee" (1 Sam. 17:37).

After a failed attempt to move about while wearing Saul's armor, David removed the armor, selected five smooth stones, put them in his shepherd's bag, took his sling in his hand and drew near to the Philistine. When Goliath saw David approaching him "he disdained him: **for he was but a youth**, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance" (1 Sam. 17:42). However, David was not about to let Goliath "despise his youth" (Cf. 1 Tim. 4:12). Ignoring Goliath's taunts, David boldly proclaimed, "This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand" (1 Sam. 17:46). Then the text declares:

And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled (1 Samuel 17:49-51).

After this magnificent victory, Saul asked Abner, "Whose son is this **youth**?" (1 Sam. 17:55). When Abner replied that he did not know, Saul ordered him to find out "whose son the **stripling** [young man] is" (1 Sam. 17:56). As David returned from defeating Goliath, Abner took him and led him straight to King Saul, who asked, "Whose son art thou, **thou young man**?" (1 Sam. 17:58).

Passage after passage emphasizes the youth of David, yet his youth did not stop him from contributing mightily to the cause of God! In contrast to the courage of young David, we read of Jether, the firstborn son of Gideon, who was told by his father to take his sword and slay Zebah and Zalmunna, who were enemies of Israel. "But the youth drew not his sword: for he feared, **because he was yet a youth**" (Judges

8:20). Jether saw his youth as a barrier; David saw his youth as an opportunity to stand up for God and be counted!

In fact, David is not the only young person who stands out in the Scriptures as a valuable servant of God. Consider just a few examples of the different young people who made a difference. When Abraham left to go to the land of Moriah, to offer up his son Isaac, he "took two of his **young men** with him" and instructed them to abide with the donkey until he and Isaac returned (Gen. 22:3-5). Joseph was a "**young man**" when he interpreted the dreams of the chief butler and baker (Gen. 41:12). After writing all the words of the Lord, Moses rose up early, built an altar and "he sent **young men** of the children of Israel" to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings upon the altar (Ex. 24:5). In fact, Moses had a special servant, a **young man by the name of Joshua** (Ex. 33:11). Later, in the Old Testament, we read that Samuel "**the child** did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest" (1 Sam. 2:11, 18, 21). The Scriptures record that "**the child Samuel** grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men" (1 Sam. 2:26).

At the battle of Jericho, the spies that went in to rescue Rahab and her kin were "**young men**" (Josh. 6:23). When we first meet Saul, in the Old Testament, he is described as "**a choice young man**" (1 Sam. 9:2). King David had his own band of **young men** to do his bidding (1 Sam. 25:5; 2 Sam. 4:12). One of them was Zadok, "**a young man mighty of valour**" (1 Chron. 12: 28). Also, when a young man came bearing the news that he had killed Saul (at Saul's request), David rebuked him for his lack of respect for the office of king, and David "**called one of the young men**" under his command and ordered him to "Go near, and fall upon him" (2 Sam. 1:14-15).

At one time, Jeroboam stood out as an extraordinary young man. Because Solomon saw that the **young man** was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph (1 Kings 11:28). However, after he became ruler, Jeroboam "forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him" (1 Kings 12:8). On the other hand, a ruler by the name of Josiah, "in the eighth year of his reign, **while he was yet young**, began to seek after the God of David his father" by purging Judah and Jerusalem of idolatry (2 Chron. 34:3-5). Jeremiah was called to become a prophet when he was **still a child** (Jer. 1:6). The Hebrew word translated "**child**" in this passage is translated "**young man**" in Zechariah 2:4, where we read of Zechariah's call to the prophetic office; hence both Jeremiah and Zechariah were young men when God called them to service.

Moving on to the New Testament we read of **"a lad"** who gave his lunch of five barley loaves and two small fishes to the Lord, Who miraculously multiplied the food into sufficient quantities for feeding five thousand men (John 6:8-13). In the gospel of Mark we are told about **"a certain young man"** who, on the night that Jesus was betrayed, followed Jesus at a distance, with only a "linen cloth cast about his naked body" (Mark 14:51). When the authorities tried to capture him "he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked" (Mark 14:52). On the day of Pentecost, Peter referred to the events that transpired thereon as the fulfillment of Joel 2:28. Among other things, Joel predicted that **"young men shall see visions"** (Acts 2:17), a prediction that was fulfilled in the era of the New Testament. When Ananias and Sapphira lied to God, and were stricken dead as a consequence, it was the **"young men"** who arose, wound them up, carried them out and buried them (Acts 5:6, 10).

Young people can still make a difference for God today. In particular, young people can contribute to the growth of the church today. More precisely, it is a certain kind of young people that can help the church grow. Some young people are like Jether—they consider their youth to be an excuse for not fighting the battle. On the other hand, certain young people are like David—they see the cause and unhesitatingly march forward to face the enemy, knowing that if God be for us, who can be against us (Rom. 8:31)? To be more specific, the types of young people who will help the church to grow are those who: (1) **Know and Stow**; (2) **Glow and Show** and (3) **Go and Sow**. Let us consider each of these categories separately.

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO KNOW AND STOW

Young people who **know** the Word of God, and who **stow** it in their hearts, will help the church to grow. This is so because the church, collectively, can only be as strong as are the individual Christians who comprise it. It is essential to our Christian growth that we know the Word of God. The Psalmist understood the importance of the Word of God to young people when he wrote:

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee (Psa. 119:9-11).

The emphasis of this passage is that young people should both **know** the Word of God and **stow** it, i.e., hide it in their hearts. Likewise, Peter exhorted newborn babes to "desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). We are to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). As noted earlier, the growth of the church is not measured just by numerical increase. The spiritual growth of the church is a matter of equal concern. Paul prayed that the church at Colossae would be "increasing in the knowledge of God," knowing that thereby they would be "strengthened with all might" (Col. 1:9-10). John said, "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2:14).

Large membership rolls do not necessarily equal a church that is strong and growing spiritually. In fact, far too often the churches that are numerically strong are spiritually weak. One of the reasons why some of these churches are so spiritually weak is because their young people were not (and are not) properly "rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith" (Col. 2:7). Why were these young people not rooted and grounded in the faith? It is largely because their parents failed to take the time to teach them. Of course, it is self-evident that we cannot impart unto our young people what we do not ourselves possess. Therefore, it is impossible for us to educate our youth concerning the Word of God, if we have not first educated ourselves. You cannot teach what you do not know! Moses exhorted the children of Israel:

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. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deut. 6:6-9).

And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates: That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth (Deut. 11:19-21).

It is apparent that God expected the children of Israel to educate their offspring concerning His commandments. Moreover, they were to teach these precepts "diligently," whether they be sitting in the house, walking by the way, rising up in the morning, or lying down for the evening. People often write things upon the palms of their hands to remind them of something they deem to be important, or they post a note on the front door or the mirror where the message will be seen, and not forgotten. In a similar way, we must teach our children the will of God so diligently that it will be as prominently impressed upon their hearts as a message on a neon sign, and as permanently inscribed as indelible ink!

The Psalmist echoed the same emphasis regarding the spiritual education of our children. He speaks of the will of God:

Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: (Psa. 78:3-7).

Our view of religion and theology is vitally connected with what "our fathers have told us." As parents, we must not hide the truth from our children, but rather, we must make it known to our children in order that the generation to come might arise and declare them to their children. The father is to make known the truth of God to his children (Isa. 38:19). Parents must pass the knowledge of God down to their children as a precious family heirloom. This is precisely what occurred with Lois, Eunice and Timothy. Grandmother Lois passed her sincere faith down to mother Eunice, and they jointly transmitted such to Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5). They made certain that from a child Timothy knew the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15).

After crossing the Jordan River, a monument, consisting of 12 stones, was erected to memorialize the event. Joshua told the people that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters

of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever" (Josh. 4:6-7).

Modern day parents have no less responsibility to educate their children concerning all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). When our children ask what the Lord's supper means, we ought to be able to tell them the Bible answer (1 Pet. 3:15). Likewise, when they ask why we do not use mechanical instruments of music, we should be able to show them the truth. We must not assume that our children will learn all they need to know about the Bible in their Sunday school class or Wednesday night Bible study.

We must impress upon our children the fact that we consider their knowledge of God's Word to be the most important and valuable knowledge they can accumulate in this life. What impression is left with our children when we make certain they have their books with them before they leave the house for public school, but fail to see to it that they have their Bibles with them before they go to Bible class? Moreover, what impression do our children receive when we expect them to do their homework for public school, but never encourage them to prepare their lessons for Bible class?

Frankly, not all of the blame for our young people's ignorance of the Scriptures can be placed upon their parents. Some of the "youth ministers" working with our young people have devoted themselves to being nothing more than glorified recreation and activities directors. The young people under their direction will remember many trips to Opryland, Six Flags, etc., etc., but very few trips to the baptistery to see a friend become a Christian. They may remember lock-ins and trips to Laser Quest, but will they remember also the many sacred moments of singing, praying, and studying together? In the *Gospel Advocate*, May 20, 1948, B. C. Goodpasture wrote:

Amusement and recreation should stem from the home rather than the church! The church, like Nehemiah, has a great work to do and it should not come down to the plains of Ono to amuse and entertain. As the church turns its attention to amusement and recreation, it will be shorn of its power just as Samson was when his hair was cut.

We are not suggesting that it is inherently wrong for Christian young people to get together and have fun. However, when having fun becomes the all-consuming quest of every youth get together, and when the majority of activities planned by the "youth minister" are fun-centered rather than faith-centered, then it is not surprising to see the faith of young people begin to dwindle. In far too many situations, the time for young people to get together to sing hymns and study God's Word is sacrificed upon the altar of entertainment. Hence, having nothing substantive to anchor their faith to, a vast percentage of these young people grow up and either leave the church altogether or maintain some mediocre allegiance to the church by attending, giving and working sporadically to support it.

Some young people, who remain in the church as they grow older, pose a threat to the welfare of the church, due to their ignorance of God's Word. They were so accustomed to being entertained as young people, when it comes to matters relative to the church, that they search for the same thing when they become adults. This is precisely why some of the "baby boomers" in the church are campaigning for dramatic presentations rather than "boring sermons." Some of these "baby boomers" are appointed as elders in the church. In such an influential position, their ignorance of the Scriptures is dangerous and deadly. It is only a matter of time before their ignorance will affect the welfare of the entire body. For instance, some churches are awash in false teaching because their elders are spiritual "children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14).

Unless parents, church leaders, preachers, youth ministers, etc., make some dramatic changes in helping young people **to know** and **to stow** the Word of God in their hearts, the future looks bleak. However, this author does not believe that all young people are ignorant of the Scriptures, or that they want to be. Some years ago, I spoke at a "youth rally" in the eastern United States. After my lesson a man approached me and said, "You did a good job in your lesson, but may I give you some advice?" "Of course," I replied, "I'm always open to constructive criticism." He went on, "Well, you did a good job, but if you're ever going to be successful on the youth circuit, you're going to have to tell more stories and use less Scripture. Otherwise, the young people won't listen to you."

I answered, "Sir, in the first place I have no obsession to be successful on what you call the 'youth circuit.' In the second place, I believe that you are selling our young people short. I work with some young people who love to learn the Bible. I believe that young people

will listen and learn when the teaching of the Bible is presented to them with passion and enthusiasm. But even if some young people don't want that, I know that God wants me to preach the Word, so that is what I am going to do as long as God gives me breath to do it."

As the man walked away, I could tell that he pitied me for being so "out of touch" with modern youth. However, it has been my privilege to teach young people for the last 14 summers at Teenage Christian Camp in Knoxville, Tennessee. During this time, I have learned that most young people are enthusiastic to learn the Word of God, especially those young people who come from homes where the Bible is revered and respected. Brethren, if we want young people to contribute to the growth of the church, then as parents, elders, preachers, youth ministers, etc., we are going to have to see to it that they **know** the Word of God and pray that they will **stow** it (hide it) in their hearts!

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO GLOW AND SHOW

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). We are to cast off the works of darkness and "put on the armour of light" (Rom. 13:12). Though we were sometimes darkness, we are now "light in the Lord" and thus we should "walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). Any person who is a Christian, old or young, should remember Paul's exhortation to the Philippians: "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (2:15). Peter wrote the Christians, who were scattered, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

The sum of the above passages is quite simple: we are to let our Christian lights **glow** so brightly that we **show** forth the praises of the glorious One Who called us out of the darkness into the light. Hopefully, those who are living in the kingdom of darkness will be attracted by the glow of our Christian lights to the point that they, too, will seek to be called out of darkness into His marvelous light!

Paul told the young man Timothy, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). This passage makes it

clear that God expects young people to **show** a proper example to a watching world. Specifically, young people should be an example "in word," meaning that their lives should conform to the Word of God and that the words they speak should be "that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:29).

Young people should be an example "in conversation," i.e., manner of life or conduct. Their conduct ought to conform to the gospel of Christ (Philip. 1:27) and stand out clearly from that of other young people. In fact, our conduct should be such that even though some speak against us as evildoers, they may by our good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (1 Pet. 2:12). We should let the beauty of Jesus be seen in us by following "his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21).

Young people should **show** an example "in love." Young people who truly love God will keep the commandments of God (John 14:15, 21-23). It is impossible to love God without loving our brethren also (1 John 2:10-11; 3:14-18; 4:7-12, 20-21). Also, Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). If Christian young people **glow** with the love of God, and **show** their fellow young people what God's love is all about, then their young friends may want to become Christians as well, thereby causing the church to grow. Basically, most people in the world feel lonely and unloved. That is why cult leaders like Jim Jones and David Koresh were able to gather a following. Everyone is searching for a place to belong, where he or she will feel loved and secure. The benevolent spirit of the early church attracted many souls to want to become a part of such a loving family (Acts 2:44-46; 4:32-37). Also, the Christian practice of loving our enemies, and doing good to them who spitefully use us and persecute us, can make an indelible impression on those in the world who witness such conduct (Matt. 5:44-47). Simply put, by basking in the glow of God's love and showing the love of God to others, young people today can demonstrate that the church of Christ is the best family in the world to belong to!

In the next place, young people are to **show** an example "in faith," meaning that they should be faithful to God and to the Word of God. Those who do so will be careful to maintain fidelity and trustworthiness to keep their promises, a quality sorely missing from so many people today, both young and old.

Finally, young people are to **show** an example "in purity." Maintaining a pure heart is a challenge to young people because God

has warned us that the "imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). No wonder the writer of Proverbs urged, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Jesus pronounced a blessing upon the pure in heart, promising that they shall see God (Matt. 5:8). Nothing harms the influence and growth of the church any more than for its members to live impure lives. Knowing that young people are exposed to so many temptations to give up their purity, Paul encouraged young Timothy, "flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

Young people can contribute to the growth of the church by letting their Christian lights **glow** (shine) in the midst of a dark world, and by endeavoring to **show** their commitment to God above all else. The story is told of an atheist who came into a city to speak at the Civic Auditorium on the question of God's existence. The atheist mounted the platform and for 45 minutes spewed forth his atheistic venom, ridiculing and chiding believers in God for leaning on an emotional crutch. He finished his speech triumphantly and sat down smugly to await the closing remarks. He was certain that he had devastated the creationist viewpoint. As he peered out at the crowd, suddenly the sound of singing was heard from the upper balcony. It was the sound of two young voices who had begun to sing, "Stand up, Stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross, lift high his royal banner, it must not suffer loss..." Suddenly, those seated in the same section as these young people joined in and helped them sing—then the balcony next to them picked up the refrain—and the balcony next to them. Soon, virtually everyone in the auditorium was standing and singing, "Stand up, Stand up for Jesus" as the atheist angrily walked off the stage and out the door. Indeed, the influence of young people can contribute mightily to the cause of Christ!

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO GO AND SOW

Jesus said to "**Go**" (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15) and "**Sow**" (Matt. 13:3; Mark 4:3, 14; Luke 8:5). More fully, we are to **go** into all the world and **sow** the seed of the kingdom, which is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). It is imperative that we understand to whom this mission was given. The original recipients of the "great commission" were the apostles to whom Jesus spoke shortly before His ascension (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). However, it is clear that Jesus did not limit the charge to evangelize the world to the apostles, because He told them to teach the ones they baptized to observe all things that He had commanded them (the apostles) to do. According to Acts 2, the ones who were baptized by the

apostles were the very same ones who were added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). Hence, the apostles were to instruct the church to observe all things that Jesus had commanded them (the apostles) to do. One of the things Jesus told the apostles to do was to go and preach the gospel to every creature. Therefore, in order for the church to observe all things that Jesus commanded the apostles to do, the church must observe the command to evangelize the world.

In fact, a study of the book of Acts reveals that the church was (and is) God's one and only missionary organization. The messengers charged to carry out the mission of evangelism are the individual members of the church of Jesus Christ. The gathered church in Jerusalem (Acts 2-7) became the scattered church as the individual members of the church were, as a result of persecution, "all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles...therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:1, 4).

It is interesting to observe that it was not the apostles who were responsible for the initial evangelism of the regions of Judea and Samaria, nor was it exclusively a group of "full-time preachers." Rather, the individual members of the church that started in Jerusalem carried out this evangelistic effort. Likewise, the Lord's church today needs to get away from the idea that evangelism is something we hire the preacher to do. When we sow the seed of the kingdom, the Word of God, (Luke 8:11) bountifully, we shall reap a bountiful harvest. Conversely, when we sow the Word sparingly, we shall reap sparingly.

The first century church spread the Word far and wide (1 Thess. 1:8), and that is why the church grew abundantly. Similarly, when the church of Christ grew so much from 1945-1965 it was because the members possessed an abundance of Bible knowledge and a commitment to sow it abundantly into the hearts of men. If we want the Lord's church to grow today we must be more diligent in broadcasting the seed of the kingdom! Each and every Christian needs to **go** and **sow** the seed of the kingdom into the hearts of men. Moreover, there is no passage in the New Testament that exempts young Christians from this work. In fact, if one is old enough to become a Christian, then one is old enough to discharge his or her Christian responsibilities. One of those responsibilities is to **go** and **sow**.

The fact of the matter is that young people can be very effective in the area of evangelism. A number of youth groups have rendered such a vital contribution to the Lord's church by going to a community for a

week, knocking doors, passing out tracts and literature, inviting people to gospel meetings and setting up Bible studies. Some youth groups have volunteered a week's time to go and conduct a Vacation Bible School at some needy congregation. As the song says, "there is much to do, there's work on every hand, hark the cry for help comes ringing through the land." We need young people to see the work, and the need, and to say, "Here am I, send me" (Isa. 6:8).

Young people can make a difference in the growth of the church. Brother W. A. Bradfield used to tell of a gospel meeting, conducted in Mississippi many years ago, in which one little freckle-faced girl was baptized. She was the only visible response of the entire meeting. Some considered the meeting a failure because there was only one response, and that was a young person. However, the little girl grew up and married a Christian. They had five sons and three daughters. All five sons became gospel preachers and thousands were converted as a result of their work.

At another congregation, a teenage girl asked a girlfriend of hers to attend the gospel meeting with her. She came, heard the gospel, and obeyed the gospel. Later, she met a man, assisted him in becoming a Christian, and married him. Together, they moved to Maryland and converted her parents and his parents to the gospel of Christ. Hence, the church was established in the city where they lived and it continued to grow as they continued to **go** and **sow** the seed of the kingdom into the hearts of the men and women in their community.

A teenage boy joined the Air Force, hung around with the wrong crowd, and grew increasingly sin-sick. He became an alcoholic, constantly gambled his paycheck away, and was, by his own admission, unruly and unhappy. He sought for answers and fulfillment but found nothing. He even contemplated suicide. One roommate moved out on him; another one moved in. The roommate who moved in was a teenage boy from Texas. He was a Christian. It did not take him long to figure out that his new roommate was not. However, realizing the value of "a word fitly spoken" he kindly remarked, "I believe if I were you I'd start reading my Bible." Although not immediately apparent, the suggestion worked. Eventually, he was able to influence his new roommate to begin attending services at the church of Christ, where after a series of Bible studies with an elder in the church, he was converted to Jesus Christ for the remission of his sins!

But that is not where the story ends. Ultimately, the young new convert attended the Memphis School of Preaching from 1970-1972. At

his graduation, he received an award honoring him as the most outstanding student of his graduating class. He went on to preach for congregations in Illinois, Indiana, Alabama and is presently preaching in Arkansas. Moreover, he was able to convert his wife out of Roman Catholicism, and all three of his children have obeyed the gospel. In fact, one of his sons graduated from Freed-Hardeman with a degree in Bible and is, at present, the preacher for the Southaven church of Christ in Southaven, Mississippi. Brethren, that gospel preacher is me, the author of this chapter! I was raised in a Christian home, am a Christian today, and a gospel preacher—all because a young teenage boy cared enough about my father to **go** to him and **sow** the seed into his heart that the Bible had the answers for his troubled life. Do not tell me that young people can't make a difference!

Everyone that my father (Ted J. Clarke) has ever helped to find his way from earth to glory ought to be thankful for Joe Crockett, **the young boy who helped my father find his way** to the Lord's church. For that matter, everyone that I have ever helped (or ever will help) to become a Christian, or to become a stronger Christian, by something I have preached, or taught, or written, should think back to a **young person**, who made it all possible by discharging his Christian responsibility! If Joe Crockett had not remembered his Creator in the days of his youth, then I would not have been privileged to know my Creator in the days of my youth!

Furthermore, Joe Crockett's life was radically changed in the days of his youth. A short time after being discharged from the service, he was involved in a car accident that broke his neck. He has been a quadriplegic (paralyzed in all limbs) for approximately 35 years. During these years he has not been able to get up in the morning, go to work, and come home to a loving wife and kids at the end of the day. He did not become a scientist and discover a cure for cancer. His achievements have not made front-page headlines. He never soared through the air and slammed a basketball like Michael Jordan. He is not a household name. But there is a child in my household who wears his name. My wife and I named our first son, Daniel Crockett Clarke in honor of Joe Crockett and the difference he has made in our lives. I do not believe for one moment that he will pass from this life never having accomplished anything significant. If the world stands another 200 years the contributions of Michael Jordan to the sporting world will have faded into insignificance. On the other hand, the contributions of Joe Crockett to my father's soul, my soul, and the souls of everyone we have taught, will continue to have significance. Indeed, young people can make a difference, **an eternal difference!**

CONCLUSION

In this lesson, we have observed that God wants the church to grow. The growth of the body is caused when every member does his or her part. Young people who are members of the church need to do their part. Young people have made a difference for God's cause in the past, and they can make a difference today. Young people can contribute to the growth of the church if they **know** the Word of God, and **stow** it in their hearts. Furthermore, they must **glow** by letting their Christian lights shine before men so that they can **show** forth the praises of God. Finally, the church will grow when young people **go** and **sow** the seed, the Word of God into the hearts of the lost. May God bless us with hosts of young people who will make a difference!

