

Twenty-Third Annual

TRUTH IN LOVE

LECTURESHIP

Theme:

**“Don’t Ever
Give Up!”**

May 15-19, 2013

PAUL SAIN, DIRECTOR

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FOREWORD

What makes Satan so successful? Deception seems to be the greatest tool in his arsenal (2 Cor. 11:3; John 8:44). He makes bad things appear to be good and good things appear to be bad. “*Take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry*” (Luke 12:19).

The inspired.

Robert Hatfield

INTRODUCTION

DEDICATION

A congregation is not great because of its size, wealth or popularity.

A congregation

Paul Sain
Director of the Lectureship

DEDICATION

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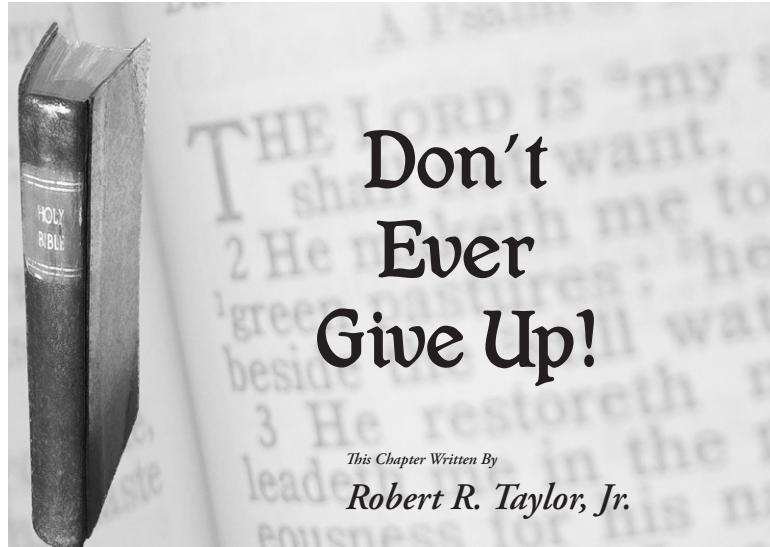
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***“Don’t Ever
Give Up!”***



Introduction

It is always a joy supreme to be invited to speak and pen material for the book for The Truth In Love Lectureship each May. It is a beautiful time of the year, usually, which fits eminently well a beautiful Lectureship.

The East Hill elders, Paul and Robert are master craftsmen in putting together a great lectureship and executing it flawlessly. My deep thanks are extended for being invited to speak first on Wednesday night and lay the groundwork for the remnant of the lectureship. I recall missing only two in all these many years. East Hill is one of our great congregations in all the brotherhood and has been since its beginning in 1951.

We are reminded of the very brief and masterful speech given at one of our colleges by the late Winston Churchill. In essence, it was, "Never, NEVER give

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up.” This had been his unchanging and unbending sentiment as Prime Minister of Great Britain toward Nazi Germany during World War II. He was the very opposite of Chamberlain, an earlier Prime Minister, who practiced cowardly appeasement toward the monster, Adolph Hitler and The Third Reich. Soft, compromising words could not stop some of the most wicked, vicious people who ever lived. They bathed various European countries with the “blood of innocents.”

Some years ago our beloved and deeply admired Bob Spurlin wrote a great book on never giving up. He has personified this in the many years he has faced serious illnesses.

Never Give Up On The Godhead

In the beloved KJV Paul alluded to the Sacred Three, the Sublime Three or the Timeless Trinity thrice. On Mars Hill in Acts 17 he told an Athenian audience,

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God,
we ought not to think that the Godhead is like
unto gold, or silver or stone graven by art and
man's device (Acts 17:29).

Until I visited Athens, the Acropolis and Mars Hill in 1970 I did not realize the proximity of Mars Hill and the Athenian Acropolis, home of their gods, goddesses and many fabulous buildings. On Mars Hill Paul was in the very shadow of the center of Athenian idolatry. On occasion in his preaching and teaching Paul would beckon or stretch forth his hand as in Acts 13:16 and

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26:1. I am made to wonder if he might have not done that as he unmasked their gross idolatry while extolling the Great, Grand and Good Godhead he represented so courageously and with such conviction. What a powerful lesson he presented on Mars Hill to a city wholly given to idolatry (Acts 17:16).