THE CHURCH: BRIDE OF CHRIST

DAVE MILLER



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The institution of marriage has taken a serious beating in America over the last 40 years. Yet it still stands as the foundational building block of the human race (Gen. 2:24). The marriage relationship (which results in the formation of the home) continues to be the divinely designed arrangement for providing stability, security and happiness for society and civilization. This beautiful institution is frequently employed in Scripture as a metaphor for God's relationship with His people.

GOD'S OLD TESTAMENT WIFE

The prophet Ezekiel describes the occasion when God observed a newborn baby girl who had been discarded like garbage shortly after birth. She lay abandoned—left to die—in a vacant field, her umbilical cord uncut and wallowing in her own bloody mess. No one showed any compassion, but God did. He saw to it that the child survived. When the child matured and became a woman, God took her as His bride, entering into a covenant of marriage with her. He showered upon her blessings and splendor. She not only ate well and was well dressed, she became famous for her beauty. Here we have a description of the bride of the

Old Testament—the nation of Israel, descendants of Abraham, whom God placed under His loving, nurturing care (Eze. 16).

This woman is the same one depicted in Revelation 12. In that context, she is clothed with the sun, the moon as her pedestal, and a garland of twelve stars on her head. She is in the midst of labor, about to give birth. Despite the opposition of a fierce, fiery red, seven-headed dragon, who hovers before her in hopes of devouring her child the moment it is born, the woman successfully gives birth to a baby boy and both are transported to safety. The male child is none other than Jesus Christ our Lord who was the product of the marriage of God and the faithful remnant of Old Testament Israel. Their union brought into this sin-cursed world the divine remedy. Satan attempted to thwart the outcome of that relationship by intensifying his attack upon Jesus—at His birth (Matt. 2:16), temptation (Matt. 4), and death (Mark 15:37; Gen. 3:15; Heb. 2:14). Nevertheless, Satan failed in his efforts and Jesus accomplished the eternal purpose of God.

Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death (Rev. 12:10-11).

JESUS' NEW TESTAMENT WIFE

That eternal purpose—the redemption of humanity through blood atonement—is realized in the marriage of Jesus. While Jesus was on earth, He was identified as the bridegroom (Matt. 9:15; Mark 2:19). The imagery and symbolism is unmistakable. His efforts on earth were intended as preparation for His marriage to His bride—the church of Christ. The book of Ephesians expounds this motif more than any other portion of Scripture. Some have even suggested that the theme of Ephesians is “The Bride of Christ.” The point is made especially vivid in chapter five.

The Bride of Ephesians 5

In this chapter, the Holy Spirit compares the relationship of husband and wife to the relationship that Jesus sustains with His church.

In so doing, we learn a great deal about how we should conduct ourselves as the bride of Christ. First, we are to be *submissive* and compliant.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything (Eph. 5:22-24).

Rather than going through life pressing for our own way and organizing our lives to suit ourselves, we are to be looking to Jesus for our cue. He is to be allowed to shape, mold and direct our conduct in every aspect of life.

The pride which we humans so frequently manifest is in direct conflict with the humble, unassuming, submissive attitude which ought to dominate our beings. Lelia Morris well expressed in the song that we sing the circumstance most of us have found ourselves in: "My stubborn will at last hath yielded." We must understand that we are not here to live our own lives. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Another song in our songbooks captures the essence of this point:

O the bitter pain and sorrow
that a time could ever be,
When I proudly said to Jesus
"All of self, and none of Thee."
Yet He found me,
I beheld Him bleeding on th' accursed tree,
And my wistful heart said faintly,
"Some of self, and some of Thee."
Day by day His tender mercy
healing, helping, full and free,
Bro't me lower while I whispered
"Less of self, and more of Thee."
Higher than the highest heavens,
deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, Thy love at last has conquered
"None of self, and all of Thee."

I wonder how many of us genuinely approach life with our daily behavior under the control of Jesus. Do we allow Christ's view to affect

our every decision? Every purchase we make is with *His* money! Every job we decide to take should take into consideration His will. Every decision we make on the job should be according to His will (Jas. 4:13-16). Decisions about where to live, how many children to have, what size of house, what kind of car to drive—all such decisions should be approached in the shadow of Christ's will. Our every thought should be, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" (Acts 9:6).

You see, the submission that the Bible speaks of is a deliberate act of the will in which the individual chooses to submit. The Christian voluntarily subordinates his will to that of the Savior. That submission is not forced or compelled. The phrase, "the church is subject to Christ" (Eph. 5:24) uses a middle voice verb showing that the subjection is voluntary. As the bride of Christ, we freely, joyfully choose to obey Christ out of our love for what He has done.

Second, we are loved. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). Jesus' love is a *sacrificial*, self-giving love. He literally laid down His life for us. We are the church "which he purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). People who grow up in a home where they are abused and unloved are typically insecure and in desperate need of acceptance. Christians ought to be a psychologically well-adjusted, stable group of people. We ought to be emotionally mature and secure. We are the recipients of a love and tender compassion unparalleled among humans. We ought to be able to sing with fervor, "Jesus loves me this I know."

Thirdly, we have been *sanctified* and cleansed by Jesus' blood through the waters of baptism. Paul wrote, "that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:26). The words of Jesus instruct us to obey the gospel in order to achieve that cleansing (John 15:3; 17:17). Knowing we are a cleansed people ought to affect our future behavior. To enjoy such an exalted status and unprecedented reassurance ought to cause us to embrace a joy and a peace that transcends anything the people of the world may have.

Not only does Jesus make it possible for us to become Christians by being cleansed from our past infractions, He also continues to cleanse us by His blood. The process of purification continues as we allow His words to penetrate good and honest hearts. We are being transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). If we are willing and receptive, Christ is able to bless and spiritually beautify us and enrich our spirits.

Fourthly, our walk with the bridegroom entails constant and perpetual attention to *service*—faithful living. Paul continues, “that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27). Christians are not perfect and we certainly make mistakes. But even with our imperfections, we must not divorce the bridegroom and desert Him (Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-29). Instead, we continually participate with Him in His effort to present us at the end of time as spiritually unblemished, unsoiled souls (Jas. 1:27).

Jesus touched on this point in His Revelation to John. The symbolism is somewhat different in that the wedding day is depicted as occurring at the end of time. At that time, faithful Christians will participate in the marriage ceremony and wedding supper (Rev. 19:9). The wedding clothing is said to be “fine linen, clean and bright” which is apocalyptic language symbolizing the “righteous acts of the saints” (Rev. 19:8). In other words, the living of our lives is the process by which we are clothing ourselves for eternity. We are to be “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2). Our righteous conduct is the means by which the bride makes herself ready for the marriage (Rev. 19:7). To change the imagery again—in the words of Paul—faithful Christian living is the means by which we may be presented to Christ a chaste virgin (2 Cor. 11:2).

Fifthly, we must understand that we are the recipients of a love that was not only sacrificial in securing our salvation initially, but which is also *sensitive* on our behalf throughout life.

So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church (Eph. 5:28-29).

The bridegroom loves His bride as much or more than He loves Himself! That love manifests itself in a perpetual process that entails our Lord nourishing and cherishing us. Surely this declaration demonstrates that Jesus extends His assistance in non-miraculous ways to Christians. We have not been abandoned to face life on our own. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Prov. 3:5-6).

Why do we pray, “Guide, guard and direct us”? Do we really believe what we pray? Do we really believe that Christ is aware of our every need, that He is with us everyday, that He is watchful and con-

cerned about us? You remember how Paul described our Lord's loving and constant attention to the Israelites: "For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). Jesus was with the Israelites every step of the way from Egypt to Canaan! He is near us, hoping we will have enough sense to live our lives aware of His presence. Hence we sing, "Let me live close to Thee each day!"

Notice that the bridegroom has modeled for us the meaning of love. The *agape* love of the New Testament is not to be equated with warm feelings or stimulating emotions. Christ's love is an act of personal commitment. It is the rational decision to care for us and to act in our best interests even when we are unlovely and disgusting. "But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Christ's love is totally unselfish. "For even Christ did not please Himself" (Rom. 15:3). Instead, He "made Himself of no reputation" (Phil. 2:7). He did not cling to His equality with God but emptied Himself and took on the form and role of a slave.

He came to serve us (Mark 10:45)! He is sensitive to our needs! He knows us better than we know ourselves and He knows just what we need to be happy in this life and prepared for the life to come. Another song that we sing captures the essence of this point:

My Jesus knows when I am lonely,
He knows each pain, He sees each tear;
He understands each lonely heartache,
He understands because He cares.
My Jesus knows when I am burdened,
He knows how much my heart can bear;
He lifts me up when I am sinking,
And brings me joy beyond compare.
When other friends seem to forget me,
When skies are dark, when hope is gone;
By faith I feel His arms about me,
And hear Him say, "You're not alone."
My Jesus knows just what I need,
O, yes, He knows just what I need;
He satisfies, and every need supplies,
Yes, He knows just what I need.

Listen to Matthew's assessment of Jesus' sensitivity: "But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd"

(Matt. 9:36). We must strive to emulate this critical characteristic in our own lives.

Sixth, as the bride of Christ, we sustain an intimacy with Christ that means we are *soldered* and *solidified* in Him.

For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Eph. 5:30-31).

What a curious thought! Eve was literally fashioned from a portion of Adam's body (Gen. 2:2). She was taken "out of man" (1 Cor. 11:8). By way of comparison, as Eve was a part of Adam's flesh, so we Christians, the bride of Christ, are members of His body, flesh and bones. "This is a great mystery" (Eph. 5:32), but it spotlights the intimate linkage the church has with Jesus.

The church is inseparably united with Christ. The church enjoys a closeness, oneness and unity with Christ. Paul said the church "is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23). To become the bride of Christ, we had to be baptized in water, which Paul says entailed being "buried with Him" (Rom. 6:4). We then endeavor to acquire the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5)—to be Christlike.

If God expects a man to leave his father and mother in order to cleave to his wife, then God expects people to leave their former relationship with the world in order to cleave to the relationship with Christ. This commitment is to occupy center stage in our lives. We have to work at it. We have to cultivate our relationship with Christ. We have to put our union with Him first in our lives. God intends for that union to be permanent. Christ expects His bride to remain faithful and loyal, forsaking all others throughout life. What condition would your marriage be in if you put as much effort into it that you put into being an active Christian and church member? Does our secular job receive more attention and more nurturing than our relationship with our wives and our Lord?

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

It was inevitable that people would deviate from the simple guidelines given in Scripture (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:1-2). The result has been the formulation of unbiblical doctrines, unscriptural practices, and

unauthorized churches (Matt. 15:9,13; 2 John 9-11). In other words, we have multiple brides whom Jesus does not claim as His own.

The Scriptures make clear that God never has and never will sanction such a state of affairs. The only hope of any individual is to be in the one true bride living faithfully as God desires. Many in our day are working overtime to obscure and blur the distinction between the New Testament bride of Christ and the manmade, counterfeit brides that exist in abundance. They seem oblivious to the fact that no denominations are even found in the Bible. Many people do not seem even to be aware of the fact that the Bible describes a single bride—Christ's church.

Yet anyone who cares to consult the inspired guidebook can see that the bride described in the Bible is easily identifiable today. The matter may be easily determined upon the basis of two criteria: (1) Can we know how to become a Christian? If so, then we can identify the bride, i.e., those who have obeyed the one and only gospel plan of salvation; (2) Can we know how to live the Christian life faithfully and obediently before God? If so, we can identify those who continue to constitute the saved body, the bride of Christ.

In light of these simple truths, no legitimate claim may be made by denominational bodies to consider themselves as the bride of Christ. The pluralistic mindset which has permeated our thinking has prodded us to be more accepting of other viewpoints and to "lighten up" in our opposition to false religion. For some 40 years now, we have been goaded and prodded into feeling guilty about claiming certainty about anything, let alone biblical truth. But the truth continues to be that denominations are manmade divisions, unmitigated departures from the faith.

Denominationalism is about the best thing Satan has come up with to subvert the truth of the Bible and bring otherwise religious people under his influence. The world religions and those who embrace humanistic philosophies like atheism, by definition, have rejected the one true God and capitulated to Satan. So where do you suppose Satan is going to focus the brunt of his assault upon the earth? The more he is able to muddy the waters and obscure the certainty of the truth, the more chance he has of luring people into his churches.

We are at a moment in history when Satan is making great inroads into the church and scoring impressive victories against the cause of Christ. As the book of Judges records a cyclical pattern among God's people of apostasy, punishment, repentance, faithfulness, back

into apostasy, we are at the point in history when apostasy holds sway. This periodic purging process seems to be an inevitable recurrence.

What God would have us to do is to stand confidently and courageously upon His will, unmoved and unintimidated by the overwhelming forces which pressure us to succumb. In this fashion, the justice of God will be made evident at the Judgment and, in the meantime, impetus is given to the redeemed to strengthen themselves in the struggle to stay true blue and loyal to the Master. Every possible soul must be "snatched out of the fire" (Jude 23).

While the Lord would have us to demonstrate concern and compassion for the lost denominational world, He would also have us to exercise discretion in the extent to which we fellowship and affiliate with such groups. Regardless of the fashionable sentiments prevalent in our day, the Bible still states God's disapproval of associating with error and false religion. When we become proud of our ability to mingle with denominationalism, manifesting acceptance and toleration of their unbiblical beliefs, we are guilty of the very attitude which Paul condemned in 1 Corinthians 5:2, which Jesus condemned in Revelation 2:15-16, and which John concerned in 2 John 11. We are guilty of betraying the bridegroom.

We need to return to the Old Testament and learn afresh the lessons which Israel failed to learn repeatedly. We need to stand at Elijah's side and breathe deeply his spirit of confrontation as he boldly distinguished between true and false religion (1 Kings 18:17-40). We need to follow Phinehas into the tent and learn to identify with his jealous intolerance of disobedience and defiance to the will of God (Num. 25:1-15). We need to step across the line to stand at Moses' side and witness the calm fury with which he sought to expunge sin (Ex. 32:25-28). We need to identify ourselves with the young king Josiah and feel the same sense of horror and tearful concern as we watch him burn, break, desecrate, destroy, cut down, stamp and slay everything and everyone who represented unauthorized religious practice (2 Kgs. 22 & 23). These men understood the principle of being faithful as a bride to her husband.

Perhaps once we have honestly filled our minds with these inspired accounts and allowed these truths to penetrate and permeate our being, we will possess the proper frame of mind to view denominationalism and alternatives to the one bride the way God views them. Maybe then we will perceive counterfeit churches and rival religions with the depth of righteous anger and opposition that God

possesses. Until then, we will be gripped by an unconcerned, blasé, live-and-let-live mentality that will allow Satan to proceed with his subversion of humanity. If we do not stand up and proclaim the distinctiveness of the one true bride of Christ, nobody else will, and we will lose our souls along with them. If Noah had not been comfortable with standing in a minute minority in an effort to stem the tide, the tide would have swept him away in the flood along with the rest.

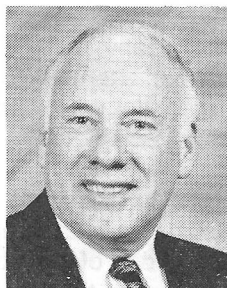
CONCLUSION

Do you love the church for which Jesus shed His blood? Do you? Do you love the bride of Christ deeply enough to temper your concern for the lost with a righteous regard for the purity and loyalty of that bride? Rather than obscure the reality and identity of the unique bride of Christ, we would do well to take note of the clearly defined borders of the kingdom that we might be able to give our attention to bringing in those on the outside. Fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness is not the answer; teaching and exposing them is (Eph. 5:11).

If we would truly fathom that the bride of Christ is distinctive, exclusive, and unique; if we would truly view fraternization with the denominations as traitorous; if we would love the genuine bride of Christ with the same fervency and jealousy with which Jesus loves her; then we would be in a position to proclaim with Paul: "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end" (Eph. 3:21).

THE CHURCH: PILLAR AND GROUND OF TRUTH

MARLIN CONNELLY



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In his book, *The Last 100 Days*, the historian John Tolland tells of those last three months in the European theater of World War II. One of the strategies of the U.S. and its allies was to bring Nazi Germany to its knees more quickly with saturation bombing in its large cities. Tolland describes how Dresden was bombed at night with three waves of bombers, the first two dropping flares to mark the target for the third. The first group of planes over the city dropped red flares to outline its perimeter. The second wave outlined the soccer stadium, which was next to the targeted railroad yards, with green flares. The third cluster, guided by the flares, then followed to drop its bombs.

It seems to me there is a parable here for preachers. At certain times, we will be less likely to "bomb out" in ambiguity if we first mark carefully our targets. To mark mine, I wish to drop two "flares" at the beginning.

Rooted in a Passage

First, this sermon is, as it must be, rooted and grown in a passage from the word of God. No preacher should ever use a text merely as a pretext to jack-up a verse and to roll his own agenda underneath.

This first marker is not the motto of America's pop-culture today. Some months ago, my son-in-law brought to me from Atlanta a brochure that had been mailed to homes in his community. The mail-out advertised a mega-church in the area. The circular promised the reader that church would never expose him to boring expositions of scripture. Instead, it would offer short talks on topics which people wanted to hear, such as "How to Deal With Stress" or "How to Manage Money," each "based on Biblical principles."

The opposite side of the brochure was subtler. It depicted three two-child families—one from B.C. times, one from the 1950's, and the last from the 1990's. The father of the first family carried two tablets of stone on which were the 10 commandments. The second family perpetuated the "boomer" myth that says the 1950's families did not know how to enjoy religion. Each family member was dressed in a Sunday-best outfit. And each face wore a glum countenance, as if each had been dropped from the back of a hearse. The mother was carrying a large family Bible. The final picture at the bottom of the folder showed the family labeled "the 1990's." As you would expect, all were in informal dress, each wore a smile, and *nobody* carried a Bible.

In contrast with the culture, this lesson will be rooted and grown in scripture. I hope you have your Bible in hand tonight, and you will turn to the passage I want to unfold in this study—1 Timothy 3:14-15.

Revealing God's Perception

The second marker necessary to lead us to our target is this idea: Tonight's passage reveals God's perception of some things. *Perception* is more than mere detection. One's perception is the *meaning* he gives to what his senses detect. Allow me to illustrate this concept. Imagine with me this hypothetical situation. As a group of you stands in this parking lot, conversing after a lecture, the attention of each is captured by the scream of a woman. Looking toward the direction of the sound, each sees the following ingredients of an event: (1) an automobile "burning rubber" as it leaves the parking lot at an excessive

rate of speed; (2) a woman standing at the end of the lot screaming; (3) a man running across the lot in one direction; (4) a dog running in the opposite direction. Now, while each member of our observing group detects these same four parts of this scene, each might give his own meaning to this package of events—a meaning based on his past experience and his present desires. One observer might perceive the woman's purse has been stolen by some felon fleeing in an automobile, the running man is seeking help, and the dog runs because it has been frightened. Another, having viewed the same event might give it a different meaning, perceiving the car had hit the dog. A third might feel this scene started with the dog biting the woman. A fourth even might conclude the man had bitten the dog. On we could go, but do not miss the point—*One's perception is the meaning he gives to the things he observes.*

Now let us apply this definition to this passage—1 Timothy 3:14-15. Since this bit of scripture was written by an apostle of Christ, it gives us not merely Paul's perceptions about truth, about the church, and about Christian behavior, but *the Lord's* perceptions of these things. For the apostle Peter said Paul wrote "according to the wisdom given to him" (2 Pet. 3:15). We have an opportunity tonight to see in this passage the meaning our Lord gives to things in His world.

With these two markers firmly in mind—(1) *This lesson must be rooted and grown in the Biblical passage;* and (2) *The Biblical passage will reveal to us God's perception of things, His world-view—we are ready to approach our target.*

Instructing Timothy whom he had left at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3), Paul wrote:

These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:14-15).

In this passage, we are introduced to three facets of God's world-view: (1) There is a reality God calls "the truth"; (2) The church is designed to be "the pillar and ground" which upholds that truth; (3) Christian behavior is an inherent part of that truth.

THE REALITY OF TRUTH

Long before Pontius Pilate sarcastically snarled, "What is truth?" (John 18:38), there must have been relativists who denied there were any set-in-stone standards for belief or behavior. But this idea has crept like a fog into our culture today. It is pervasive. From academicians to talk show gurus, across the spectrum, we hear them drumming out the doctrine that the only absolute is there are no absolutes.

Truth Designated

But Paul, as he wrote to Timothy, was not relying on human preference, but was relaying the Divine perception. Therefore, the last two words of verse 15 are *absolutely* there. He wrote of something called "*the truth*."

Other passages from Paul amplify this perception of truth: It can be heard (Col. 1:5); it can be known (1 Tim. 2:4); it must be obeyed (Rom. 2:8; Gal. 3:1); but it often will be resisted (2 Tim. 3:7-8).

Truth Deposited

God has done more than designate something as "the truth." He has *deposited* with His church that truth. Jude, verse 3, states this fact—the faith "was once for all delivered to the saints." In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul elaborates on both the necessity and the method of this deposit. Paul argued that it was necessary for God to *reveal* the truth of the gospel, because no one—not even the most educated could have known it unless God had revealed it (vs. 6,8). Elaborating on the human inability to know the will of God without His revelation, Paul drew on the Words of Isaiah 64:4 and 65:17: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

Paul continued to assert the necessity of *revelation from God*, by pointing out that no one can *read the mind of God*, using as proof the fact that no one can read even a fellow human's mind (vs. 10-11). He then maintained this revelation from God was given through those whom God's Spirit guided to speak "not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches" (vs. 12-13). Truth has not only been *designated* as such, it has been *deposited* with the saints.