On March 4, 1970, I was invited to speak at the Wednesday night Bible study to the Athenian congregation. I spoke for about 35 to 40 minutes on “Paul at Athens.” I based all my remarks from Acts 17:16-34. I spoke through an interpreter in order that the Greek speaking people could understand my message given in English. I have never forgotten that enriching and deeply moving Wednesday night Bible study in Athens, Greece. All our tour group were present plus a large number of native Greeks in Athens.

In Paul’s profound Roman epistle he wrote,

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, ever his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

What a cogent refutation to Roman idolatry. Their gods and goddesses were lifeless and thus impotent. The Godhead Paul preached was living, was omnipotent, all sufficient, all knowing, all wise and all benevolent.

Paul’s final mention of the Godhead in the New Testament reads, “*For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*” (Col. 2:9). This is not a Oneness Holiness sugarstick as these people contend there is just one Person in the Godhead—Jesus and no one

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else. They reject the Biblical concept of Three in the Godhead—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Quite to the contrary Paul is refuting the Colossian Heresy who denied Jesus was fully God. They denied sufficiency in the Savior and completeness in Christ. Paul affirmed that Jesus Christ was no less God than the Father or the Holy Spirit. Divine fullness rested in Him as well as in the other two.

The Godhead is good, grand, great and gracious. Let us never give up on the Godhead. Barry Grider, in the recent MSOP Lectureship volume, said the Father formulated the plan, the Son implemented the plan and the Holy Spirit revealed the plan. We close forever the door on redemption when we give up on the Godhead. They, and They alone, save us when we obey and remain faithful to the demands of truth.

Never Give Up The Bible

This is the Divine Document of the entire Godhead. Each had an integral part in its precious production. Each has had a part in its powerful preservation.

Two Testaments make up the Bible—the Old and the New. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. In the aggregate they number 66 books—God's Divine Library. We have 1,189 chapters in the Bible with 929 in the Old Testament and 260 in the New Testament. In the Bible we have about three and one half million letters and about 773,000 words. The average word in the KJV is composed of five letters. Yet, many people tell us no

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one can understand the KJV. I resent their telling me what I can and cannot understand.

Pictured in the Bible are three Dispensations—Patriarchal, Mosaic and Christian. The first two were for people prior to Calvary. The last one is for people subsequent to Calvary.

God's glory and man's redemption is a five word summary of this valiant and valuable volume. The Bible reveals from where we have come (origin), why we are here (purpose) and where we are headed (destinies).

The Bible teaches us how we become Christians—hearing, faith, repentance, confession of Christ and immersion (Rom. 10:17; John 8:21, 24; Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:9-10; Gal. 3:27). It is in immersion that we come into Christ and into a saved relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-4; Matt. 28:19). In the Bible we read about four wonderful words beginning with a W—Work, Worship, Watching and Waiting (1 Cor. 15:58; John 4:23-24; Mark 13:35-37; Luke 12:36).

The Bible is our only road map from earth to heaven in the sweet by and by. I had Greek under John Rainey of Lipscomb. His parting words to me were, "Follow Jesus. He knows the way to the New Jerusalem." I have never forgotten those sage words even though they were uttered nearly sixty years ago.

The Bible ascends the ages and surpasses the sages. It is inspired, infallible, all-sufficient, authoritative, precious, powerful, practical, inexhaustible and incomparable. Relative to Goliath's sword and David's saying there was none like it, in a far higher and nobler

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sense we can say of the Bible, “There is none like it” (1 Sam. 21:9). How could anyone give up such a rare, rich and valuable volume?

Let us never give up the Bible. The Godhead never has. Faithful men and women across countless centuries have not done so. Neither have stalwart saints of our day given up God’s Book.

Never Give Up The Church

Let no one mistake what is incorporated into the word church. Man-made churches are not contained in this word choice at all. Included only is the church about which we read in the Bible—not the works of men who build and maintain human religious bodies.

The church about which we read in the New Testament is the kingdom Old Testament prophets saw and of which they wrote in prophetic accuracy. Nathan saw this in 2 Samuel 7:12-19. Isaiah and Micah saw this coming institution (Isa. 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-3). Zechariah 6:13 contains the promise of the Branch who would build the temple of the Lord. Interestingly, he said Christ would be both King and Priest on His throne. Deny Him currently reigning as King and one cannot have Him as Priest. If He is not now Priest, He has not yet atoned for our sins and redemption is denied all humanity. Yet, premillennial people deny He is now on David’s throne at Jehovah’s right hand. Premillennialism is anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-Holy Spirit, anti-Gospel, anti-Christianity, anti-truth and anti-good common sense.

John spoke of its near approach in Matthew 3:2.

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Jesus revealed his future intent to build His church in Matthew 16:13-19. The twelve apostles went forth in Matthew 10:1-7 preaching the nearness of this kingdom's beginning. So did the seventy in Luke 10:1-9. Premillennialism makes all the foregoing liars of the deepest dye. This poisonous ism says the kingdom is still out there in the future and will not be here until Christ comes the second time. Yet, a lady in the church told me in the 1960's that premillennialism is an innocent, harmless doctrine. It is lethal through and through.

The church has existed in purpose, promise, prophecy, preparation and in perfection from Pentecost onward (Eph. 3:10-11; Gen. 12:1-3; Isa. 2:1-4; Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Acts 2:47).

The wonderful word church derives from ekklesia. The ek means out of; Kaleo means to call or summon. Hence, the church is the called out people—called out of darkness into the light of the Lord.

This word is used in three senses—universal, local and when assembled for worship. We are members of the church universal and our local congregation 24/7. However, we are not in an assembly 24/7. In 1 Corinthians 5, 11 and 14 Paul spoke of the church coming together. Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:18 speak of the church universal. Revelation 2-3 speak of local congregations—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

The church is the saved (Acts 2:47). It is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:20). It is the kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph. 5:5). It is the temple of God (Eph. 2:21-

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22). It is the bride of Christ (Rom. 7:4; 2 Cor. 11:2). It is blood-bought (Acts 20:28). It is the church militant now and destined to be the church triumphant in yonder's world (John 17:24). The church should never be bashed, minimized, de-emphasized and demeaned as liberals are fond of doing.

Let us never give up the church. The Godhead has not. The faithful and dedicated have not. Gallant saints today are not giving up on the church. Let us never think that we can be for Christ and against the church. It cannot be done. The liberal concept, "Yes to Christ and no to the church" has not a scintilla of support from Scripture.

Never Give Up On Marriage And The Home

Marriage and the home are as old as the race. Adam and Eve were married the very day they were created as we see in Genesis 1:26-27 and 2:21-25. Adam was made first (Gen. 2; 1 Tim. 2:13ff). When Adam needed a help meet or one suited to his needs, God did not make another man for Adam's marital mate. He made a woman in all her glory, beauty and usefulness to Adam. When God first made Eve, He did not make another woman for Eve's marital mate. God defined marriage in Genesis 2:21-25 as being between a man and a woman.

Permanence was attached to marriage from that day forward. The Edenic ideal was one man for one woman for life. Jesus endorsed that same ideal in Matthew 19:2ff. So did Paul in Romans 7:2-3.

Hence, God did not leave it up to homosexual

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men and lesbian women to define marriage. He surely did not leave it for the Supreme Court of the USA to define marriage. Yet, all these seem to think they are in the driver's seat relative to defining marriage.

Marriage is real in nature. It is divine in origin. It is mutual in its obligations. It is permanent in the duration as long as both parties live. It is uplifting in its designs. It is sexually intimate for those married and not to any other. Heavenly smiles rest on sex in marriage. Strong disapproval rests upon fornicators. Porneia, Greek word for fornication, is broad in its comprehension. Forbidden is the relationship between a married individual and one not his/her spouse. Forbidden is the relationship between married people and those not their mates. Forbidden is sex between two men, two women or humans with animals.