THE CHURCH DESIGNED TO UPHOLD THE TRUTH

Our home-base passage tonight reveals a second component in God's perception of things. He has not only designated some things as "truth" and deposited that truth with His church; He also has designed the church to uphold that truth. Paul writes the church is "the pillar and ground"—the prop and the support of the truth.

Responsibility of the Church

When a congregation forgets this truth something happens which should not happen—they allow the audience, not the message, to become sovereign. It is no surprise that many of today's young affluent professionals are returning to religion. But it is also no secret that they want to return under their own terms. They have developed what some call a "pick-and-choose Christianity" where they pass over whatever does not meet their "felt needs." But if the church is to be the upholder of the truth, it dare not for the sake of numbers shove aside heavy truth for "Church Lite." Our task is not to *amaze* and *amuse* so that we may *amass* and *amalgamate*; our commission is to teach that all have gone *amiss* (Rom. 3:23), that God Himself has made *amends* (Rom. 3:24-25), and that all can and must come to *amity* with God (Rom. 5:1).

In 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Paul shows these same truths permeated the ministry of the apostles of Christ:

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation....Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore You on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

We have gone *amiss*; God has made *amends*; we must come to *amity* with Him.

Whenever and wherever the church fails to adopt this same mission, we will perceive our assignment as making Christianity a way to achieve self-awareness, or to appease humans, or to reconcile people to themselves. And all of these things can be done without offending postmodern sensitivities, but they cannot be done without producing a false gospel! For in an effort to make God more user-friendly, we shall have reduced sin to maladjustment, salvation to self-esteem, and the church to group therapy. We will have produced assemblies and "Bible"

classes patterned like television talk-shows in which self-expression is the goal, "sharing experiences" is the center of discourse, and tough theological stuff is peeled away to find a soothing sampler.

Irresponsibility in Our Culture

There once was a more simple and better time in America when the church had assistance from the culture around us in diffusing through society God's truth as it relates to morality. But such time is no more. In the *U. S. News and World Report*, July 3, of this year, John Leo, who writes weekly an essay on life and morality in America, observed that the U.S. has "an increasingly nasty pop culture that now envelops us." Much of it, he charged, "is frankly transgressive and is dedicated to undermining all available, norms, authority, and established values."

Some months earlier, in the October 15, 1998 issue of the same magazine, in an essay titled "The Selling of Rebellion," Leo pointed to one subtle advocate of the revolt against rules. Charging that some of the worst cultural propaganda is jammed into 60-second and 30-second commercial spots, he explained:

The central message here is very serious and strongly anti-social—we should all rebel against authority, social order, propriety, and rules of any kind. *Obey* and *rules* are bad words. Breaking rules—that's good. A great many advertisers now routinely appeal to the so-called post-modern sensibility which is heavy on irony and the wink and the nudge, and attuned to the message that rules and boundaries, standards and authorities are either gone or should be gone.

Citing examples, Leo reminded us of the Isuzu truck commercial showing a balding, repressive teacher barking at his elementary school pupils to "Color within the lines!" while a caption tells us "Isuzu is for getting out of the lines."

John Leo gave us other glaring samples: A Burger King spot telling us "You gotta break the rules"; and the Out Back Steak House commercial assuring us, "No rules, just right." And even Woolite, which used to be associated with that which is clean, offers us a photo of a young woman groping or being groped by two young men, and under it the caption: "All the rules have changed."

Thomas Frank, in his book The Conquest of the Cool, argues that the 1960's counter culture has become a permanent part of the American scene, with rebellion as the motif of the age, and with the popular culture dominated by an "in-your-face" stance.

Responsibility in Classes

When society sags, if the church does not sag with it, God still has truth's prop. The church must remain the "pillar and ground," not just of a truth, nor merely of *some* truth, but of "the truth." The church can know this truth only by studying the New Testament scriptures. Paul, in alerting Timothy to the possibility of a delay in his coming, declared he was *writing* so Timothy could know certain things. May God have mercy on us if we get to the point where elders in congregations allow, as substitutions for serious Bible study, classes which are more like *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, offering only heart-touching stories which suggest principles. Candy for the mind does not produce props for the truth.

BEHAVIOR AN INHERENT PART OF THE TRUTH

But our passage—1 Timothy 3:14-15—says more. Paul does not write these things merely so Timothy can *know* something, nor even so the church can *uphold* something; he writes so Timothy will know how those in God's household *should* "behave themselves."

The Subject of the Action

In the original text there is no Greek word for the subject who is to do the action. The translators of the King James Version assumed Paul was writing so Timothy would know how to behave himself and supplied "you" for the subject doing the behavior. The American Standard Version of 1901 assigns "men" as the subject. Here is a case where meaning must be determined by the context. There are two things in the setting which, it seems to me, show Paul is concerned about how the entire congregation behaves: (1) This behavior takes place in the household of God, his church. (2) Verse 14 indicates whoever was to behave in God's house could know *how* to behave by the things Paul had been writing. When one looks at the things Paul had just covered in chapter 2 and the first part of chapter 3, he will see behaviors that relate to the church in general, not merely to Timothy.

Chapter 2 discusses demeanor in an assembly in which both men and women are present. Chapter 3:1-13 covers the behavior necessary for those who would be overseers and deacons.

The Importance of Behavior

Inherent in the task God has assigned His church is an attempt to *persuade*. We cannot be the support of the truth without trying to persuade others to *adopt*, to *continue*, to *discontinue*, and to *refrain* from certain beliefs and actions. Prescribing for Timothy, Paul charged him, "Preach the word," and touched on the persuasion involved by saying, "convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 2:1-2). Describing the ministry of the apostles, Paul wrote: "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11).

But no one can persuade without credibility. A little over three centuries before the birth of the Christ, Aristotle wrote in his Rhetorica that success in persuasion involved the proper blending of its three elements, which he called the "available means of persuasion: (1) the *logos*, the message itself; (2) the *pathos*, the linking of the message with basic human needs; and (3) the *ethos*, the opinion the receiver has of the sender at any given moment.

It is the *ethos* of the sender, what the receiver thinks of him, which makes good behavior essential to persuasion. Aristotle defined this *ethos* as one so speaking that people consider him to be a man of wisdom, of character, and of good will. (It is interesting to me that each of the qualifications for overseers and deacons given in 1 Timothy 3 could be placed under one of these three facets of *ethos*.)

The apostle Peter wrote of this connection between the Christian's persuasive task and his behavior. Having commissioned Christians with the proxy of proclaiming the praises of Christ (1 Pet. 2:9), he charged them regarding their *ethos*, explaining their conduct should be "honorable among the Gentiles" so that by doing good they could "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Pet. 2:11-15).

Further evidence that good behavior is an inherent part of the truth, and that it is vital in persuading others of that truth is seen in Titus 2. Paul begins by urging Titus to "speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine," (v. 1) and then discusses *behavior* of the men and women, both old and young, including those who were bondservants (vs.

2-10). In amplifying on their need for proper behavior, Paul lists three reasons for it, each of which connects that behavior with the church's task of persuading others of the truth: (1) "That the word of God may not be blasphemed" (v. 5); (2) "That one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you" (v. 8); (3) "That they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things" (v. 10). *Ethos* is an essential for the support of the truth.

Paul's emphasis on the appearance of the pillar of God's truth seems especially appropriate when we realize where Timothy was working when Paul wrote this letter. Ephesus was the site of the great temple of Artemis (the Greek designation) or Diana (the name the Romans called her). The temple had made, already, most of the lists classifying "The Seven Wonders of the World." It had 127 columns, each paid for by a king, and each studded with jewels and overlaid with gold. Obviously, these pillars were not there merely to hold up the roof, but to provide the décor that gave the temple its reputation.

Now, our home-base passage tonight designates the church as "the house of God." It is certainly God's house in the sense of *household*, as Paul tells the Ephesians when he writes: "I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph. 3:14-15). But the church is also God's house in the sense of being God's *temple* (1 Pet. 2:5). And of this truth, also, Paul reminds the Ephesians, connecting both metaphors—household and temple in one passage. In Ephesians 2:19, he states the Gentile Christians were "members of the household of God" right along with the believers from "the Circumcision." In the next words, Paul switched to the temple metaphor. He explained those in God's household had been "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets," and that Jesus was "the chief cornerstone" (v. 20), that in Him "the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple" (v. 21), and that in Christ they were "being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (v. 22).

We have seen that the columns, which held up the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, were also for its adornment. We have seen in the letter to the Ephesians, that the church is God's house in the *temple* sense, not only in the *household* sense. We can have, therefore, a better understanding why Paul, as he wrote to Timothy at Ephesus, linked the church's task as the pillar to uphold the truth to the church's behavior that adorns that truth.

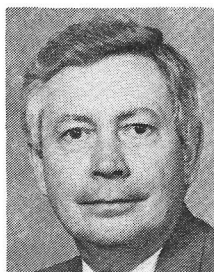
CONCLUSION

Belief in God is essential. Hebrews 11:6 reminds us that "without faith it is impossible to please *Him*." But the kind of God in which one believes is equally vital. Tonight we have looked into one passage that tells us some things about the kind of God we have. 1 Timothy 3:14-15 does not give proofs of Him; it gives us a Biblical perception of Him, because it helps us see how He sees some things. First, it tells us God sees the reality of something He calls "the truth." Secondly, it tells us he has designated the church to be the upholder of that truth. And, finally, it reminds us that Christian behavior is an inherent part of that truth.

God's perception must be the map for our position.

THE CHURCH: FAMILY OF GOD

DAVID R. PHARR



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"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole *family* in heaven and earth is named" (Eph.3:14-15).

INTRODUCTION

In 1822 a successful, but lonely, American looked at a crowd of people, all strangers, who were on the street below his window. He was an American playwright named John Howard Payne. He had been in Paris, France, for nine years and had enjoyed the excitement of the city. But on this evening he was feeling a wave of homesickness. As he recalled the scenes of his family and youth, he went to his desk and began to write a poem that people would sing long after the rest of his work was forgotten:

Mid pleasures and palaces, though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.

A year later in London the song received a standing ovation. It grew in popularity year by year. Then 27 years later it was sung in a great concert in

Washington by the famous Jenny Lind. The president, his cabinet and other dignitaries were present. She acknowledged the attention all gave her, and then turned her eyes on a single man seated inconspicuously in the great concert hall. Not once did she take her eyes off him, as if it was only for him that she sang the beautiful lines: "There's no place like home, oh, there's no place like home!" That man was John Payne, the one who wrote "Home Sweet Home" Tears poured down his face. Hardly anywhere in the whole audience was there a dry eye.¹

Why are certain words almost magic words in the way they touch our hearts? Such are the words "home" and "family." It is, of course, family that makes a home and to speak of home is to speak of family. One of the most meaningful ways the church is portrayed in the New Testament is as a family. The church is the family of God. The text speaks of "the whole family in heaven and earth." It is awesome to consider that we are part of one great family, the family of God, the redeemed of the ages.

AN ANALOGY

Several analogies are used to define the church. It is a kingdom to emphasize the reign of Christ. It is the bride of Christ. It is a building set on a solid foundation, a building that shows the manifold wisdom of the heavenly Architect. It is a flock led and guarded by the Good Shepherd. Another illustration is that the church is a vineyard to produce good fruit in the world. It is the "true Israel of God," a "holy nation." To emphasize the interdependence of the members under one head the church is described as the body of Christ. It is a temple because therein God dwells with His people. All of these descriptions are important, but in this lesson we are looking at the church as a family.

Though literally the word "house" means a structure, it is frequently used in scriptures in reference to those who dwell in the house. Hence, the household, or family. In Ephesians 2:19 we read of "the household of God." That means the church. In Galatians 6:10 it is "the household of faith." People are in physical families because of marriage and birth, but people are in God's church family because of their faith. This is why they are called "the household of faith." In 1 Timothy 3:15 we read of "the house of God, which is the church of the living God."

Earthly families are not always what they are supposed to be. Some people do not have happy thoughts about their own families. No doubt, though, even those who never enjoyed a happy home must have dreamed of one. And

those who have seen or experienced what should be the happiest of human relationships certainly know that God has been wise and good in making His church His special family. Applied to the church, the family motif suggests the loveliest and best connotations.

A story is told of a family that hit on hard times during the great depression. There was serious sickness, scant income, pressure from creditors, seemingly little hope. Desperation had invaded the home. But the father gathered his loved ones around him, and after reviewing their sad circumstances, he said, "Somehow we are going to get through this and we are going to do it together because *we are family*." Sometimes the church is in crises. Sometimes it is hard to keep on keeping on. At other times our church life is especially happy. This lecture series has been about the growth of the church and we are always thrilled by progress. Whether, however, we are seeing the church in a period of crises or seeing it in its growth and success, let us always remember: "*We are family*."

THE FATHER AND HIS CHILDREN

We are family because God is our Father and we are His sons and daughters.

A man stood looking at a great skyscraper, an architectural marvel. Another man standing by remarked that it was one of the most impressive buildings he had ever seen. The first man proudly told him, "My father was the architect; he built that building." But, Friends, our Father "made the world and all things therein" and "is Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:25). What a marvelous thing to be His child! Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (I John 3:1)

Our text speaks of "the Father" and then of "the whole family." The words for "Father" and "family" are from the same root. "Father" is *pater* and "family" is *patria*. We might compare this to "Creator" and "creation." There is a creation because there was first a Creator. We are family because God is our Father.

The "house of God" is "the church of the living God" (I Tim. 3:15). It is His "house" because He is the Father over it. In Hosea 1:10 there is the promise that God's people would be the "sons of the living God." This finds fulfillment in the church of God. Ephesians 4:6 says there is "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." "All," used four times in this verse, is masculine and does not refer to His being the Father of creation. It is

not neuter, which would apply it to things, but masculine which indicates persons. He is, of course, the Father of creation, the Creator, but that is not the point here. The context is showing the oneness of Jew and Gentile in Christ. The "all" over whom he is the Father is the "one body" of verse 4. The point to be made is that God is the Father of the one church. He is not the Father of several families. We see, then, that while God is indeed the Father of all men as their maker (Mal. 2:10), there is a special sense in which He is the Father of the saved.

Birth and Adoption

Two figures are used to show how we become His children. It happens, of course, in conversion and Jesus spoke of conversion as a birth, the new birth (John 3:1-8). Those who believe are given "power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12). Such sons, John explains, are "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:14). The new birth is "of water and Spirit" (John 3:5). When a penitent believer is baptized he enters the family.²

We are also said to be in the family by adoption. Romans 8:15 speaks of our having "received the Spirit of adoption." Birth points to the process and the beginning of a new life. Adoption suggests having been chosen by the Lord and the special honor of the relationship. The privilege of adopted sonship is enhanced by the fact that we were adopted out of slavery, out of bondage. The assurance of this is in the joint witness of our spirit with God's Spirit (Rom. 8:16) that we are being led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14). The leading of the Spirit is through the gospel. When in our spirits we know that we have followed the instructions of the Holy Spirit we know we are the children of God. The redemption that is in Christ makes adoption possible. "To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:5).

Divine Nature

Both genetics and influence convey traits of parents to their children. In God's family it is expected that the children be "partakers of the divine nature" (II Pet. 1:4). Godliness identifies the children. Only on the basis of our separation from the world can we enjoy the assurance of being included in the family. "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" (II Cor. 6:17f; cf. I John 2:29; 3:9).

Years ago a young man checked into a grand New York hotel. He had a sophisticated bearing and gave his name as that of a famous man. He was "Junior." With such an impressive pedigree, he was treated royally until someone questioned his identity and there was an investigation. Even when the police questioned him he still insisted on the imposture. For a long time he had been enjoying the advantages of being in a famous family. However, when the police took him to the Wall Street office of the man whom he claimed as father, the fraud was finished. "I never saw this man before." In the judgment, some will claim sonship, but the Lord will say, "I never knew you" (Matt. 7:23).

CHRIST OUR BROTHER

We are family because Jesus Christ is God's Son and we are His brothers and sisters.

One time as Jesus was teaching in a synagogue they told him that His mother and brothers waited outside to see Him. This caused Him to make a beautiful point about the fellow members of His heavenly family. "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? . . . For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt. 12:46-50).

The Hebrews writer considers it very significant that we are Christ's brothers. "He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren" (Heb. 2:11f). The point is that he became flesh to participate in our life and death experiences. He identified with our fleshly nature that someday we might take on His heavenly nature (I John 3:2; Phil. 3:21).

Again, in Hebrews 3:6 we are said to be Christ's "house." The Father made the house (v. 4), but Christ is "a son over his own house." Now, notice this. In I Timothy 3:15 we found that the "house of God" is the "church of God." Here in Hebrews we find the "house" of Christ. And it is the church of Christ.

Another important passage on this is Romans 8:29. Paul reminds of God's foreordination of the scheme of redemption and points to the Divine purpose in it all, which is that we would be "conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." We sometimes hear it said that Christ is our "elder brother." Here is the basis for that. He is the "firstborn among many brethren." Notice especially, however, that this kinship involves being "conformed to the image of his Son"—Christ-likeness. Just as the Father's children should be "partakers of the divine nature" (II Pet. 1:4), so the Son's brothers and sisters should be in His likeness.

A young Christian man I knew in a town in Ohio had a new car. He asked the preacher, a kind older brother, to ride and "try out" the car with him. On a crowded street a careless driver banged a fender. The immediate impulse was anger, but the older brother grasped him on the arm and said, "Remember who you are." When we are enticed or pressured by any temptation, we need to feel the grasp of our "older brother's" hand and hear Him say, "Remember who you are."

There are various ideas on why Jesus used the double address when he prayed, "Abba, Father" (Mark 14:36). One thing is certain, he felt the strongest possible filial tie to His Father. Twice Paul recalls that same address, explaining that "because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his son into your hearts, crying, Abba Father." (Gal. 4:6; cf. Rom. 8:16). As brothers and sisters of Jesus we call upon our Father with like assurance of His paternal care.

ONE ANOTHER

We are family because we are brothers and sisters to one another.

Look at how often New Testament Christians were called "brethren." Everett Ferguson observes that "brothers" is Luke's favorite term for the church, using it thirty times in Acts.³ Almost all of the remaining New Testament books use the same terminology. Paul uses it nineteen times in the five chapters of I Thessalonians.

John emphasizes that there is an essential correlation of our brotherhood with God's fatherhood. "Let us love one another . . . everyone that loveth is born of God . . . If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (I John 4:7, 20-21). We speak of "the family circle," but sometimes the emphasis needs to be on the family "triangle." Both of the lower points of the triangle—my brother and me—must be connected to each other before there can be a complete connection with the point above—the heavenly Father.

Family affection is natural. Children have their sibling rivalries, but they still sense a natural bond. Sometimes brothers hate and hurt one another—Cain killed Abel—but that is not the natural order. Cain smirked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Yes, but the answer is better expressed, "I am my brother's *brother*." When those who claim the same heavenly Father and the same heavenly Brother do not feel kinship to one another it is unnatural. Peter wrote: "Seeing

ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (I Pet. 1:22). The two words for "love" (*philadelphia*, *agapao*) in this verse suggest, first the love that is natural affection, and then the love that is taught and deliberate. This is not to say that brotherly love is not taught, nor that we are not to endeavor to grow in this affection. It is, however, the naturally expected outcome of our being in the same family. Peter's point is that this intrinsic affection should be felt sincerely and should be incorporated with the even more excellent agape love.

An eleventh century writer known as St. Celsus said, "These Christians love each other even before they are acquainted." Many of us have had an experience of meeting a stranger, who, we discover, is a member of the church. There is an immediate comradery.

I was with some children at the Carowinds theme park last summer and passed by hundreds of strangers. I do not recall a conversation with any of them. But just before we were leaving I saw a man wearing a tee shirt which said "___ Church of Christ." I stopped him and became acquainted. Why him and no one else?

Someone told of a group of members who were traveling in an unmarked van. They passed another van which was marked as a group from a church of Christ. They waved, but got little response. The church van saw them as just more strangers on the highway. Then someone made a sign saying "Acts 2:38" and showed it to the other van. There was an immediate enthusiastic excitement in the other van. Why? Because we are generally alone in upholding the truth of that text and they realized that these were members of their family.

Universal and local

The family analogy applies to the church both in the universal and local sense. Of course we should love all Christians everywhere. "Love the brotherhood" (I Pet. 2:17). It is expected, however, that members of a congregation would have the stronger sense of family. Paul was pointing to the family-like relationship we have in a local congregation when he told Timothy, "Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity" (1 Tim. 5:1-3). Timothy, these people are members of your family. Treat them accordingly.

The New Revised Standard Version makes this use of the word "family" in a few places. In Galatians 1:2 it has Paul writing of "God's *family* who are with me."

Not influencing others to sin by eating idol sacrifices would be primarily a local concern. "But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ" (I Cor. 8:12 NRSV).

Families seek to provide for one another's needs. "Charity begins at home." Strong words are applied to one who fails to provide for his earthly family. "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (I Tim. 5:8). The duty to do good, therefore, especially applies to "those of the *family* of faith" (Gal. 6:10 NRSV).

Can we not see the sense of family in such passages as Romans 12:10? "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another." Or in verse 15 below it? "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."

Peter wrote, "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (I Pet. 3:8). Does that not sound like the kind of kinship we feel in the local congregation, the family of God where we are—a family that loves one another, that shares both tears of sorrow and joy, that bears one another's burdens to fulfil the law of Christ, where members are happy when the church does well and the church rejoices when a member does well?

THE FAMILY GOING HOME

We are family because we are on our way home together.

I confess that I am not sure of all that is comprehended in the text where it speaks of "the whole family in heaven and earth." Some think it includes angels as well as the saints. We do know that included are "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23). Many members of God's church family are already with the Lord (Phil. 1:23; II Cor. 5:1ff).⁴

The Bible makes a wonderful connection with being in God's family and the idea, therefore, of being heirs. "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's

seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:7). We are "heirs together of the grace of life" (I Pet. 3:7). This is "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (I Pet. 1:4).

Earth's sweetest families eventually must be broken apart. A man went back to the old home place. It was where he had learned wisdom from his father and love from his mother. It was where with his brothers and sisters he had laughed and played. He went back to the old house because his memories called him there. He wanted to recapture the good things he remembered. But it was not home. It never could be again. Death had reached into the family circle and broken it apart. He could go back to the old house, but he could not go back to the home. But God's family is going home, and all of the family is going to be there!

CONCLUSION

In the modern world "family" does not have the precious meaning it ought to have. In the rush and crush of the world, there is not the closeness, the loyalty, the caring love, the commitment, the willingness to sacrifice for the family. Sadly, this is too often what is happening to the church family. Let us take a moment to look around this assembly tonight and say to ourselves, "*We are family.*"

¹Dan Harless, "Home Sweet Home," *Gospel Advocate*, April 11, 1968.

²Cf. Titus 3:5; Eph. 5:26; I Pet. 1:22ff. Jesus said the birth of water and Spirit is essential to entering the kingdom, the church. Baptism is also the means of entering the body, the church. Things equal to the same thing are the same thing.

³Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), p. 119.

⁴Though prior to the final judgment, there is a sense in which deceased saints are already "with the Lord." This does not mean heaven, as promised in

John 14:1-3, which will be after the resurrection. There are different senses in which we may understand being with the Lord. There is a sense in which we are with Him now, another sense in which the dead are with Him, and the heavenly sense.

SECTION IV

Ladies' Classes

PRISCILLA: HOSPITALITY

JANE BROWN



Jane (Pierce) Brown is married to Charles Brown, Dean of Admissions at ETSP. They have three married children and six grandchildren. She has spoken on lectureships at FHU, OVC and ETSP. Jane has participated on Ladies' Inspiration Days in numerous states. She has also appeared on several Teacher Training series. "The Perfect Fragrance" is a video by Jane and produced by The Way of Life.

The Bible excites us with many stories about real people who lived far away and many years ago from us. The applications of their circumstances help us live pleasing lives to God.

The complex issues and fast pace of life make being God's woman a challenge--but is life so very different today from First Century Christianity? As we read through Acts and the New Testament letters we appreciate people who had ordinary lives until their Christianity became an obstacle to everyday living. How did they respond?

Two of the dearest friends Paul had, Priscilla and Aquila, loved the Lord and served Him wherever they went and under all obstacles. They had an everyday job, tent making, and used opportunity and time to be servants of God. They reached out effectively and eternally to others.

In Acts 18:1-3 Luke describes the dispersion of the Jews from Rome because of persecution. Aquila and Priscilla now went to Corinth. We do not know when they became Christians. We do know Paul stayed with them in Corinth.

In Ephesus they taught Apollos the truth about baptism, since he was preaching the baptism of John. What did they teach Apollos? "...the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:18-26).¹

They took the heart-filled incentive to teach someone in error. They did not wait to take a personal evangelism class. They did not wait to ask Paul or another preacher to teach Apollos. They did not point a finger at him and label him a false teacher and avoid him. In my mind I see their sitting with food as their gentle words went back and forth. What significance their love had on Apollos and the church in Corinth. I Corinthians 8:6 records that Apollos watered after Paul had planted the church. How important it was for the "water" to be truth!

The next time Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned in the Bible is I Corinthians 16:19 when Paul, writing from Ephesus, sends greetings to the church in Corinth. In Ephesus the church was meeting in their home.

We see an established pattern in their contacts with other people. They opened their home to people with needs: (1) Paul needed a place to live; (2) Apollos needed to be taught; (3) the church needed a place to worship.

The third scriptural reference to these active Christians was in Romans 16:3-5. They are back in Rome. Paul addresses them as his fellow-workers. He had used the same complimentary term about Apollos in I Corinthians 3:9. Romans 16:5 says, "Likewise greet the church that is in their [Priscilla and Aquila's] house."

What are some similarities in their lifestyles and ours today? We know they moved frequently. Most women like to feel settled, but job relocations and changes require uprooting families. Priscilla and Aquila worked as a team and partners in their tent-making and in serving God. Many couples work together and teach the Bible together. Priscilla and Aquila's home was secure even though their dwelling places were different. They faced hardships and still made their home a haven that strengthened and renewed. Since Priscilla probably had the greatest responsibility in creating the atmosphere of their home, she created a home life that reduced frustration and uneasiness. Priscilla must have demonstrated self-control and organization to accomplish all she did. Laziness did not enter her body. She knew she had an assignment from God, to give honor and preference to one another (Rom. 12:10), wherever she lived. Regarding others as more important than yourself gives you the mind and manners of Jesus (Phil. 2:4-5). She was other-oriented.

Priscilla had goals. Priscilla had choices to make. Priscilla took time to know the Word. Priscilla found time for others in her busy life. Priscilla was prepared to teach and to have people in her home. She was a self-starter in the midst of a dangerous world for Christians. The Bible principles lived and breathed in Priscilla. People grew in the faith from Priscilla's hospitality.

We are to be "given to hospitality" (Rom. 12:13). The righteousness in the body of Christ is to be demonstrated through hospitality. In the original language, "given" means "pursue" as a calling. The same chapter of Romans in verse 15 commands us, "Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep." Our Lord ministered to people of all stations of life. The good Samaritan stands for all time as an example of hospitality (literally "a love of strangers"). The neglect of Christ is symbolized by being uncaring about our neighbors.

Hebrews 13:2 promises us blessings when we heed the command to practice hospitality.

First Peter 4:9 commands us to have hospitality without complaint.

First Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8 require men to be hospitable before they can fulfill the role of elders.

Early Christians practiced hospitality to grow in the faith and to encourage each other (Acts 2:46). These people purposed to minister to one another. Usually a warm welcome, the eating of food, the sharing of words of God and the concern for the guests, and a loving farewell accompany hospitality.

"Counsel in the heart of man [or woman] is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out" (Prov. 20:5).

Mary LaGrand Bouma wrote about understanding counsel drawing other women out of deep water in *The Creative Homemaker*. "Kaffee-klatches have become an object of scorn to many people who see them as a symbol of all that is sufficient and inane and superficial in the life of a modern housewife. It is true that some women do sit together over endless cups of coffee, exchanging trivia. But a great deal of concern, wisdom, and love can be dispensed along with a cup of coffee. Important matters can be discussed over coffee in a woman's kitchen."

Small pleasures uplift the spirit, encourage, and reestablish friendships.

How do we overcome the insecurities of practicing hospitality?

1. Remember you are a child of God and “can do all things through Christ which strengthens” you (Phil. 4:13).
2. Pray for opportunities to serve.
3. Think about who is within your influence.
4. Get busy. Open your heart with a phone call, “Come have a visit with me.”
5. Practice. Every skill requires practice. As people are welcomed to your home and leave with warm hearts, your confidence grows. A cake from the bakery rather than a full meal can fill hearts and leave minds free to impart joy and warmth to the guests.
6. As you mirror the love of Jesus, you reflect his compassion to a lost world.
7. Observe how others practice hospitality. I was so blessed in my youth to be in a local congregation where hospitality was given freely, bountifully, and sacrificially.
8. Expect the unexpected. Some most cherished moments of true hospitality have come when I was not expecting them. Some of the people involved ones who had moved into the area and did not have a house for a week; people who had a fire in their house at midnight and were brought to our house; physically and mentally sick people who needed the quietness of a bedroom and warm food; an abused wife who was considering what to do next, a teenage girl who had been sexually-abused by her father and missionaries who were passing through town and needed a meal. These many people taught me valuable lessons in what hospitality can mean to people.
9. An open heart prepares her home. You keep your house for your family, so why not invite others into your home? Keep a menu on the shelves that you can greet unexpected guests with an open table. How blessed we are to have convenience foods

that require very little cooking. Very seldom are our cabinets so bare that we cannot share. Keep the makings of a menu to take out to those in need (sickness, funerals, new baby, new neighbors).

Our houses will not be in perfect order, but a smile of welcome puts people at ease, even unexpected guests.

Today it seems as if many Christians have forgotten not only the biblical commands of hospitality but also the purposes of hospitality that fulfills more needs in a congregation than the need for food and lodging. Think about specific opportunities for church growth:

1. Hospitality Is An Avenue For Evangelism. Nothing will leave a greater impression on a visitor than a friendly "hello" and an invitation into a Christian home. When one has made friends in the church, it becomes easier for the person to return to worship to be taught whether in the pulpit or in the home. Invite a couple where one is a Christian and the other is not. This will help to break down strangeness and resistance found in the non-Christian. Watch for opportunities to relate the Bible to conversation.
2. Hospitality Strengthens The New Convert. Hospitality is the warmest welcome into the family of God. Celebrations occur when a physical birth happens in a family. Celebrate the birth of a spiritual brother or sister. Ask the person to share the joy at the new birth. Put a candle on a brownie and sing "Happy Birthday to _____." Studies have shown that when new Christians develop seven or more friendships, eighty percent remain faithful. Of those who make two friends or less, only twenty percent continue to come. Invite another family to be with the new convert. A snack or a dinner may be much work to you, but it may help someone else go to heaven.
3. Hospitality Meets Benevolent Needs. Make it a point to invite those who are probably not often invited (Luke 14:12-14). The large family, the poor, the widowed, the quiet family, teenagers whose parents do not attend are all candidates for warm strokes. Benevolent meals can be met outside the home to promote God's love. Other actions such as the offer to baby-sit, the use of our driving others to the hospital, the food to those staying with sick ones in the hospital, all demonstrate Bible hospitality. How little a cup of cold water given in Jesus' name is, but the key

is given in Jesus' name. Adam Clarke says of Luke 14:12-14, "Our Lord certainly does not mean that a man should not entertain at particular times, his friends.... What He condemns is those entertainments which are given to the rich, either to flatter him or to prepare a similar return."

4. Hospitality Makes Fellowship By Breaking Down Barriers. Communication around a table with a cake and coffee (or tea, Coke, or water) will break down barriers between races, between young and old, rich and poor, people you know and people you don't know. After I had complimented an elder's wife on the many groups of people they had in their home, she said, "What better way for my husband to know the people he shepherds?"
5. Hospitality Makes The Church A Home. We give shelter from the cold winds of loneliness and despair by a simple invitation for others to share our lives. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32).
6. Hospitality Is A Bridge. Our children need opportunities to learn helpful hospitality. When you are having guests, let the children set the table, make a paper chain around the guest bedroom door, pick a flower for the guest or bake cookies to take to shut-ins, mow the lawn free for a widow, and to read to small children when the parents visit. Your attitude toward hospitality is contagious. Your children will absorb this wholesome attitude.

Just as a hostess can extend God's love, a guest can give God's blessings to a hostess. Jesus knew how to be received into a home. Philippians 2:3-4 indicates His good manners, "...but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than ourselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Make up your bed. Keep your room neat. Keep your personal items out of the bathroom. Express appreciation for what is offered and do not ask for something not offered. Bring a book to read if your hostess has an early bedtime or later getting up time than you. Offer to help with meals and to set the table. If you are staying a few days, give your hostess some time to herself by going to your bedroom. Use good manners at the table and do not dwell on your illnesses. Either write a thank you note and place it on your bed as you leave or write it and mail it within a few days of leaving. Good manners will write, not type, the note. Make the note sincere with specific thanks. You are giving a blessing for a blessing given you.

Take Priscilla's life as a challenge to show hospitality in whatever circumstance you are. Use hospitality for church growth, not "I entertained you; now it is your turn to entertain me."

Whether her tent had a "Welcome" on the flap or not, people experienced so great a love by this woman. To describe it is impossible, but to feel it is wonderfully uplifting. As an ordinary woman with an extraordinary ministry, she shines as a beacon to give light. Are not we glad the Holy Spirit gave us her life! God does not exist to serve man; man lives to serve God. As you open your home, open up the living waters of everlasting life to friends.

¹ All scripture references are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

PHEBE: SERVANT OF THE CHURCH

Romans 16:1-2¹

IRENE C. TAYLOR



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INTRODUCTION

I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also (Rom. 16:1-2).

It is significant to notice the commendation here given to Phebe. Paul considered her deeds worthy of such commendation and this is a high compliment to a noble lady. Keep in mind that what Paul has written was written at the direction of the Holy Spirit. Be it further noted that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write what was originated from God the Father and God the Son. Thus the commendation of Phebe came from Deity through the pen of Paul. There is no higher commendation that can be given to mankind. Nothing from the highest source of government can compare to it. This, in and of itself, tells us much about the character of this lady.

PHEBE THE SERVANT

To be a servant has always been considered a lowly position in the eyes of man. We prefer to be served rather than to serve. This is made clear by Webster's definition of the word. "A person employed to perform services, esp. household duties, for another; a person employed by a government: cf. public servant, civil servant; a person devoted to another or to a cause, creed, etc."² This attitude has not changed greatly from the early dawn of time to this present age. Those able to hire others generally consider themselves somewhat superior to those hired.

Jesus taught a different concept of service. He declared, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom to many" (Matt. 20:28). He showed that to serve was the source of true greatness. He gave of Himself in the ultimate service to mankind in providing a way of salvation. He taught His disciples, "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 23:11). To follow in His steps, the Christian must learn to provide a worthwhile service for others. Without question, this gladly Phebe did.

We are not told specifically what services Phebe performed but we can be assured that they were many. Her services were of real benefit to those for whom they were performed. Her service went far beyond the mere lip services rendered by far too many in the kingdom. There were many times when Paul needed the help and assistance of others. Phebe was among the many who often came to his aid.

In his book about women, C. R. Nichol refers to Phebe as a deaconess.³ Though she is not so designated in the New Testament, the term simply means servant. In this light we may so designate her. In a more elaborate discussion of the work of a deaconess, he relates instances of service performed by women which could qualify them to be so designated. It is not an official office in the church and this must be fully understood. In his commentary on the book of Romans, my husband writes as follows:

She was a servant of the Cenchranean congregation. Does this mean she was an official deaconess? Moses E. Lard was of this opinion and so states in his commentary. He is joined by others who state the same. But equally judicious students say no. The latter ones are right for a surety in this matter. This looms with greater importance now when we face the momentous and crucial issue of moving women into all positions of

church leadership with no attention paid at all to 1 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:11ff. R. L. Whiteside sagely states that we, as a people, "let our minds run to officialism too much." Later in his comments on this passage the scholarly Whiteside wrote,

"To select a person for a certain work does not necessarily make him an officer in the common acceptance of that term. To select a man to hold a series of meetings does not make him an officer, and no one thinks so. Selecting a song-leader does not make him an officer. Selecting certain women to attend to certain duties does not make them deaconesses in any official sense."

Relative to this same matter, but dealing particularly with 1 Timothy 3:11, brother Guy N. Woods wrote, "There is no support here or elsewhere in the scriptures, for the denominational practice of having official deaconesses in the church."⁴

Despite the fact that no specific services are recorded, it is not difficult to think of many which would have been of great assistance to Paul. Since Paul often traveled he needed a place to stay along the way. Perhaps Phebe was one of many who provided such accommodations. He was unmarried. His clothes needed to be washed, ironed and kept in good repair. Meals to sustain his physical needs would be greatly appreciated as he went from place to place. These are but a few of the many services better provided by a woman.

Women today would do well to follow the example of Phebe. Though we will not receive commendation in Scripture as did she, our good deeds will be recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life. We will be laying up treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:21). Christian women have many talents which need to be used to the glory of God. We need to re-think our priorities. Are we following the high road when we expend our talents and energies to promote the good deeds done to the glory of a secular organization only to bring the crumbs to be used to spread the work of the church? Can we really picture Phebe having to be begged to be of service to Paul in his work for the Lord? We women would do well to reflect on this the next time someone is needed to provide hospitality for a guest speaker!

A thought comes quickly to mind as this article is written. Why are some wives of elders, preachers and other church workers resentful of the work done by the husband for the church? It is readily recognized that there are those men who deprive the family of the time they need and deserve, who fail to maintain a proper balance of their time. These men need to be reminded that being a good husband/father involves more than providing financial support. It involves an investment of time as well. The role of man in the home is part of his service to God, also. It is part of the love he bestows on his family. However, we observe, more and more, a resentment from the wife toward the husband's investment of appreciable time and talent in the work of the church. It sometimes stems from a selfish demand on his time and an unwillingness to share him—even with the Lord. There must be a proper balance but, assuming this is maintained, we wives must support—not hinder—our husband's work for the Lord! No man can do his best with a resentful wife no matter what his field of endeavor. We are to be an help meet (an help suitable) to our husbands. This is never more true than of those who serve the Lord. As the wife of a busy, busy preacher, let me remind all wives who harbor such resentment that supporting such work for God is an avenue whereby we may be of service to God as well. Especially is it commendable when such wives willingly and cheerfully relieve the husband of menial responsibilities whenever possible to free his time for spreading God's kingdom. Some years back this writer made the declaration that we wives are serving God when we iron those shirts which our preacher husbands wear in the pulpit. This principle is seen in First Samuel 30:24. Our behind-the-scenes at-home tasks are essential to the success of their work just as were Phebe's unnamed deeds valuable to the work of the apostle Paul. The elder's wife who graciously opens her home to share hospitality is a true helper to her husband. We need to cease underestimating the worth of our services.

Service, for the Christian, is an ongoing part of life. Phebe is not commended for a one-time performance! She was one on whom Paul and others could depend. He tells us that Christians are always to abound in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). There is never a time for us to retire from the Lord's work. In secular work, one may retire and cease to perform the task or tasks heretofore done. There is no retirement for the Christian this side of death. Those who attempt to do so do it at their own detriment. Our avenue of service may be changed as we enter the various stages of life due to an inability to be as active as previously we have been. But there is always work which we can do. Those not busy are not busy out of choice in most instances. Many are the reports of those on beds of sickness or of those physically challenged whose pen and/or telephone are used as a means of

encouragement to the weak and discouraged. They use such avenues to invite newcomers and friends to services, grade Bible lessons and cheer other shut-ins. Even those unable to perform these can pray for others and for the good of the Lord's work. If we want to be involved, we will be.

Phebe is an example of one who saw an opportunity and sought to fulfill it. Mary is another such example (Mk. 14:3-9; John 12:1-8). It is easy to find a task for someone else to do. It is quite another matter to willingly fill it ourselves. Those of us today who excuse ourselves from service because "there is nothing to do" are not being totally honest. Most of us see things which need to be done. We need to re-focus our perception and, like Phebe and Mary, do them ourselves. From a bulletin published by East Point Church of Christ, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, comes this timely article:

Do You Feel Left Out?

When it is announced at the assembly that someone is sick, do you: Send them a card? Offer to help? Organize help, if needed? Visit them at the hospital?

When you learn that a person has died, do you: Pay your condolences? Attend the funeral? Send a card? Take a dish of food? Offer help and comfort?

When a "Work Day" is planned, do you: Rearrange your plans so you can be there? Look for ways you can contribute to the upkeep and improvement of the building (not only on work days)?

When new souls are added to the Lord, do you: Introduce yourself and welcome them? Visit and encourage them? Help supply any physical and/or spiritual needs they may have?

When you think there is not enough social activity, do you: Invite groups of Christians into your home? Plan and carry out recreational activities for either adults or children? Offer to supply transportation or help for activities which others plan?

When no one seems friendly, do you: Make a special effort to befriend someone in need? Make it your place to greet visitors? Invite visitors into your home?

When Bible classes are provided, do you: Attend and encourage others to do so? Make sure you prepare your lesson? Study the material ahead of time? Contribute to class discussion with comments and questions?

When someone is absent from the assembly, do you: Call them to find out why? Exhort and encourage them? Visit them and offer to help bear their burdens?

NOW, FROM WHAT ACTIVITY DO YOU FEEL YOU HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED?

Currently we are seeing a thrust to open new avenues of "service" for women heretofore assigned to men. Christians understand that it is God who has set in place certain restrictions for men. Too few realize the weight of the responsibility God placed on the shoulders of man. It is sad that we do not realize and appreciate the protection He afforded women. Phebe was content to work within her God-given realm and thus her service received the approval of Deity.

Phebe as Sister

Paul's commendation of Phebe begins with a specific notation as to her relationship both to him and to fellow followers of the Lord. "I commend unto Phebe our sister..." (Rom. 16:1—Emphasis added). Webster defines commend as "to mention as worthy of attention; recommend; to express approval of; praise."⁵ When we obey the same gospel as did Phebe we, too, are sisters and brothers both to her and to Paul.

There is a special relationship which is meant to exist between brothers and sister in the flesh. When that relationship is correct there is a special warmth and devotion that knows no bounds. When one hurts, the others rush to aid and ease the pain. Sadly, many families fail to enjoy such love and devotion. Instead there is jealousy and bickering. Just so with brothers and sisters in Christ. Christ is our elder brother. His love for us is boundless. He proved His deep devotion by making

the ultimate sacrifice for us. Deity intends that there be a special, sacred bond between brothers and sisters in Christ. This bond is even more precious than that of the physical realm. When a spiritual brother or sister is in need we who are more fortunate are to rush to give aid.

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? (Jas. 2:15-16).

Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality (Rom. 12:13).

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10—Emphasis added).

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world (Jas. 1:27—Emphasis added).

Christian brothers and sisters in the Lord share the joys and sorrows of life. Phebe obviously shared in Paul's need and it seems only logical that she would rejoice in his triumphs for the Lord as well as weep over his sufferings. Inspiration directs us to "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15). We are to be happy over the accomplishments and good done by another but too often there is a feeling of jealousy. When one of our own is hurting we should be hurting, also. We are to "weep" over the misfortune of another. Is it not unfortunate that we frequently reverse the order given by Deity? We tend sometimes to weep while someone is rejoicing and rejoice when he weeps. The jealousy among some Christians is unlike our Lord, as different as daylight and dark.

Phebe obviously worked with Paul. It was not a relationship of competition. We can easily read "between the lines" and feel the warmth of pure devotion between Paul and Phebe. Theirs was a relationship sealed by their mutual desire to be productive in the work of the church. Paul does not write requesting that his needs be given precedence over hers. Conversely, he requests that her needs be given attention. "That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business [matter-ASV] she hath need of you..." (Rom. 16:2).