Marriage permits baby making between a husband and his wife. Heaven smiles on such. The sexual union of husband and wife for mutual pleasure is proper in the sight of God. Paul touches this in 1 Corinthians 7:1ff.

Marriage is not just a twosome—husband at one end of the straight line and wife at the other end. Marriage is a threesome—the Lord, husband and wife. Marriage is like a triangle. God occupies the apex angle. Husband and wife occupy the two base angles. In Eden we have the Lord, Adam and Eve. In John 2 we have the invited Christ, the unnamed groom and the unnamed bride.

Marriage and the home constitute the basic unit of society. Rome fell in A.D. 476. Contributing factors

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were the skyrocketing of divorces, the deterioration of the home and the loss of moral standards. America in the twenty-first century is walking in the footsteps of ancient Rome near its downfall. All too few seem to care about these alarming factors so very evident in our amoral society.

Let us never give up on marriage and the home. The Godhead has not. Pure-minded saints have not in the past and current Christians who are dedicated are not about to give up on marriage and the home. Marital mates should be able to say to each other, "*O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together*" (Psm. 34:3).

Let Us Never Give Up Our Hope In Heaven

Heaven is the home of the soul. It is where the Godhead, obedient angels, the redeemed in all three dispensations and all children who die prior to reaching accountability will surely be for an eternity.

Heaven is the rest remaining for the children of God (Heb. 4:9). It will be that better country ancient patriarchs sought (Heb. 11:10-16). It is the place of "no more" graphically depicted in Revelation 21-22. It will be the holy city, the new Jerusalem and as the bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:1ff).

It is reported that John Stuart Mill once said,

I would give all I have and ever hope to have if
for one hour of the day I could look up at the
sky and call it heaven as I did when a boy.

Earth offers nothing to compensate lost hope.

Let us never give up our hope in the reality of the heavenly world.

Bible Examples Of People Who Never Gave Up

Abel never gave up loyalty to God even in the face of a murderous brother (Gen. 4). By faith, he being dead, yet speaks (Heb. 11:4).

Enoch did not give up his faithful walk with the Lord century after century. His was constant loyalty to Jehovah (Gen. 5:21-24; Heb. 11:5; Jude 14-15).

Noah did not give up but did the Lord's bidding in the building of that gigantic ark for the salvation of his family (Gen. 6-7; Heb. 11:7).

Illustrious patriarchs such as Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, the three founding fathers of the Israelite nation, did not give up regardless of foes they faced from idolaters, in-laws like Laban and from relatives who sought their harm. Each of these is enrolled in Inspiration's Hall of Fame and Faith (Heb. 11:8-21).

Joseph is a shining example of one who never gave up. He was hated by his ten older brethren and by them sold into Egyptian captivity. He was maligned by a vicious woman who sought to catch him in the web of fornication and later despised him when he resisted her blandishments. She lied about him resulting in an unjustified prison stay. He was forgotten by the Egyptian butler he had befriended. Through all these his faith never wavered and his trust never failed him. His high standards of morality remained intact all his life. These four eminent patriarchs never gave

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up. What a lovely legacy they left in the footprints of time.

Moses did not allow the first forty years in Egypt as the son of Pharaoh's daughter to ruin him for life. The rigors the next forty years found him faithful and prepared for his life's greatest work from age eighty to one hundred twenty. He performed magnificently as Lawgiver and Deliverer. He was strong and robust in faith the day he died on Mount Pisgah.

Joshua never gave up whether as general of the Israelite army in the wilderness, Moses' confidant, the leader who took Moses' place and led in the conquering of the Land of Promise or expressing what he and his family would do in serving Jehovah. He said, "*as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.*" These words of Joshua 24:15 are among the most important of his patient pilgrimage. Surrender was not in his vocabulary.