Sometimes those requesting assistance seemingly feel that their need is the most important even to the detriment of funds previously allocated to another good work.

Sisters and brothers are to work side-by-side in the greatest endeavor ever given to mankind. There is no room for the petty jealousy too often present. Jealousy is one of Satan's more effective tools in rendering ineffective a good work! There is a place of work for everyone. One person cannot possibly do all that needs to be done in this wicked world. We are to work together as a united body (1 Cor. 12:14-20). Had Phebe been of a jealous nature she would have been of little benefit to the work of Paul. Working behind the scenes as a partner in his work gained her recognition where it mattered.

There should be no hesitation in recommending a sound sister (or brother) in Christ for a specific task. We must remember that we, too, are to work together in peace and harmony for our common Cause. Why, then, the seeming competition? Like Phebe and Paul, let us work together and lay aside our petty, personal pride and differences and march forward for the Master.

PHEBE THE SAINT

To be designated as a sister and a saint may seem redundant at first glance. If it were not so serious, it would almost be amusing to note the difference between a true saint (according to the Bible) and the world's view of that term. The world's view is reflected in the definition given in Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. It defines saint as follows:

(A) holy person; a person who is exceptionally meek, charitable, patient, etc.; those esp. holy persons, who have died and are believed to be with God; in the New Testament, any Christian; in certain Christian churches, a person officially recognized as having lived an exceptionally holy life, and thus being in heaven and capable of interceding for sinners; canonized person... (Emphasis added).⁶

This particular edition includes a recognition of the true meaning of saint along with the world's definition. The 1948 edition does not.

To the Bible student, the word saint is a familiar term. Such knowledgeable ones realize that one does not have to be dead to be a

saint. Rather, one is a saint who has rendered obedience to the gospel of Christ.

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).

But fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God (Eph. 2:19b)

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse... (Col. 1:2).

That Phebe was a Christian is a fact that is indisputable. Thus she was entitled to the designation of saint. We who have truly obeyed the plan of salvation are also saints. It is really a serious reflection on this honorable title to declare flippantly, "I am no saint!" It, like the name Christian, should be worn with honor. The right to wear it was purchased for us with a great price—the blood of our Lord and Saviour.

Every privilege of worth carries with it a responsibility. This fact is too easily overlooked by the masses. As a saint, we must daily walk the walk as well as talk the talk. Paul declared his need to "keep under [buffet-ASV] my body, and bring it under subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway [rejected-ASV]" (1 Cor. 9:27). If Paul, an inspired apostle, felt such a need, why would we not feel it more?

Phebe was a saint in good standing else Paul would not so have praised and commended her. That she was worthy of his trust is seen in the added belief that she likely was the very one who brought the epistle to the Roman brethren. Cenchrea was only a few miles (about nine) from Corinth where Paul penned the Roman epistle. It is suggested that she had business which took her to Rome.⁷ Phebe was undoubtedly one who took seriously her life and responsibilities as a Christian. She remembered well whose family she represented—Christ's—and she represented it in honorable fashion. We must remember whose family we represent at all times as a Christian and exercise diligence to do so honorably, also.

PHEBE AS SUCCOURER

To be a succourer is to be a helper of real worth. Again turning to Webster, we find these words of definition for succor: "to give assistance to in time of need or distress; help; aid; relieve."⁸ Because she was so helpful to Paul, he directed the Roman brethren to give her whatever help she needed. What trust he had in her integrity! There is a principle that we reap what we sow. This is true in the secular realm and it is true in the spiritual. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). Someone has rightly observed that there is no way we can help another without helping ourselves. "Kindness is one thing you cannot give away—it always come back." Phebe was reaping as she had sowed.

There were many times in Paul's life when he needed help. Though we have no way of knowing for certain, Paul may well have severed all family ties when he chose to become a Christian. Even today, many Jewish converts have been ousted from the family circle. No mention is made of his mother, father or any possible siblings in Holy Writ. He pays tribute to another lady who may well have been his "adopted" mother. "Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine" (Rom. 16:13—Emphasis added). Perhaps she opened her heart and home to him and loved him as her son. Paul reveals some of his trials and times of distress in his writings.

In stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness (2 Cor. 11:23-27).

Perhaps it was during some of these stressful times that Phebe befriended the beloved apostle. When proclaimers of the true gospel today face discouragements and trials, her modern counterparts would do well to follow the example of being a succourer.

Not only was Phebe helpful to Paul but "of many" (Rom. 16:2b). She was not guilty of preacheritis but her desire was to serve Christ

wherever needed. In this writer's mind comes the vision of a woman who was ready to offer help and hospitality to any needing such. Hers was the attitude of filling any need to which she was privy if the means was at her command.

THE NEED FOR MODERN DAY PHEBES

Women today can emulate Phebe in the arena of service to God's Cause. We cannot all be teachers but we can all teach! That is, we may not all be able to teach publicly but we can teach by the godly lives we live. We can all serve. God gave each of us abilities. Those abilities differ in each of us so that every need may be filled (Rom. 12:6ff). We are to fill our place with cheerfulness (Rom. 12:8). We will all give account of how we used our several abilities (Matt. 25:14-30). All of us can open our hearts and our homes in extending hospitality, a talent almost lost in our hurried society. We must, however, be careful not to extend such to the false teacher (2 John 9-11). We can all be encouragers of sound programs and ever ready to do our part in working toward their success. In giving instructions for the care of widows, Inspiration directed Paul to write, in speaking of widows worthy of help,

Well reported of for good works, if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work (1 Tim. 5:10).

We might sum it up today by saying that we must have helped others to gain help ourselves. God does not intend that any be moochers. It does not take a lot of money to be of help, mostly it takes desire.

Whenever we read of a tribute to woman in the Bible we can be certain it is there by the direction and approval of Deity. Such tributes are given only to the worthy. And they underscore the fact that women are capable of valuable service to God while working within the framework of His pattern. Thus we recognize that Phebe was truly a worthy woman approved of God. There is no way we can be of service to God without gaining more in return. Remember, God has promised our needs will be ours in this life if we seek Him first (Matt. 6:33). Add to that the promise of life eternal to those faithfully serving Him throughout life and we see the rich reward for the Christian life (John 14).

CONCLUSION

The name Phebe means "bright or radiant." She reigns through time as a radiant example of one who exemplified the real beauty of Christian service and caring. Women today would do well to reflect upon the life of this noble lady. We need to ask ourselves some pertinent questions. "What am I doing for the Cause of Christ?" "What can I do?" "Will I do it?"

¹All Scripture references are from the King James Version of 1611.

²Victoria Newfeldt, Editor-In-Chief, Webster's New World College Dictionary, Third Edition, Completely Updated (Macmillan USA, 1988, Simon & Schuster, Inc.), p. 1226..

³C. R. Nichol, God's Woman (Abilene Christian University Bookstore, ACU Station, Abilene, Tx.), p. 159.

⁴Robert R. Taylor, Jr., Studies in Romans (Quality Publications, Abilene, Tx., 1996), p. 283.

⁵Webster, p. 280.

⁶Webster, p. 1183.

⁷Taylor, p. 283.

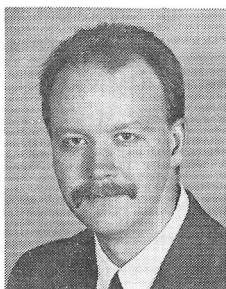
⁸Webster, p. 1337.

SECTION V

Keynote Speakers

A PRAYER FOR CHURCH GROWTH

KENNETH S. FORREST



Kenneth S. Forrest has been serving as the minister for the Red Bank Church of Christ in Chattanooga, TN since June 1998. He is a 1994 graduate of ETSP and has been an active participant in meeting work both here and abroad. Several of his essays have been published in The Christian Bible Teacher, The Carolina Christian, The Palmetto Messenger, and The Bulletin Digest. He has spoken on several brotherhood lectureships, including ETSP, Palmetto Biblical Studies, and the Carolina Lectures, as well as several area preachers' meetings. Ken and his wife, Anita, have three children.

Our Father in heaven:

We humbly approach Your throne in praise and adoration, giving thanks to You for qualifying us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. You have delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of Your love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. We come to You in willingness to serve—Here we are, Lord...send us! In our determination to go, O Lord, we make an earnest plea that You mold us into the soul winners that You have called us to be.

We pray that You will make us salt and light in the world (Matt. 5:13-16). As salt, we pray that we will ever season the world. As light, we pray that we will shine brightly in this world of darkness.

We ask that you make us such an example of Your transforming power that men will see our good works and glorify You (Matt. 5:13-16). It is Your glory—and not our own—that we seek.

We ask You to send out evangelistic workers into Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia, North and South America...and our communities (Matt. 9:35-38). Open our eyes to the plentiful harvest that is before us.

We pray that we will use the precious gifts that we have been given to reach lost people (Matt. 25:14-30). Bless us so that we may feed the hungry, satisfy the thirsty, take in the stranger, cloth the naked, and visit the sick and imprisoned (Matt. 25:31-46).

We beseech You to raise up disciple-makers from our congregations and that we will be among them (Matt. 28:18-20). Give us the courage to speak according to Your authority, knowing that You will always be with us.

We ask that You make us into the kind of people who will leave behind their temporal concerns to spiritually fish for the lost (Mark 1:14-18). Though our earthbound priorities may constantly change, never let us lose sight of our commitment to seeking the lost.

We request that You keep us open to Your Word and that You will lead us to people in our communities who are open to Your Good News (Mark 4:1-20). Let us not become discouraged over apparent failures, but ever mindful of the warfare that we are waging against a powerful foe.

We pray that You will cause Your kingdom in our locales and around the world to grow (Mark 4:30-32), that just as a mustard seed has the potential for great things, so too your kingdom when the Word is spread abroad.

We appeal to You to make our congregations "a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17). Please develop within us a burning zeal for what is good. Never let us compromise what we know to be right.

We ask You to remind us continually that Your Word makes Christians, and that if we have represented it truthfully and lovingly, a person's acceptance or rejection of the message is actually the acceptance or rejection of You (Luke 10:16).

We ask You to open our eyes to the opportunities for us to be someone's "Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-37). Let us never turn our heads from those who threaten our "comfort zone."

We pray that You will help us to stay focused on You today and not be distracted by earthly concerns (Luke 10:38-42). It is easy for us to lose our focus on those things that are set in eternal terms.

We ask, seek, and knock for a non-Christian friend to be reached by the Good News (Luke 11:9-13). For we know that if we ask, it will be given; if we seek, we will find; if we knock, it will be opened to us.

We pray that You will teach us to love lost people as much as You do (Luke 15:1-32). Let us never be satisfied with just "keeping house" in our congregations, but give us a concern that will take us into the world to gather in your "lost sheep."

We beseech You to make us persistent in calling out to You on behalf of lost people (Luke 18:1-5). Please do not turn from our pleas, but rather bless us with the courage to continue in the face of adversity.

We request that You help us to bring a friend to Jesus, and we specifically bring this person before You now in our memory (John 1:35-41). Develop within us a spirit like that of Andrew who drew Your great servant Peter to Jesus.

We ask You to grow a sacrificial love for lost people in our hearts that is like Your love (John 3:16). Please develop within us a love that seeks the best for another without the expectation of any return.

We pray that You will open our eyes to the receptive people around us (John 4:34-38). Give us a discernment that recognizes the potential of others to Your service. Help us to find the right approach in delivering Your Word to them.

We ask that You continually remind us that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Please remind us that He is the only way to You, both for ourselves and for every person we meet (John 14:6).

We pray that our congregations and our brotherhood will be united so that the people of our communities and world will come to develop faith in Christ (John 17:20-26). Let us never be fooled into thinking that such unity is held solely in diversity. Rather, encourage us in our commitment to build unity in Truth.

We appeal to You for a specific friend or relative that he/she may believe and have life in Jesus' name (John 20:30-31).

We are awed by the beautiful picture that the Scriptures paint of the early church: continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, breaking bread, praying, having all things in common, meeting various needs, and being in one accord. We ask You to make this a picture of our churches (Acts 2:42-47).

We ask you to make us bold in evangelism (Acts 4:23-31). Make us bold enough to speak the Truth in love. Not a love of unjustified tolerance, but a love of concern for their souls.

We pray for greater dedication in proclaiming the Gospel (Acts 5:41-42). Yes, such dedication as portrayed of the early Christians: a dedication that rejoices in suffering shame for Christ's name.

We pray that as the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in the first century, and a great many of the errant religious leaders were obedient to the faith, You will do this again in our time and in our midst (Acts 6:7).

We pray that we may be more dedicated to spreading Your Word, preaching it even under the threat of persecution, knowing that You will prevail through the persecution to strengthen Your church in the long-term (Acts 8:1-7).

We pray that our congregations will enjoy a time of peace, will be strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Scriptures, will grow in numbers, and will live in the fear of the Lord (Acts 9:31).

We pray that we will learn to actively tell the Good News to others wherever we go. As a result, we pray that a great and steady number of people will be brought to You (Acts 11:19-21).

We pray that in spite of the obstacles that arise from time to time (and we know that they will arise), Your Word will continue to grow and multiply in our communities and throughout the world (Acts 12:24).

We pray that we will be faithful in speaking the Good News to others and that as a result people will be reached for Christ. Once converted, we pray for the continued strengthening of their souls (Acts 14:21-22).

We pray that we will never be ashamed of Your Good News (Rom. 1:16-17). We know that it is Your power to salvation for everyone who believes it. For in it Your righteousness is revealed.

We pray, as a matter of urgency, that we might all come together in the same mind and judgment, speaking the same things with no division (1 Cor. 1:10).

We pray for the access to venues by which the Word might run with free course, declaring to the world the remaining time of acceptance and the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2).

We pray for the disciple-making efforts of our brothers and sisters in Christ (Eph. 6:18-20). Open their mouths that they may make known the mystery of the Gospel and to speak boldly, as they ought to speak.

We pray for their increased wisdom and desire to make the most of every evangelistic opportunity as You open doors to them (Col. 4:2-4). Help all of us to recognize these doors when they are opened.

We pray for the evangelistic efforts of the spiritual leaders of our congregations (1 Thess. 5:11-13). We recognize and esteem those who labor among us, and are over us in the Lord and admonish us.

We pray that leaders around the world will not resist Christianity, and will allow evangelism and conversions without hindrance. We pray that high government officials will come to know the Lord and that they will use their influence for good (1 Tim. 2:1-7).

We ask You to give the spiritual leaders of our congregations' wisdom, love, and true spirituality (Heb. 13:7). Help us to follow their faithful examples and to esteem them highly for their work's sake.

We pray that we will live up to Your expectation of us. For we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, Your own special people. As such, we will continually declare Your praises to all those around us (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

We pray that our honorable example under the attacks of evildoers may draw others to Christ (1 Pet. 2:12). Teach us to apply ourselves consistently to restraint, knowing that evil is overcome with good (Rom. 12:21).

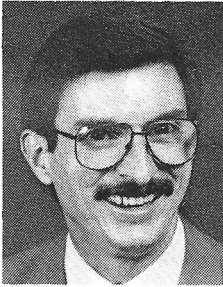
We pray for the light heart before You and the right words to answer the inquiries of non-Christians (1 Pet. 3:15). Let us always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks us a reason for the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear.

We pray for Your continued longsuffering as we put forth efforts to lead our unsaved friends to Christ (2 Pet. 3:9).

To You, O Lord, the One who is able to keep us from stumbling, and to present us faultless before the presence of Your glory with exceeding joy, the only true God and Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

GIVING

ALAN C. COLE



Alan C. Cole was born in Jackson, MI. He began preaching full-time in August 1988 for the 26th Street church in Huntington, WV where he still preaches. He attended ETSP, Marshall Univ, and has a B.A. and M.A. from Theological Univ. of America. He has appeared on several lectureship programs and preached in meetings in WV, KY, AL, OH, MI and TN. He is married to the former Helen Risner and they have one son, Keith.

INTRODUCTION

Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders is both touching and revealing. His message, his methods, and his motives all mark him as a true and faithful gospel preacher. Paul met with them at a very critical moment. He knew that in the future serious problems would face these men. He told the elders that they must remain vigilant because "savage wolves" would come in "not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:28-29)¹. When Paul finished his prophetic, soul-stirring message, tears came to the eyes of all of them. These elders fell upon Paul's neck and wept. Interestingly, among the last words Paul said to them were these:

Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:34-35).

These words, perhaps more than any others, reveal to us the compassionate heart of the Apostle. What caused Paul to go from city to city, forsake all that might have made life easy and give up hope of riches? Paul lives a Christlike life, which is a life of giving. He not only remembered but actualized the words of Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Christians today must adopt this philosophy so that the church of our Lord can grow as God expects. Being willing to give to the cause of Christianity is vital for all brethren. Giving is a central part of Christian living. The salvation of souls is built upon this foundation. God gave His Son to die for lost souls, to build the church. God's people must give to know the full significance of being members of Christ's church.

COLLECTION

The church in Judea had been impoverished. Initially, through the sharing with brethren (Acts 2:44-45). And then through the persecution of the church that drove many of the disciples from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-4). The church in Judea also experienced difficulty due to the famine which came during the days of Claudius (Acts 11:28-30).

Paul determined to raise money among the churches, composed primarily of Gentiles, for the poor saints in Judea. This money was called "the collection for the saints."

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

One can learn several basic principles about this act of worship that relate to Christian stewardship.

The saints were to give obediently. The saints at Corinth had been given "order" to give as Paul had instructed the churches at Galatia. "The force of the word is that of a command to be obeyed or directions to be followed."² "In issuing this apostolic order Paul is clearly commanding an arrangement."³ There is a definite God-ordered plan for financing God's work.

The Christians were to give regularly. Both here and in Acts 20:7, it is clear that the church met regularly on the first day of the week--the Lord's day, our Sunday. From Acts 20:7, we learn that the Lord's Supper was observed in the meeting that day; here we are informed that a contribution was to be taken as well. The words, "lay by him in store," are literally, *putting it into the treasury*. In reference to a common fund, McGarvey wrote:

The word *thesaurizoon*, translated "in store," means, literally, "put into the treasury; and the phrase *par heuto*, translated "by him," may be taken as the neuter reflexive pronoun, and may be rendered with correctness as "by itself."⁴

This being true, one may infer that the church treasury already existed, and this collection was a special collection set aside for the poor saints. Giving was, and will always be, a part of the apostles doctrine (Acts 2:42).

The saints were also giving proportionately. Every Christian was, and is, under heaven's imposed obligation to give as he has been prospered. The basis for New Testament giving is not a tenth of one's income as taught according to the Law of Moses, but instead, it is according to the degree to which God has caused one to prosper. In Proverbs 3:9-10, Solomon describes prosperity as what we possess and what we receive as increase. "Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." Truly, giving is a personal matter between an individual and God. Giving as God has directed will cause individuals and churches to grow.

The Christians were, likewise, to give preparedly. This collection was to be made before Paul's arrival. Upon the first day of the week each Christian was expected to contribute into the common treasury of the church and the portion given for the poor saints would be kept by itself, and would be ready when Paul arrived. "When each Christian contributes weekly to the common treasury, the church has on hand the means to carry on the Lord's work...."⁵

ILLUSTRATION

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul uses the Macedonian churches (Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea) to illustrate true Christian giving and to motivate

the Corinthian church to complete their promise to give for the needy brethren in Judea.

Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints (2 Cor. 8:1-4).

The Macedonian churches had experienced severe difficulties. J.W. McGarvey stated:

The district of Macedonia had suffered in three civil wars, and had been reduced to such poverty that Tiberius Caesar, hearkening to their petitions, had lightened their taxes. But in addition to this general poverty, the churches had been poor by persecution (2 Thess. 1:4).⁶

Paul, knowing of their poverty, had hoped for only a meager bounty from them, but they went far beyond his expectations. It is interesting how Paul describes their giving.

Paul describes their giving as a grace. This is one way by which the Christian demonstrates generosity. Having been a recipient of God's grace in salvation and in the Christian life, the Christian administers grace to others by giving. Often the needy are quite undeserving, but deserving is not the issue in giving. The issue is obeying God and being like Jesus who "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

The good brethren at Macedonia also gave liberally. Liberality of giving is a test of love. "Liberality" from *haplotetos* showed that the Macedonians gave with single-mindedness simplicity and sincerity. Jesus demonstrated his love for man by giving Himself as a sin offering for man. He laid aside His glory and took upon Himself a human body to die for our sins (Phil 2:5-8). He became poor in order that man might become rich. Paul wrote, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). Paul stated that the Macedonians were willing to give—they simply chose to give to the Lord's

work. These generous Christians gave beyond their ability. They willingly gave; they gave without delay; they even begged to be included in this giving. They were generous in spite of all their trials. "Grace giving means giving in spite of the circumstances"⁷

Furthermore, Paul described the giving of the Macedonians as a fellowship. This fellowship refers to their participation in the collection, and the ministry to the service which the money would render to the poor Christians. "Our English word 'fellowship' is a translation of the Greek *koinonia*, which literally means having something in common."⁸ Similarly, the Christians at Philippi had fellowship with Paul when they contributed to his preaching efforts (Phil. 1:5; 4:15). The Macedonian Christians were grateful to the Jerusalem Christians for bringing the gospel to them. They wanted Paul to help them share their "carnal things" with the church at Jerusalem (1 Cor. 9:11).

MOTIVATION

Unlike the Macedonian churches, the church at Corinth needed to be motivated to give, to fulfill their promise. Paul motivates the brethren by focusing on the giving of others, specifically the Macedonians. The Apostle also appeals to the total commitment demonstrated by the Macedonian brethren. The reason these Christians gave so liberally, willingly and sacrificially is described in the phrase "but first gave their own self to the Lord." If one belongs to the Lord, then he will have no complaints about giving to the Lord's work as he has been prospered. "To give themselves to God was to consecrate all they had to His service, and this was according to His will."⁹ William Barclay noted: "No gift can be in any real sense a gift unless the giver gives with it a bit of himself. That is why personal giving is always the highest kind, and that is the kind of giving of which Jesus Christ is the supreme example."¹⁰ When self is given to the Lord first, God is joyfully served and others are lovingly helped.

DETERMINATION

The apostle Paul begins in chapter nine by reminding the Corinthians of their determination to give to the needy saints a year ago. Interestingly, Paul had used the zeal of the Corinthians to challenge the Macedonians, but now he was using the Macedonians to challenge the Corinthians.

For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you: for I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many. Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up before hand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness (2 Cor. 9:1-5).

Paul considered it unnecessary to convince the Corinthians of the need to send funds to the poor brethren in Judea. The saved in Corinth already knew of the bad economic conditions in Jerusalem and of the suffering of its people. To restate these matters would be superfluous. Paul's confidence in the Corinthians was at stake. Just a year before, the Corinthians had enthusiastically planned that they would share in the offering, but since then they had done nothing. Paul described their plan as the gift which they had promised (2 Cor. 9:5 RSV). Paul had boasted in Macedonia of the liberality and readiness of the Corinthians. The Macedonians had followed through on their promise, and Paul was afraid that his boasting would be in vain. To avoid this, Paul had sent Titus and his companions on ahead to gather the offering beforehand so that when Paul and any of the Macedonians arrived he would not be embarrassed by their possible delinquency. "Saints ought not give 'leftovers' to God. As they plan ahead for the purchase of things needed, they should also plan ahead concerning their donations to the Lord's cause."¹¹ Christians need to determine to give and give with a determination.

DIRECTION

When one carefully considers the teaching of the New Testament with reference to giving, one learns that there are some specific motives which should govern Christians in this phase of their service in the Lord's kingdom. The first and highest motive is the desire to obey the Lord (Matt. 7:21; James 2:10; 4:17). Also, the giving which the Lord requires is intended to produce spiritual growth and development. Giving toward

the cause of Christ in the proper spirit will result in spiritual growth and spiritual riches. Furthermore, Christians give as a proof of love (2 Cor. 8:8-9, 24; John 14:21). Giving is, likewise, to provide means for carrying on the work which the Lord has ordained for His people to do (1 Cor. 9:13-14; 16:2).

As in practically every instance of doing that which God commands, there are divine directions. It is important to know this in the matter of giving; because the inspired writers of the New Testament gave some specific instructions regarding it. God has always been definite in His instructions to those who worship and serve Him (John 4:24). Paul wrote:

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:6-7).

This is the law of the sower. It is an immutable one. If the farmer is so stingy with His seed that he refuses to sow enough, he need not expect a plentiful harvest. So Paul suggests that giving works according to the same principle. Our blessings in life are determined by our liberality.

When considering the matter of giving from the negative standpoint, there are ways in which Christians are not to give. They are not to give grudgingly, that is "out of sorrow,"¹² "with a sour, reluctant mind."¹³ Nor are they to give of necessity, that is, compelled to give. Their giving, likewise, is not to be of covetousness. A covetous person will try to hold on to, as long as he can, that which should be given in the Lord's service. Paul wanted the Corinthians' gift to be a liberal and voluntary one, and not a reluctant contribution, wrung from them by the authority of the apostles. He wanted them to make this contribution as a genuine freewill offering and thus feel the joy of giving.

Considering the positive side of the matter, there are some principles stated which, in following, will certainly result in the accomplishment of that which the Lord has authorized. Christians are to give, previously stated, as they have been prospered, according to their gain (1 Cor. 16:2). One is to have an aim in mind and resolve to discharge the obligation growing out of it. The giving which God desires and requires must result from settled convictions and a determined

purpose; not from an occasional impulse. And this is to be done weekly by each member.

One should also give cheerfully. It is interesting to observe that the word "cheerful" is from the same Greek word from which we get our English word *hilarious*. A hilarious person is one who is happy, full of joy and cheerful. Those who give cheerfully imitate God who is described by James as a giving God; a God who gives liberally; a God who gives to all; and a God who does not upbraid (ie. without reproach, NKJV) us when we ask Him for His blessings (James 1:5). And as Paul stated: "For God loveth a cheerful giver." One should be filled with joy knowing that he has the honor and privilege of giving toward the Lord's work. The farmer has to wait for his harvest, but the Christian who practices true spiritual giving begins to reap the blessings of the harvest immediately. There are long-range benefits from giving, but there are also immediate blessings.

EXPECTATION

Christians who give as the Lord directs can expect to be blessed by Christ.

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (as it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God (2 Cor. 9:8-11).

God has many good works which need to be done, and those who are willing to do these works will be enabled through the blessing of the Lord. God, who can and does bless all who give liberally to righteous causes, will enable us to do more and more in His vineyard. David Lipscomb said: "This as clearly teaches as any passage in the Old Testament that God bestows temporal blessings as well as spiritual, and that He bestows them in response to a free and hearty consecration to the Lord."¹⁴ God is able to make us able to give. It shows the wisdom of God to bless liberal givers so His cause will prosper. According to the Old Testament, this has always been God's rule and practice. Paul quotes Psalm 112:9

to confirm that God does give to His people who are willing to conform to His law of sowing and reaping. This is a powerful incentive to liberal, cheerful and purposeful giving.

CONFESSION

The Apostle Paul wanted the Corinthian saints to know that what they were doing in their giving was much more than a service that supplied God's people with what they needed. It was something that would make many others thank God. Paul called their generous gift of relief a "service." "This word intimates that it was not merely an act of humanity, but of religion, most pleasing to God and suitable to the Gospel."¹⁵ Giving was a way of confessing their obedience to the gospel of Christ. "By virtue of one's conversion, he is already pledged as a giver to support God's work."¹⁶ And their generosity would cause the receiver of the bounty to pray God's blessings on the giver.

Paul concludes by thanking God for His unspeakable gift. This verse should be read in connection with 1 Corinthians 8:9. God is "unspeakable" or "indescribable gift" is God's own precious Son. "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). Giving is directed to the cross for its proper motivation. God gave His best; He gave His all. Therefore, all Christians giving should be a humble and joyful response of worship and gratitude for God wonderful gift, which human words are truly inadequate to describe.

CONCLUSION

It would be good for all to reflect on the fact that God loves those who give cheerfully. Inasmuch as He gave His only begotten Son to die in our stead, it only make sense that we would want to be involved in the matter of giving to promote the cause of Christ.

¹All Scriptures are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

²Howard Winters, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Greenville, S.C.: Carolina Christian, 1987), p. 230.

³Roy Deaver, *Studies In 1 Corinthians*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Pearl Street Church of Christ, 1982), p. 266.

⁴J.W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Co.), p. 161.

⁵Winter, op. cit., p. 231.

⁶J.W. McGarvey, op. cit., p. 210.

⁷Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary Volume 2* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), p. 655.

⁸Winford Claiborne, *Doctrines and Commandments of Men* (Knoxville, TN: East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions, 1984), p. 214.

⁹David Lipscomb, *A Commentary on Second Corinthians and Galatians* (Nashville: The Gospel Advocate Co., 1935), p. 109.

¹⁰William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), p. 230.

¹¹Jimmy Allen, *Survey of 1 Corinthians* (Searcy, AR: Harding College, 1975), p. 207.

¹²W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 284.

¹³Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978) p. 383.

¹⁴Lipscomb, op. cit., p. 123.

¹⁵Deaver, op. cit., pp. 219-220.

¹⁶James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1974), p. 436.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

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The Lord's Supper is often a point in question to those non-Christians with whom we may be studying in an effort to convert them to Christ. The memorial feast which our Lord established should be viewed as a source of growth for the individual Christian which in turn will cause the church as a whole to grow as we commune with one another and our Lord. When properly done, the Lord's Supper will draw us together as we are drawn into a closer relationship with God.

There have been efforts by some to try to "enhance" the Lord's Supper by use of innovative ideas which seem to stem from the idea that we must make it more meaningful. It is not my purpose to discuss these trends here but to remind us how observing this grand memorial is a tremendous source of personal spiritual growth to those who partake in that manner taught by Jesus himself and continued by the apostles (Matt. 28:20; Acts 2:42).

"THIS DO IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME"
(Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24)

It seems quite clear that God has been acutely aware of man's forgetfulness from the beginning of time.

Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up (Jer. 18:15).¹

Moses instructed the people as to the observance of the Passover, recorded for us in Exodus 12. The Passover was to be a remembrance of their deliverance from the bondage of Egyptian slavery. The individual parts of the Passover feast were for the specific purpose of reminding Israel of its dependence on God. The Paschal Lamb offered by each family certainly is a symbol of the spotless Lamb of God (John 1:29,30; 1 Pet. 1:19). "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7).

We, too, are prone to forgetfulness. Our forgetfulness, as unbelievable as that may be (Jer. 2:32), is a factor in our lack of individual growth. In his teaching regarding our personal growth discussed in 2 Peter 1:5ff, Peter draws a direct correlation between our lack of growth and our forgetfulness. The Christ-like qualities, which we have come to call the "Christian Graces," that Peter lists are also directly tied to our fruitfulness, as these are to be continually on the increase in our lives. Peter says that those who lack these traits of Christianity are those who have forgotten his "purging." "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath **forgotten** that he was purged from his old sins" (2 Pet 1:9).

It is very interesting that the very word that Jesus used in Luke 22:19 and repeated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:24 which is translated "remembrance" (*anamnesis*) is the word from which we get our word amnesia. Jesus' reason for instituting this memorial is not out of his own ego, but is for our benefit, knowing that we need reminding of our Paschal Lamb which is the source of our deliverance from the bondage of sin and thereby a factor in our continued growth, individually and thus collectively.

THE LORD'S SUPPER—A LOOK BACKWARD

And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this

do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me (1 Cor. 11:24-25).

As children we learned this easy method of remembering the events of Jesus' death: One Lord; two thieves; three crosses (rebellion, repentance, redemption); four pieces of His garments; five wounds; six hours; seven sayings. There is the definite need for us to look backward to that scene of agony and shame and obedience. We need to remember that He has reconciled us (Rom. 5:10).

We also need to be reminded that Jesus surrendered His place in heaven to come and live the life of a human being. "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:6-7). In doing so Jesus lived the perfect life which made him the perfect sacrifice. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

We need to look backward to the time of our own spiritual birth. We need to remember that we died to the world and buried that old man of sin so that we might live for Christ (Rom. 6:23-28). We need reminding that we were servants of sin" and are "servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17-18). The sacrifice system under the old law served to remind those worshippers of their sinfulness, whereas the sacrifice made for us is the one-time offering of the perfect Lamb of God. We need to look backward to where we've been so that we might better appreciate where we are now in Christ.

THE LORD'S SUPPER—A LOOK FORWARD

"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26).

As I write this manuscript we are a few months from what is being glamorized as the end of the millennium. If the Lord is willing we will gather for this lectureship in March of 2000. As the fatalist prognosticators envision the end of time on December 31, 1999. These doomsday prophets are not the originators of this game as previous false teachers conducted themselves in a similar manner in the year 99 and again in 999 and at many points in between. At this writing there have

been approximately 102,200 first days of the week. If you multiply that number by the number of Christians that have faithfully observed the Lord's Supper you would have the number of times Jesus' death and coming have been declared all in one act. We do not stand staring into the heavens looking for Him, but we declare His coming by obedience to the memorial feast which He has instituted.

I can remember saying that I hoped to be living when Jesus comes because I wanted to see it all, to take it all in. Little did I understand at that point in my youth that no matter where I may be that I would indeed see His glorious coming (Rev. 1:7). Peter teaches us that we should be "eagerly awaiting" (Hugo McCord Translation) the coming of God.

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 Pet. 3:11-12).

As we partake of the Lord's Supper not only should we look backward to when Jesus died and when we were born, but we should be looking forward to where we are going because He died for us. By partaking we show that we believe that He is coming again and that we one day will share His glory (Rom. 8:15-17).

THE LORD'S SUPPER—AN INWARD LOOK

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

A key word here is "examine" which comes from the Greek word dokimazo which the American Standard Version translates as "prove." This word could be used to explain the process of testing metal by fire with the purpose of purifying it, to test its genuineness. In the King James Version dokimadzo is translated: prove (10 times); try (4 times); as well as approve (3 times); discern (2 times). Along with under-

standing this word we must also note that it is to be "self" examination. The concept of "closed" communion is not a New Testament teaching for we are to be looking inwardly. Paul says that this proving will be seen outwardly due to the transforming action of renewed minds (Rom. 12:2). Certainly the principle of hearing and doing as taught by James involves the process of looking honestly into the mirror and doing the things necessary to effect change (Jas. 1:22-26). Jesus taught, recorded for us in Matthew 5:24, that conflicts should be resolved before presenting oneself for worship to God. It seems to be a very logical conclusion that this principle of cleaning up our lives by honest "examining" and true repentance (2 Cor. 7:10) should be followed in regards to our worship on the whole and in partaking of the Lord's Supper in particular.

In First Corinthians 11:27 and 29, Paul uses a word that is not found anywhere else in the New Testament. This word, anaxios, is translated "unworthily" in the KJV, "unworthy," in the NKJV and ASV. A. T. Robertson correctly says that anaxios modifies the act of partaking and not our own worthiness to partake. Thayer very simply says, "unfit for a thing." This word has to do with how we view the opportunity to partake of our Lord's body and blood. It has to do with an attitude of irreverence. Verse 29 further defines the word for us, "not discerning the Lord's body." The word discerning means to make a distinction and is the word from which we derive our word discrimination. In this portion of Paul's letter to the Corinthian Christians he is dealing with a problem of their lack of consideration for their own brethren and there is a direct connection to their lack of proper regard for the Lord's Supper. It is this disregard for appropriate reverence for the Lord's Supper that prompted Paul to warn them that each one was "eating and drinking damnation unto himself." It may also be in Paul's mind that they have little regard for His spiritual body, the church (Col. 1:18) but the Lord's Supper is the central thought here.

The Hebrews writer makes us acutely aware of the effect of our unfaithfulness; "If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:6).

As we partake of our Lord's body and blood each Lord's Day may we look backward, look forward and look inward. In doing so we should be able to avoid the sin of "not discerning the Lord's body."

THE MEMORIAL THAT UNITES

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

There is a beautiful unifying effect that is found in the communion of our Lord's body and blood. This word communion is translated from the Greek word koinonia which is translated in other places as fellowship and could be translated partnership. As we live in fellowship with Jesus, we become the one bread and the one body as Paul describes here. The apostle John identifies how that fellowship results: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). It is not our purpose here to discuss unity per se, but how the Lord's Supper contributes to that unity. But it must be understood that unity can only exist when we are of the same mind and the same rule.

Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing (Phil. 3:16).

That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 15:6).

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5).

I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord (Phil. 4:2).

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin (1 Pet. 4:1).

When we partake it is a unifying factor. One of the questions often asked by non-believers is, "Why do you take the communion every Sunday?" It is easily established that the first century Christians did partake of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week (Acts 20:7) as "they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine" (Acts 2:42). "But," they may say "it doesn't say 'every Sunday.'" Neither did Moses say, "Remember every Sabbath to keep it holy." We need to teach that when the Lord makes a statement that everything else is automatically excluded. We have binding examples of the early church observing what the apostles taught as they were taught by Jesus (Matt. 28:20).

We unite in the specific contents of the Lord's Supper, the body (unleavened bread) and blood (fruit of the vine) which Jesus used to institute this memorial. The valid Bible principle of the silence of the scriptures eliminates anything else from this feast.

We unite in what it represents (Matt. 26:26-28). Just as Paul said in First Corinthians 10:16-17, we commune in the body and blood of Jesus. There is no "transubstantiation" unless Paul still had some of the literal body and blood of Jesus twenty years after His death. Some of our own brethren are critical of using words like symbol, represents, and etc. in reference to the elements of the Lord's Supper. Jesus called himself a lot of things that we do not take literally (i.e., door, vine, etc.). Similar misunderstanding led to first century opponents of Christianity accusing believers of cannibalism.

We unite in the "how" we partake of the Lord's Supper. As previously discussed we individually and collectively look backward, forward and inward.

We unite in the "why" we partake of the Lord's Supper. We partake in memory of our Lord, as He has asked (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24) that we do so.

All through the ages mankind has found great enjoyment in gathering around a bountiful table of food. We often joke about that fact that we will look for any reason to get together and eat and we sit down to a grand feast which always takes a back seat to the company we enjoy as we share the meal.

In our "hurry-up" world it is sad that families do not spend time sitting down together for mealtime as we once did. Mealtime can be a marvelous time of sharing, relaxing and catching up. Families certainly **need this time**. I remember from my youth that my mother had dinner on

the table every evening like clockwork. That time was determined by Dad's arrival at home from work. We were all expected to be at the table, washed and ready to eat when Mom put it on the table. We understood that no matter where we were or what we were doing, we were to be home at dinner time. If you missed it, you just missed it, and it was a long wait until breakfast. We knew that this was an important time.

We each, in the family of God, have an invitation to this memorial feast. An invitation from the King Himself. A feast in His honor. This is one of those invitations that you cannot refuse. It is a family thing for which we all must be present. So many of the normal things, almost habitual things seem to be forgotten for this feast. At a family dinner we would never simply ignore the empty seat normally occupied by "Aunt Susie," or "Cousin Joe," or "Uncle Bob." We would inquire—at the very least, we would want to know why she was not there. We would be concerned about her well-being. Something must be wrong for her to miss the family dinner. And yet at this feast with the King of Kings we seem to care very little if our family members are not present.

Just as etiquette is expected at the dinner table, so it should be at the feast of the King. There is an appropriate behavior for this feast. We must recognize the severe consequences for those who fail to behave properly.

For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:29-32).

We need to do a better job of teaching our family the vital significance of the Lord's Supper and in doing so we will instill in them the importance of their participation. This is where the unity is. This is where the growth comes.

SUPPER WITH THE KING

By J. J. Turner

"This do in remembrance of me," was the Savior's decree

In the Lord's Supper we remember, Christ's death on a
cruel tree
We must examine ourselves, before eating with the King
We must have pure hearts, and mind the right things.

(Chorus)

His broken and bruised body, is remembered by the
bread
As we drink fruit of the vine, we remember the blood he
shed
We declare that we believe, Jesus is coming again
We affirm that we are one, at the Supper with our friend

(Chorus)

When we come together, on the Lord's Day
We have sweet fellowship, as we sing, study, and pray
But the focus of our hearts, is on Supper with the King
We don't want to miss Supper, and the strength it brings

(Chorus)

Don't let your seat be empty, when the Supper is served
Remember it's a commitment, you want to observe

Chorus:

Having Supper with the King, on the first day of the week
Having Supper with the King, it's a memorial we keep
When the family gathers, to eat with our King
Our hearts are filled with joy, in the hope He brings

May we each be committed to observing this memorial feast in a
way that properly honors the King who instituted it so that we never
forget His love for us in giving His life while we were yet in sin (Rom.
5:8).

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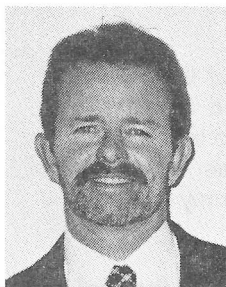
SECTION VI

Student's Lessons

JOSEPH: CONVICTION

Genesis 50:24-25

DANNY J. RADER



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INTRODUCTION

An example is "One that serves as a pattern to be imitated."¹ Conviction is "a strong persuasion or belief; the state of being convinced of certainty, conviction means a state of being free from doubt, based on objective truth."² Joseph, the Bible says, was a man of faith. "For by it [therein] the elders obtained a good report, [had witness borne to them]" (Heb. 11:2).³ Joseph, listed in faith's hall of fame by the Almighty God, is worthy of our consideration. We need to ask ourselves these questions.

1. Why did God consider Joseph a man of great faith? The Bible says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Joseph was willing to hear.
2. What gave Joseph the conviction to go beyond the impossible with God? The Bible says, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

- a. Joseph believed that God is, and was not only willing to hear God's word but to keep on hearing. For he had learned to trust in God (Prov. 3:5,6).
- b. He was willing to come to God (for God to be near) by his faithfulness.
- c. And he believed that God "is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

Joseph, looking back over a life-time of faith, seeing those things he had "hoped" for; his conviction to God made clear. Recalling how God had blessed him; remembering the times when he did not understand the circumstances he had encountered in his life, but God had delivered him out of them all.

And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence (Gen. 50:24,25).

A son of separation was facing his last departure. With the realization that death is inevitable; "incapable of being avoided or evaded and having seen the death of his mother as a boy, he probably still remembered her cry": "In Rama there was a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not" (Matt. 2:18), and they buried her at Beth-lehem, as they journeyed from Bethel (Gen. 35:15-20). He witnessed the burial of his grandfather Isaac (Gen. 35:29), as they had buried him with Abraham in the cave at Mach-pelah (Gen. 25:9), and later he and his brothers buried their father Jacob in the same resting place (Gen. 50:13). The Bible says:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off [and greeted them from afar], and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 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. 11:13,16).

A city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10).

As we consider the life of Joseph, an example of conviction, let us consider these three points of interest.

1. FAITH IN GOD IS NOT ALWAYS "CONVENIENT."
2. FAITH IN GOD TAKES "CONVICTION."
3. FAITH IN GOD BRINGS ABOUT CONVERSIONS.

FAITH IN GOD IS NOT ALWAYS CONVENIENT

What is convenience? 1. Fitness or suitability for performing an action of fulfilling a requirement. 2. a: something (as an appliance, device, or service) conducive to comfort or ease. b: Toilet. 3 a suitable time: opportunity. 4. freedom from discomfort: ease. 4: designed for quick and easy preparation or use⁴.

We live in a land of convenience, but what about Faith? The Bible says, "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled [was terrified], and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25). What about you? What about me? What about Joseph? Joseph said, "I die: and God will surely visit you." Was it a convenient time to die? Yet he spoke with all the conviction in the world that God would perform that which He had promised him. Israel said unto Joseph, "Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers" (Gen. 48:21). Yes, Joseph HEARD GOD'S WILL; he BELIEVED it, and by FAITH he gave God's command. "And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence" (Gen. 50:25). Faith in God is convenient, but our will is often not!

As a son of Rachel he was the answer to his mother's plea, "Give me children or else I die" (Gen. 30:1). Not at her convenience, but in God's appointed time. He was a son because, "God remembered Rachel and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach: And she called his name Joseph" (Gen. 30:22-24). God would have us to learn patience. As a son of Jacob, the Bible says, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Psa.

127:3). God had blessed Jacob with twelve sons. Having four wives, but the Bible says, "He loved also Rachel more than Leah" (Gen. 29:30). Rachel had died giving birth to Benjamin. The Bible says, "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors" (Gen. 37:3). "And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him" (Gen. 37:4). This created circumstances where faith would not be convenient. Giving us an example for parents, the Bible says, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Warning us, "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (Jas. 3:16).

Joseph would be cast into a pit and sold into slavery by his brothers. Some have considered Joseph as a spoiled child, but the Bible says, "He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: Until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him" (Psa. 105:17,19). Joseph would be falsely accused of rape as a slave and imprisoned. And as a prisoner, he was forgotten, but the Bible says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (Jas. 1:2-4). Yes, we can see that "Faith in God is not always convenient," as God prepares His people for bigger and better things. We need to be examples of conviction:

O Give thanks unto the Lord; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wonderous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord. Seek the Lord, and his strength: seek his face evermore. Remember his marvelous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth; O ye seed of Abraham his servant, ye children of Jacob his chosen. He is the Lord our God: his judgments are in all the earth (Psa. 105:1-7).

FAITH IN GOD TAKES CONVICTION

What is conviction? As we said earlier conviction is "a strong persuasion or belief. The state of being convinced of certainty, free from

doubt, based on objective truth." But where did Joseph get such conviction? Parental teaching: conviction begins in childhood. The Bible says, "O Lord, our Lord, How excellent is your name in all the earth! Who have set thy glory above the heavens! Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength. Because of Your enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger" (Psa. 8:1). God chose Abraham because, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken" (Gen. 18:19).

Conviction comes through hearing and seeing godly examples. God provides for the faithful and the unfaithful, but the faithful praise His name. "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight" (Gen. 31:42). God's protection and provision were seen by Joseph when Jacob gave God the Glory. Joseph had witnessed Jacob's testimony of wrestling with the angel, and changing his name to Israel, and erecting an altar and worshipping God (Gen. 35:10-15).

Conviction comes by accepting "responsibility." Joseph was willing to work. "Joseph being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren: and the lad was with the sons of Bil-hah, and with the sons of Zil-pah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report" (Gen. 37:2). He chose to speak up when most would have chosen to shut up. It shows you that things never change. We live in a society that will speak up about anything and anybody so long as they do not have to be responsible for what they say. But ask those same people to give a report about something wrong. They will say, "No way am I going to snitch on some one." Kids used to call these tattle tales. Now the Bible does not tell us what the evil report was, but it was evil, sin. The Bible does say,

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light; for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light (Eph. 5:11-14).

Conviction comes by respecting others and what belongs to them. When Joseph was sold into slavery, the Bible says, "And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian" (Gen. 39:2). Now, that is not my meaning of prosperity, but God's. Even though mistreated by his brothers, sold into slavery, and in his master's house, his attitude to do right had not changed. The Bible says, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). "And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand" (Gen. 39:3). Our examples of conviction should give glory to God.

Conviction comes by self-control. Joseph had been put in charge of his master's house. We live in a world that says, "If it feels good do it." Sex is used to promote food, cars and bars and entertainment is chief delight. The practice of self-control is not even considered by many. But Joseph was taught differently. The Bible says when he was tempted to commit fornication with Potiphar's wife he said, "There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). He was alone, far away from home. Who would find out? And he was just seventeen years old. Faith in God takes conviction.

FAITH IN GOD BRINGS ABOUT CONVERSIONS

What does conversion mean? "1. An experience associated with a definite and decisive adoption of religion.⁵ 2. epistrophe (ep-is-trof-ay'); from 1994; reversion, i.e. morally, revolution: KJV—conversion."⁶ Paul and Barnabas were declaring the conversion of the Gentiles in Acts 15:3. Most of the time we associate conversions when one confesses Christ as the son of God, repents and is baptized for remission of sins. Paul wrote, "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" (Gal. 3:27-29). "To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:5). And there we stand, more often than not; we stress our conversion, rather than conviction to a faithful life in Christ. Conversion means we have been adopted to another way of life, not our own. And convictions, according to God's word, will bring about a definite change in our lives, and often in the lives of them around us.

Think about the sons of Jacob who were hateful and envious of their brother, they sold him into slavery, and lied to their father about his death. Why did God choose them to represent the nation of Israel? What about Joseph, who for twenty-two years thought he had been forgotten by his father, hated by his brothers, and thinking he would never see his little brother Benjamin again. What brought about their conversion? Was it because they were Abraham's seed? Or were they finally convicted by the almighty God? And, if so, what brought about the change of life? The Bible says,

For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another (Rom. 2:13-15).

I have said all of this because the law of Moses, at this time, had not yet been given, but there was law. God working in the hearts of men through truth in their hearts, and in their minds, accusing or else excusing one another of sin. We see the lives of the sons of Jacob changed over the years. The Bible states: "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb.12:6).

Conversion is not centered on what we used to be, but what God can do with you and me; the end results. God would chasten the sons of Jacob by sending a famine in the land. That would cause them to fulfill the dreams of Joseph twenty-two years before. Joseph would charge his brothers of coming to spy out the land. He put in prison them that had cast him in a pit and sold him into slavery. But because he feared God, he would try their integrity. Simeon would be kept while they were to return home and bring their younger brother Benjamin. Thinking he could not understand their speech, they said, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress is come upon us" (Gen. 42:21). The living of a lie for twenty-two years burned in their minds, their conscience convicting of sin. The Bible says Joseph, "turned himself about and wept" (Gen. 42:24). He would fill their sacks with grain and money; the ones that sold him for only twenty pieces of silver. Would they keep the money and run, not returning to rescue Simeon? But when they discovered the money they proclaimed, "What is this that God hath done unto us?" (Gen. 42:28). They would return

home and have to tell their father of the circumstance that took place. Convincing their father that Benjamin would have to go with them, they would return to buy more grain, rescue Simeon, and return the money they had found. They would be tried again when Joseph put his cup in the sack of Benjamin, along with their money. In the event of finding it, Joseph would be able to keep his only brother as his slave. But the change that had taken over his brothers when they all came back for the defense of their brother was more than he could bear.

Joseph made himself known to his brothers saying, "And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 45:7,8). All of Israel would be brought down unto Egypt just as God had told Abraham in Genesis fifteen. Yes, faith in God brings about conversion!

CONCLUSION

And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt (Gen. 50:25,26).

What about you? What about me? Joseph could look back and see the purpose, the promises, and the providence of God being worked out in his life. Yes, faith in God is not always convenient, but when one, by faith, is convicted to the promises of God, God will bring about a lifetime of conversion in his life as he prepares him for bigger and better things in Christ. We, too, can say that faith is the substance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen, and that God will carry us to rest with our fathers.

¹Merriam-Webster, Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Inc. Publishers, 1985), p. 431.

²Webster, *ibid.*, p. 287.

³All scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

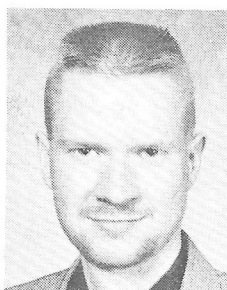
⁴Webster, *ibid.*, p. 286.

⁵Webster, *ibid.*, p. 286.

⁶Strong's, James S.T.D., LL.D. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (Iowa Falls: Riverside Book and Bible House), p. 67.

DANIEL: COMMITMENT

SPENCER STRICKLAND



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INTRODUCTION

The summation of Daniel's life might be expressed in two words: providence and perseverance (the latter being completely contingent upon the former). The overwhelming odds that Daniel faced during Judah's captivity would certainly try the faith of any individual. What would be our response to such a situation? I shutter to think what I might do in a situation similar to the one that Daniel experienced. Yet, Daniel serves as a reminder to us that our problems might rather be looked upon as opportunities to serve God.

BACKGROUND OF DANIEL

True to the life of Daniel and in keeping with the title of our lesson, we see Daniel as a man of commitment. The meaning of the name Daniel, "God is my judge," shows us to whom Daniel's commitment was entrusted. Some might ask why did he commit to God? Some might say that Daniel's God abandoned him and question how a person could ever be loyal to a God who allowed him to be put into such a predicament. However, no matter what happens throughout time,

God's word will stand the test of time, and Daniel must have realized this. After all the Bible records, "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psa. 119:89).¹ Frankly, there was no excuse for Israel to not anticipate what would happen, "and ye **know** in all your hearts and in all your souls, that **not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake** concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed" (Josh. 23:14). Due to King Hezekiah's carelessness in showing the King of Babylon "the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold..." (Isa. 39:2), it was prophesied by Isaiah that there would come a day when all those things would be carried away into Babylon. "And all thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (Isa. 39:7). We see this prophecy fulfilled in the lives of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Dan. 1:3,6-7,9-10). It was prophesied in the Word of God, therefore Daniel had a choice of accepting it or suffering through life without Jehovah as his strength (Psa. 28:7, ASV). What **hope** could Daniel ever have had if he had turned his back on God? Simply—NONE AT ALL! **He is the God of hope** (Rom. 15:13). We see, therefore, that Daniel trusted in God because he knew that only God could help him endure the trials that lay ahead.

Also, as we look at the life of Daniel, we cannot help but notice that he is so very similar to another character who faced overwhelming odds and overcame by faith in God. The one we are speaking of is, of course, Joseph. If we were to look at the parallels of Joseph and Daniel, we would certainly conclude that Daniel was a second Joseph. Consider:

Joseph

1. Experienced captivity
(Gen. 37:28)
2. A teenager (Gen. 37:2)
3. Interpreted dreams
(Gen. 41:15)
4. Wisest among the men
of his time (Gen. 41:39)
5. Revealed God to the heathen
(Gen. 41:28)
6. Gave God the glory in his life
(Gen. 40:8)
7. Prospered as a result of faith
(Gen. 39:2)

Daniel

- Experienced captivity
(Dan. 5:13)
- Thought to be a teenager
(Dan. 1:4)
- Interpreted dreams
(Dan. 1:17)
- One of the four wisest
men of his time (Dan. 1:19-20)
- Revealed God to the heathen
(Dan. 2:47).
- Gave God the glory in his life
(Dan. 2:28)
- Prospered as a result of faith
(Dan. 6:28)

Joseph was certainly committed to God just as Daniel was committed to God. From this point on, our study will focus on commitment and particularly the commitment of Daniel. From the commitment that Daniel had, we will notice some fundamental principles of commitment and seek to apply them to church growth. With this in mind, let us begin to look at Daniel's commitment.

A COMMITMENT TO PURITY

"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself..." (Dan. 1:8a). A contrast is drawn here from the preceding verse. Already had his name been changed in order to honor a false god (Dan. 1:7; cf. 4:8), now he was expected to defile himself to an even greater degree. However, from these simply words, we see much about the integrity of the young man Daniel.

What about the "heart" of Daniel? Vine's Dictionary² gives several possibilities of what the "heart" can refer to in the Old Testament which would serve to benefit us:

1. The seat of desire, inclination, or will can be indicated by 'heart': "Pharaoh's heart is hardened..." (Ex. 7:14).
2. The 'heart' is regarded as the seat of emotions: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart..." (Deut. 6:5)."
3. The 'heart' could be regarded as the seat of knowledge and wisdom and as a synonym of 'mind.' This meaning often occurs when 'heart' appears with the verb 'to know': Thus you are to know in your heart (Deut. 8:5, NASB).
4. The 'heart' may be the seat of conscience and moral character. Job answers: "My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live" (27:6).

From the context, we can conclude that the heart referred to here is probably that of Daniel's "seat of conscience and moral character." In other words, Daniel made a godly decision to remain a godly man.

"With the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself" (Dan. 1:8b). Defilement would come in the form of a diet. It is to be sure that in the king's mind he was giving the "well-

avored and skilful men" the very best that he had to offer. However, to these "children," it was certainly regarded as an abomination.

So we ask the question: How would Daniel have defiled himself by simply eating and drinking what was put before him? Much of the food that was eaten by Pagans was first offered to idols as a form of worship.

It was customary for pagans in ancient times to offer their own sort of 'first-fruits' activity to the gods; to begin feasts with sacrifices unto the gods. This, added to the fact that much of the meat they would eat would be unclean to a pious Jew[,] would encourage Daniel not to wish to contaminate himself with such food.³

Though we are not told anything of Daniel's parents nor of his life up to this point, we can be sure that he knew the Word of God. To eat of this meat would be a slap in the face to God and His commandments. Whether the food had been offered to idols (Deut. 32:36-38), or it was an animal that a Hebrew was not permitted to eat (Lev. 11:44-47), Daniel was faithful to God's Word.

With this in mind, is it any surprise that Daniel's commitment to his God would be rewarded? "Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs" (Dan. 1:8). Due to Daniel's commitment, God providentially intercedes in an otherwise hopeless situation. To think of what could have happened to Daniel allows us to appreciate the mighty hand of God in his great work of providence. Many are caught up in the miracles that God performed, and fail to see him working in any other way. God did not have to perform a miracle to work in the lives of his people in the Old Testament, so why should it be difficult to understand God providentially working today (the age in which miracles have ceased, cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-10; Eph. 4:8-14) in the lives of his people. There seems to be confusion between the differences of miracles and providence in both the denominational world and our own brotherhood. Perhaps Rex Turner's excellent work in Daniel: A Prophet of God⁴ can provide some insight into defining miracles and providence:

Miracle

1. Characterized by maximum interference.

Providence

- Characterized by minimum interference.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 2. End result only incidental. | End result especially primary. |
| 3. Obvious. | Not obvious. |
| 4. Declares itself. | Makes no declaration. |
| 5. Associated with agent. | Not necessarily associated with any agent. |

Daniel could have been mercilessly tortured or killed because of his stand against impurity. However, God saw the faithfulness of Daniel and provided for him as a result.

From Daniel's first commitment, we see that he was not satisfied with worldliness in his life. Far too often the church has sat back and allowed worldliness to creep in and cause devastating results. As Christians, we can never be satisfied with having "a little bit of the world" in the church. We see Daniel as a young person (it is suggested that Daniel may have been between the ages of 14 and 19) who is bent on following the Lord's will. Yet, worldliness so often today creeps into the church through young people in the form of indecent clothing, fowl language, inappropriate movies, etc. Unfortunately, a common excuse seems to be, "that's just teenagers being teenagers." That cannot be said of Daniel, and neither should it be said of our youth!

No matter what agent Satan uses to bring worldliness into the church, be it children, teenagers, or adults, the church must have a "zero-tolerance" for worldliness. For the church to grow, we must commit ourselves to purity just as Daniel did so that God may continue to providentially bless our lives.

A COMMITMENT TO PRAYER

"All the presidents of the kingdom, the deputies and the satraps, the counselors and the governors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a strong interdict, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions" (Dan. 6:7, ASV).

Up to this point in chapter 6, Daniel has been exalted under King Darius as one of the three presidents of the kingdom. However, we see from verse 3 that Daniel was regarded more highly than all the others, by the king, simply because "an excellent spirit was in him..." (6:3b). As a

result, the burning fire of jealousy has begun to kindle, and Daniel has now made some enemies. The presidents and princes ("satraps"; ASV) have now joined together to devise a plan to destroy Daniel. Knowing that Daniel could not be taken out of the picture on the basis of his behavior because he was "faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him" (6:4c), the men decide to attack his God. What a mistake! A decree is, therefore, made by the presidents (excluding Daniel) and princes and signed by Darius to prohibit prayer to any one except to Darius himself as a representative of the heathen gods.⁵

"Now when Daniel **knew** that the writing was signed..." (6:10a). If called into question about his prayer, Daniel could not plead ignorance. The prohibition was no secret. With that in mind, we might ask the question—Why? Why did Daniel do the very thing that he was prohibited to do? Was it outright rebellion against figures of authority? Was it outright rebellion against authority itself? After all, these are the two charges given by his accusers in verse 13, "Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day." To the casual observer, it may seem as though Daniel was simply rebelling against authority. However, if Daniel had a problem with being told what to do, then why listen to God?

"He went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime" (6:10b).

We learn much about the commitment that Daniel had to prayer from this verse. First, we know that his action was not out of rebellion from the phrase, "as he did aforetime" (NKJV, "as was his custom since early days"). If Daniel were the type of person who prayed when "he felt the need to," we might question Daniel's motive behind his prayer. The text, though, says that he had a certain habit of prayer. Daniel committed himself to prayer three times per day.

Second, his praying three times a day shows that his worship was not one of convenience. It was not a question of, "Do I really have time to pray right now?" or "Do I really want to pray right now?" We might say that Daniel prayed "in season, out of season." We live in a country of conveniences, and we would be naïve to think that this has not reflected our worship. Whether it be leaving a congregation to go to one down the street because we have had a "falling out" with a brother or

sister, changing Sunday morning worship times to be the first group of people at the popular town restaurant, or praying (as in this case) when it is most suitable for ourselves, we have truly missed the point of worship. Daniel did not worship inconsistently. Daniel had committed himself to praying three times per day, and that commitment went far beyond convenience.

Third, the fact that he prayed at all shows both his dependence and humility toward God. Daniel was in a high position of authority which certainly made many demands on his life. Could Daniel have been tempted to sacrifice his prayer-life to get to the business of ruling over people? Certainly! Because he was given this position of authority might he have chosen to forget about God? We cannot deny the possibility.

He had the responsibilities attendant on the highest office in the kingdom, and he fulfilled them so well that his most jealous enemies could find no fault with him. Yet he did not regard these public duties as an excuse for the neglect of prayer. 1. As our duty to God is of primary obligation, *no human duties* [sic] can afford an *excuse for neglecting it* [sic]. 2. Prayer is a *help to performance of duty* [sic]. Time spent in prayer is not lost time, even as regards to the work of the world. Hours of prayer can no more be neglected with profit, than the time for meals and sleep. Christ spent much time in prayer in the most active part of his life, and the more he worked the more he prayed (Matt. Xiv. 23).⁶

We can certainly understand why Daniel, though a man of prominence, was not one to neglect his prayer life. After all, it was God who allowed him to be put in that position of prominence. Is it any wonder then, why Daniel went and prayed to God during this time of persecution? Daniel had a problem and he took it to God in prayer even though prayer was the problem he was facing! For Daniel to not go to God would be to turn his back on his only hope in this difficult time.

The consequence of disobeying the statute was a night with the lions, but Daniel feared God more than those lions. God intervenes in the life of Daniel by sending his angel to shut the mouths of the lions (6:22). From this chapter, we see the faithful rewarded and the guilty receiving their just recompense. Not only had Daniel been saved, but his oppressors along with their families suffered the fate meant for him, "And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused

Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den" (6:24).

Daniel, again, has reaped the rewards of his faithful commitment, "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian" (6:28). We see Daniel as a man who took a stand with the "Lord of the lions" by his side.

Can the church grow if there is no commitment to prayer? The answer to this question should be obvious. Prayer should play a major role in our daily lives simply because it is our direct link to the Almighty Living God! Jesus emphasized the importance of prayer to his disciples in Luke 18:1, "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, **that men ought always to pray**, and not to faint." We see Paul as one who emphasized prayer by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Philippians 4:6: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God," and again in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." What is the point? Just as Daniel was committed to prayer, we must also be committed to prayer if the church is to grow.

A COMMITMENT TO PROPHECY

"In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:2).

In chapter 9, we are given a very special record of a prayer to God by Daniel. From verse 1, we see it is the first year of Darius' reign. In verse 2, Daniel records that he has come to a conclusion about the captivity of Israel from studying Jeremiah's prophecy. McGuiggan's comments might be appropriately applied here:

No apologies are offered here for calling Jeremiah a prophet. No mumbling about the possibility of the message of Jeremiah being the message of God. There's a plain declaration that these things are so. Daniel was a Bible believer. He read the books so he was a Bible reader.⁷

G. Campbell Morgan summed the matter up as follows:

In the first year of the reign of Darius, Daniel, who was evidently not only a man of prayer, but a diligent student of the prophetic writings, became conscious that the seventy years of judgment on Jerusalem foretold by Jeremiah were drawing to a close. He therefore set himself to seek the Lord by personal prayer and penitence on the behalf of his people, making confession of their sin, and pleading their cause.⁸

We see that first, Daniel paid attention to those things which were written. By doing so, he shows us that he not only carefully considered the things which God was presently saying, but also the things which God had already said. There is a lesson to be learned from this. Understanding that the Old Testament does not give us the pattern for our worship to God today (John 4:21-24), nevertheless we can certainly profit as individuals from the principles that are taught in the Old Testament (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Because of Daniel's commitment to the Word of God, he understood the duration of Israel's captivity (9:2). Daniel could never have done this without diligent study and prayer. Some prophecies of the Old Testament are not clear as to when their exact fulfillment took place. However, if study of the Old Testament is made in light of the New Testament, the fulfillment of prophecy becomes clearer.

Daniel has understood two very important aspects of Israel's captivity. From Jeremiah's prophecy, he has come to the knowledge of the duration of the captivity—Seventy years, "And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (Jer. 25:11 cf. 25:12 and 29:10). From Moses' prophecy (9:13), he has understood the reason for the captivity.

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.... The Lord shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone. And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee (Deut. 28:15,36,37).

Based on these prophesies, Daniel then makes an intercessory prayer on the behalf of Israel. Daniel trusted in the Word of the Lord because he knew from experience that the answer is found therein.

Second, Daniel's commitment to prophecy was also manifested in the fact that he himself was a prophet. If we stop to think about all the circumstances that Daniel found himself in because of his commitment to God's Word, we must certainly be impressed with the sincerity of Daniel's commitment. After all, Daniel put his life in danger for the Lord's cause so that he might speak God's words to a heathen nation. For instance, how many of us would be bold enough in our speech to step up to king Nebuchadnezzar and tell him, "Guess what ol' boy, you're going to be faring sumptuously on grass for the next few years with those oxen out in the field unless you change your ways" (Deut. 4:25-27, author's paraphrase)! This king was known for his ruthlessness and cruelty towards those who rebelled against him.⁹

What of Belshazzar? Daniel again showed his loyalty to God's Word when he was called to interpret the writing on the wall of the king's palace (Dan. 5:25-28). How many of us would be willing to tell the king that his kingdom would be taken from him? Of all the things we might want to do, this would certainly not be number one on our list! Yet, Daniel shows his commitment to truth no matter what the situation. We need more Christians who display this type of attitude!

The fact of the matter is that the only words that can be counted on without reservation are those words that were spoken by God. The prophet Baalam, though an eventual snare to the children of Israel (Num. 24:25-25:1-3; cf. Rev. 2:14), made a profound observation about the Word of God: "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: **hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?**" (Num. 23:19). Joshua reminded Israel of the trustworthiness of God's Word, as we noted in the background of Daniel, after they had entered the promised land, "ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof" (Josh. 23:14). "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psa. 119:89). These things being the case, could we ever expect the church to grow without a firm conviction of those precious precepts found in the Bible? Would it make any sense at all for the church to even exist unless the members of it are willing to follow God's Word without reservation or compromise? Let us commit ourselves to

God's Word just as Daniel so that there might be "glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:21).

CONCLUSION

The life of Daniel speaks volumes to Christians today. We, much like Daniel, have a responsibility to commit ourselves to purity, to prayer, and to the Word of God. The church cannot grow unless these principles are practiced with firm conviction so that liberalism can be headed off at the pass. Daniel's commitment was based upon the promises found in the Word of God. We must desire to know that Word and practice it so that the church may grow. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2)

¹All Scripture references taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

²W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., eds., Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (Nashville: Nelson, 1984), p. 109.

³Jim McGuiggan, The Book of Daniel (Lubbock: Montex, 1978), p. 30.

⁴Rex A. Turner, Sr., Daniel: A Prophet of God (Montgomery: Southern Christian U., 1993), p. 21.

⁵D. F. Keil, Keil and Delitzsch Commentaries on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub., 1973), p. 211.

⁶H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, The Pulpit Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub., 1975), p. 197.

⁷McGuiggan, *ibid.*, p. 45.

⁸G. Campbell Morgan, An Exposition of the Whole Bible (Westwood: Revell, 1959), p. 369.

⁹Turner, *ibid.*, p. 18.

PAUL THE EVANGELIST

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INTRODUCTION

He was the persecutor who became the persecuted (1 Cor. 15:9). He was the disobedient who became obedient (Acts 9). He was the lost who became saved (Acts 9). He is the one who is called an apostle "...out of due time" (1 Cor. 15:8). He was the evangelized who became the evangelist (Col. 1:28). He is the apostle Paul. You are invited to open God's word to the book of Colossians, chapter 1, and we will begin with verse 16.

What exactly is an evangelist? An evangelist is one who goes about presenting the "Good News" to those who are lost in sin. Mark defines evangelism by the words of Christ saying, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). An evangelist is one who recognizes his individual call to action. He understands the need to break all barriers of sex, race, nationality, socioeconomic status, etc. The evangelist will travel next door and across the seas to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

What qualified Paul as an example of evangelism? First, Paul was firmly grounded in the truth. Paul said himself to Timothy:

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

In the second place, Paul preached the deity of the Christ.

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence (Col. 1:16-18).

Thirdly, Paul preached of the church that belonged to Christ (Col. 1:18; Eph. 4:4; Eph. 1:22,23). Fourth, Paul preached about the blood and cross of Christ.

And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled. In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight (Col. 1:20-22).

Finally, Paul preached on the hope found in the Gospel of Christ.

If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister (Col. 1:23).

Paul, above all others excluding Christ, was and is the supreme example of an evangelist. According to his letter to the church at Colosse, his duty as an evangelist was to preach the Christ, to warn

every man, to teach in all wisdom, to present every man perfect in Christ, and to labor for the cause of Christ.

Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily (Col. 1:28,29).

PAUL WAS THE EVANGELIST WHO PREACHED CHRIST

Notice first of all the phrase, "Whom we preach" (Col. 1:28). The "whom" spoken of in our text is none other than the Christ. He is the one who is called "the first and the last, which was dead and is alive" (Rev. 2:8). He is the one who has "the sharp sword with two edges" (Rev. 2:12). He is the one who was in the beginning with God, and was God (John 1:1; Gen. 1:1; Gen. 1:26). He is the one who would build his church and be the solid foundation for that church (Matt. 16:18). He is the one who would suffer agonizing death and then be raised and ascended to the right hand of the father (Matt. 20:28; Matt. 27; Phil. 2:8).

Today, so many other lords are being preached instead of the "One Lord" of the Bible (Eph. 4:5). One is not surprised to see the lord of the dollar preached in the world. This was no surprise to Paul, for he said that the love of the dollar leads to evil (1 Tim. 6:10). So many so-called evangelists speak of the lord of tolerance. Today, instead of being referred to as an adulterer or adulteress, that person is one who had an affair. Instead of calling it homosexuality, it is called an alternate lifestyle. Instead of calling it divorce, one says that they "just broke up." The lord of indifference is seen in religion, even in the church, when it comes to finding "a church," or when it comes to doctrine, or even which version of the Bible one uses. Brother Robert Taylor, Jr., noted that "We are now in a position that a person not only may have the church of his own choice, which many have delighted in through the years, but also now he may have the Bible of his own choice."¹ Furthermore, Paul exhorted Timothy to be true to the Lord by speaking only the "word," because the time would come when people would just seek what they wanted to hear (2 Tim. 4:2-4). Paul did not preach on "lords many," but only on the Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

Not only did Paul the evangelist know whom he was to preach, but also he was active in preaching him. One does not have to go too far in the epistles to recognize that Paul had a deep love and zeal for the

Gospel of Christ. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Paul told others to follow him in this zealous endeavor of Christianity. "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me" (1 Cor. 4:16). "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample" (Phil. 3:17). "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you" (Phil. 4:9). "And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost" (1 Thess. 1:6). "For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you" (2 Thess. 3:7). Paul was only worthy of being followed as he followed the Christ.

Paul evangelized the first century world by preaching the Christ in Jerusalem, Damascus, Antioch, Cyprus and Perga, Galatia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Macedonia, Rhodes, Caesarea, and Rome.² He was an example of one who went throughout the world preaching the Gospel. He was an evangelist who truly cared for the souls of his fellowmen.

Truly it is sad for the Christian who has no concern for the souls of men. David, during the time he was running from Saul, penned the words that can pierce the heart, "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; **no man cared for my soul**" (Psa. 142:4). Christians are in the business of caring for souls. The story was told of two men who were traveling together on an airplane. One of the fellows was obviously an important businessman. The other was a preacher of the Gospel. The preacher asked the businessman what he did for a living. The fellow replied, "I am a wine distributor," and he asked the preacher, "What is it that you do for a living, sir?" The preacher replied, "I also deal in spirits." We need to be concerned about the soul of every man in the world. Paul cared for the souls of men. Paul cared enough for the souls of men to teach them the same plan that he obeyed.

PAUL WAS THE EVANGELIST WHO WARNED EVERY MAN

To be an evangelist, is to warn man to repent or perish. In the Gospel account according to Luke, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3,5). Paul said that all will give an account of himself before God. "For we must all appear before the

judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Let there be no mistake in this, everyone will stand before the Judgment Bar of Christ. "Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city" (Matt. 10:15). "But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you" (Matt. 11:22). In other words, everyone will be in judgment; there is simply no escaping it. One must also note the fact that all will be there as individuals. It will make no difference where their church home was. It will make no difference whom their parents were nor their friends; each one will be there alone. "That every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done" (2 Cor. 5:10). Furthermore, every sin that one has ever committed, and has never been forgiven, will be made known before all in that day. The only way that man can stand justified before God is by holy living.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And 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. 12:1,2).

In Peter's second epistle, he noted that the whole of life is to be holy in order to stand prepared to meet God.

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? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless (2 Pet. 11-14).

Paul was an example of an evangelist because he warned men to be ready always for the coming of the Messiah. "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:2). Peter, likewise warned of this when he said, "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" (2 Pet. 3:10). In other words, when was the last time a thief called you up to let you know he was coming?

PAUL WAS THE EVANGELIST WHO TAUGHT IN ALL WISDOM

To teach is literally to "cause to know something...to show how...to guide the studies of...to impart the knowledge of."³ The words Paul spoke while he was evangelizing were those that would make one wise to salvation. He did not speak to merely be pleasing to men, neither did he speak just because he thought he was a good orator.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

Paul's utmost desire was only to speak the words of Christ that would convict men of their sins, exhorting them to repent and obey God.

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).

When Paul spoke to Titus, and taught him what the elders were responsible for, he included in that list that they were to convince men of their sins. "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Tit. 1:9). Paul declared the very nature of the word to be piercing.

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing

asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

Paul desired for those to whom he preached Christ to be able to make practical application of the knowledge that was received from God's word. The word wisdom basically means knowledge that is put to action. Webster defines it as "good sense."⁴ One of the things that brother Meadows has stressed to the students here at ETSP, is that a "Thus saith the Lord" can not be found on every issue that one faces. However, he also points out that there are Bible principles that will cover every obstacle that is thrown our way. The Bible says, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). In the beautiful words of the song, "Do All in the Name of the Lord," we find the same thought carried out.

What-e'er you do in word or deed,
Do all in the name of the Lord;
Do naught in name of man or creed,
Do all in the name of the Lord...
Be not deceived by worldly greed,
Do all in the name of the Lord;
The Spirit says "In word or deed,"
Do all in the name of the Lord...
If you are toiling for a crown,
Do all in the name of the Lord;
O do not trust in world re-nown,
Do all in the name of the Lord...
Till toils and labors here are done,
Do all in the name of the Lord;
Dear Christian friends, if you'd be one,
Do all in the name of the Lord.
Do all in His name,
Do all in the name of the Lord;
In word or deed, as God de-creed,
Do all in the name of the Lord.⁵

We also find Paul saying, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). The point is this, is the item that one is struggling with, does it violate any Bible principle? Does it bring God glory? Is it helpful in building that person up? Is it edifying to yourself and to others? Paul's desire is not only to warn but to teach others how to use the Bible properly.

PAUL WAS THE EVANGELIST WHO DESIRED TO PRESENT
EVERY MAN PERFECT IN CHRIST

The goal of every evangelist is not to merely teach them Christ, bury them in water, and then throw them out with the wash. An evangelist has the responsibility to continue to teach. So often the church fails to continue what it has started. This includes working with people. A babe in Christ is just that, a babe in Christ. How can a baby mature, unless it is properly shown the way to maturity. Paul teaches us, if he be the Hebrew writer, that to be found pleasing to God is to become mature Christians.

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

The point is this, every Christian has the responsibility to grow in the Faith, however, each one must recognize his responsibility to continue teaching.

Paul was an outstanding example of an evangelist because he had the desire to present every man, woman, and child of accountable age perfect before God almighty. This desire is seen in Acts when Paul declared that he was free from guilt, because he declared to all, the entire plan of God.

And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God (Acts 20:25-27).

One may say that it is impossible to be perfect. That is partially right. No man is without any sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful

and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 John 1:8-10).

Furthermore, Paul said in his letter to Rome, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Although one is not flawless, he can be perfect in the Biblical sense of the word.

The Greek word for perfect in Colossians 1:28 is *teleion*. It is used as an adjective describing how one is to be found in Christ. The word literally means to be complete in.⁶ The key is found in the one in whom the Christian is to be found complete. Christ is the picture of perfection. His purpose in coming was to make all one in Him (Gal. 3:28). Therefore, as one becomes obedient to the plan set forth in God's holy and divine word, and as he remains faithful to that word, keeping the commands therein, then he can be found perfect or complete in Christ.

PAUL WAS THE EVANGELIST WHO LABORED FOR CHRIST

To be a laboring evangelist for the Christ, is to be a soldier of the cross.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it (Matt. 16:24,25).

Paul said to Timothy, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:3,4). To be a soldier of the cross is to recognize that there will be many trials and sometimes persecutions to be suffered for the cause of Christ. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Peter said, "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Pet. 4:16).

To be a Christian who is an evangelist like Paul, will recognize that it is not a life of ease. There will be many things to give up. One may love to play golf as I do, but that will have to come further down the list to a devoted service to God. One may have a love for many things,

but if those things do not come second to the job that every Christian has as an evangelist, he violates the very teachings of Jesus, when he said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

CONCLUSION

Paul was a supreme example of an evangelist that can be imitated by every Christian. Paul was a tremendous help to the growth of the church in the first century.

...He vigorously preached the word with boldness (Acts 9:29), and went far and wide doing so. Congregations of the church were established in various cities and countries. He viewed the church as brethren and wanted to see how they fared...Paul's view that the church is to be cared for and must multiply caused him to preach and teach helping the churches to grow and be stronger. "So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5). Would not the church today be stronger and be growing more rapidly if our view of the church was that of Paul's and we acted on that view as he did?⁷

Paul was the evangelist who preached the Christ, warned every man, taught in all wisdom, desired to present every man perfect in Christ, and labored for the cause of Christ. May we strive to be more like Paul so that at the end of our life we will be able to say, like Paul:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 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: and not to be only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

⁷Robert Taylor, Jr., Challenging Dangers of Modern Versions, 3rd ed. (Ripley, TN: Taylor Publications, 1991) 6.

²Henreitta Buckmaster, Paul a Man Who Changed the World (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965).

³"Teach," The Merriam Webster Dictionary, 1995.

⁴Ibid.

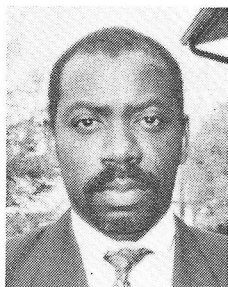
⁵John P. Wiegand, ed., Praise for the Lord (Praise Press, 1992)
121.

⁶"Perfect," Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, 1981.

⁷Bob McNally, ed. What Does It Mean to be a Christian Like Paul?: Twenty-fourth Annual Florida School of Preaching Lectureship (Sain Publications, 1999) 214, 215.

BARNABAS THE ENCOURAGER

ERNEST TAYLOR



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And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:36-37).

INTRODUCTION

We are introduced to Joses by Luke, as Barnabas, his surname. The King James Version renders his name as the *Son of Consolation* and the Revised Version as the *Son of Exhortation*. The literal meaning is *Son of Prophecy*.

The idea of prophecy carries with it a certain distinction. For example, in Genesis 20:7, Abraham is said to be a prophet. We also find Aaron in Exodus 7:1 as a prophet of Moses. A prophet was a divinely inspired minister of Jehovah; originally called a seer (1 Sam. 9:9). In Acts 13:1-2 Barnabas' name appears with certain prophets and teachers.

In Acts 13:2 Barnabas and Saul are separated, for work designated by the Holy Spirit. This indicates to me that Barnabas was a man of God given the special ability to *exhort and encourage* those he came in contact with.

It may be of little significance, but I find it very interesting that these two people are together as fellow laborers in Christ. Barnabas, a man of meek character, and Saul as a roaring lion, but both have the same goal with equal determination. They both have strengths and weaknesses that are complimented. Perhaps this is why Jesus sent his disciples out two by two because He understood the value of having a friend.

BARNABAS' CHARACTER

We are introduced to Barnabas by his good deed; would it not be wonderful to have someone write about us and introduce us according to the exceptionally good deed we have done? Performing good deeds is a responsibility that all Christians have. It is not a unique thing to give. It is how we give that counts. Like the widow in Mark 12:42, Barnabas gave all that he had.

Barnabas is not another name inserted into the history of the Bible to be passed over with little attention; his deeds, as we will see, should be encouraging to each of us. If we would follow his example and give up some of our selfish ideas of success, maybe we could see the need for greater service.

BARNABAS A GOOD MAN

"For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and faith" (Acts 11:26). What qualified Barnabas to be spoken of in this manner, a *good man*. For one to be good there must be a comparison for measurement.

It is said of Jesus that he went about doing good (Acts 10:38). What did Jesus do that we can measure Barnabas and ourselves? We cannot be equal with Him as the Son of God, or His dying on the cross, but we can measure ourselves with the exhortation: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27). We can do a self-test to see if we are keeping the Father's

commandments. This is the self test: "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" (Matt. 7:12). We can be merciful and caring, we can be compassionate and keep our mouths closed as we warm the pews while others are out doing the work which God commanded all Christians to do (Matt. 28:18-20) and we can love in deed and in truth. If we are in the balance, and we find these things on the opposite side, I believe we will measure up to our example, Christ.

"A good man showeth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion" (Psa. 112:5). "A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord: but a man of wicked devices will be condemn" (Prov. 12:2). "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matt. 12:35). Barnabas was a good man, and is spoken of as such. More importantly he demonstrated his faith by his actions. This is the key to our example of Barnabas. Whenever we read of him he is always doing good, or encouraging someone to do good.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAME CHANGE

Names are important. We select names for our children that are appealing, but we still give them what we call a nickname, and nicknames have significance. Names fit into certain cultures; for a certain period of time, for example, Mary Jo, Billy Jo, JoAnn, Bubba, James and John were popular names. Today we have names we cannot spell or pronounce.

God at certain times would change the names of the people He chose for a particular mission or duty. When God appeared to Abraham when he was ninety years old (Gen. 17:1) and confirmed His promise to make him a great nation (Gen. 12), He changed his name from Abram to Abraham renewing his relationship with him and making him the Father of many Nations. He also changed Abraham's wife from Sarai to Sarah. She is now a Mother of Nations (Gen. 17:15). Then there is Jacob. When God renewed His relationship with Jacob, after putting away strange gods (Gen. 35:1-4), God changed his name from Jacob to Israel, meaning exalted father.

God even changed the name of His chosen people, the Jews, along with the Gentiles, after he renewed His relationship with mankind (Isa. 62:1-2; 65:15; Acts 11:26).

For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles [nation] shall see thy righteousness, and all the kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name (Isa. 62:1-2).

And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:26).

Is it not wonderful that we can dwell together in the Church or Kingdom of God and not worry about what color of skin we have, what color of Christian we marry, nor what color of preacher we will hire for the next available job. Thank God we can all be like Barnabas: sell that which we have and give it to the church and not worry who will get it because our concern is like Christ's, we do the will of the Father.

HE WAS A LEVITE

I believe this is very important because we know the Levites were chosen by God for the priestly function (Ex. 32:26-29; Num. 3:9, 11-13, 40-41). Barnabas was a descendent of Levi. Though he was not a priest, we know that he was a Jew and Jews had no dealing with the Gentile people. The woman at the well confirms this fact as Jesus talked with her concerning the place of worship (John 4). How could a Jew and a Gentile be brothers in Christ, if the Law of Moses had not been changed? "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. 3:28).

BARNABAS ENCOURAGING SAUL

Barnabas not only gave all that he had in material wealth, he like Peter said, "silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee" (Acts 3:6). Barnabas gave his support to a brother in the time of need. Imagine the position Saul was in. He was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, but he is met by Jesus. Saul recognizes he has been wrong and asks the Lord, "What will thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Jesus tells Saul to go to Damascus and one named Ananias will tell him what he must do. After being told what to do we next find Saul in Damascus preaching the words of God; This is more proof the word of

God is quick and powerful. The problem arises for Saul when the Jews have heard enough and they want to put him to death. They lie in wait for Saul to take his life; good brothers will always take care of you when the heat is on. Saul escapes over a wall in a basket with the help of some disciples. He returns to Jerusalem from where he left with papers in hand to persecute those he is now returning to for comfort and safety. His new life is met with opposition. The disciples will not believe him. At times like this, we all need a friend. Who steps to the front? None other than Barnabas to stand with Saul.

But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus (Acts 9:27).

Look at what a little encouragement can do. "And he was with them coming in and out of Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians [Grecian Jews]" (Acts 9:28-29). We can only imagine what would have happened if Barnabas had not been there at Saul's greatest time of need. I know that the Lord said he would be with me always and he will keep his promise, but sometimes a little encouragement from a brother here on earth would help. Every new convert, as well as others, need the support of every member of the family of God. Let us not be found lacking in this matter (Jas. 2:14-15; 1 John 4:21).

Because of Saul's belief in Christ and his willingness to believe the things told him by Ananias, and the encouragement and support of Barnabas, "Then had the churches [church] rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" (Acts 9:31). We must be ever thankful for men like Barnabas who are trustworthy, honest, and who bear positive testimony on the behalf of another.

This is only the beginning of the relationship and respect that grew between Saul and Barnabas. On one occasion we have recorded a problem because of Peter's refusing to eat with the Gentiles for fear he persuaded Barnabas also; Paul did not (according to record) scold Barnabas, he simply stated that Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation (Gal. 2:13).

Turning our attention to Acts 11:20, we find Barnabas' countrymen also believed in the word of God. Barnabas was sent to

Antioch and through his encouragement "much people was added unto the Lord" (Acts 11:24). After his visit to Antioch, Barnabas realized the importance and need of the people. What does he do? He goes to Tarsus to find Saul (Acts 11:25). "And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

When the disciples needed aid in Judaea, who did they send? Barnabas. Once again his honesty and trustworthiness comes to the front. Who is by his side? Paul. We all can learn from this lesson. A friend is worth more than all the money in the world.

BARNABAS ENCOURAGES JOHN MARK

On the first journey of Paul and Barnabas they took with them John Mark, but John departed from them when they came to Perga in Pamphylia and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13). Why he departed is mere speculation.

When Paul and Barnabas returned from their trip, they were faced with men of Judaea teaching the brethren that they could not be saved unless they were circumcised first (Acts 15:1). The problem was resolved by what is known as the Jerusalem Council. "And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do" (Acts 15:36). Barnabas wanted to take John Mark, but Paul did not think that it was good because John had left them before. Was it because Paul thought John was not mature in his thinking, or that John was not dedicated to the cause of our Lord? We know Paul's attitude and determination in what he believed to be true. Maybe it was because of this that he did not want John Mark. Whatever the reason, we do not read of Barnabas rebuking Paul, nor reminding him of the time when he was a young convert. This is another indication to me that Barnabas was dedicated to the Lord and his wisdom allowed him to choose Mark for the work that was needed.

CONCLUSION

Barnabas was a good man, a prophet, and a man full of the Holy Spirit. When we die all that needs to be said of us is, "he was a good man, full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit who went about doing good."

"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).