Samuel never gave up even when people rejected him as Judge demanding a king. He remembered God in youth, even prior to Solomon's sage counsel in Ecclesiastes 12:1. He never forgot His God during the sunset of his illustrious life.

David never gave up whether facing taunts from an older brother, dangers from the Philistine giant—Goliath, being hunted by Saul as though he were an incorrigible outlaw, the set backs he faced from Absalom, Sheba or difficulties from Joab. The lowest ebb of his life was the sordid affair with Bathsheba and the cold-blooded murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite. In his later life he prepared mightily for the future construction of the temple.

Elijah and Elisha never gave up their tremendous faith and loyalty to Jehovah.

The four major prophets and the twelve minor prophets never gave up their roles of mouthpieces for Jehovah.

John the Baptist never gave up when he faced the hostility of Herodias and Herod Antipas. The coming of the axeman did not daunt him in the closing moments of his life.

God's only begotten Son, the Christ, never gave up when His own four brethren denied His Deity, His own people rejected Him with unparalleled vengeance crying for His crucifixion on a Roman cross. Judas betrayed Him; Peter denied Him; all the eleven forsook Him in Gethsemane at the time of His arrest. The horrors of the cross did not shake His total commitment in ransoming the race. For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross (Heb. 12:2). He did not flinch before any of His foes.

Subsequent to Pentecost His apostles never forsook Him. Peter and John were imprisoned and threatened in Acts 4 but did not give up. All the twelve years imprisoned in Acts 5 with further threats aimed at them but they did not give up (Acts 5:29, 41-42).

Stephen did not give up in Acts even with stones hurled at his innocent body (Acts 7).

The Jerusalem congregation, except the apostles, were scattered abroad in Acts 8 at the hands of misguided Saul of Tarsus. Yet they never gave up but went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4).

Paul, the final apostle chosen, suffered much from

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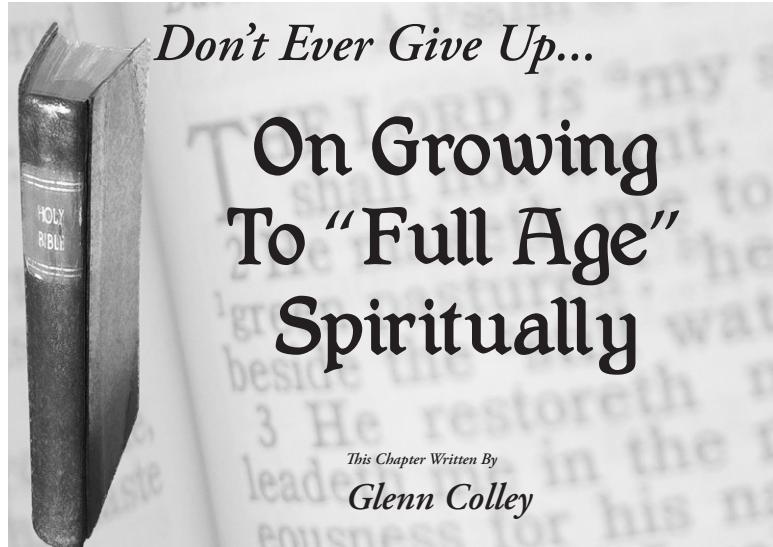
the time of his conversion in Damascus of Syria until Rome slew him around A.D. 67 or 68. But he never gave up. Some of his sufferings and persecutions are portrayed for us in Acts 21:13; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28; Galatians 6:17; 2 Timothy 2:10; 3:10-12. He died in the rich triumph of His faith (2 Tim. 4:6-8). As a Christian Paul began well, continued well and finished well.

Aged John and stalwart saints on Patmos and on the mainland of Western Asia Minor never gave up. John's full commitment to Christ did not vanish when he was banished to rocky Patmos. The twenty-two chapters and four hundred verses of militant Revelation attest to that.

Among past and present Christians there have been and still are a great company of spiritual warriors who never gave up and never will.

Conclusion

What we have in the Godhead, the Bible, the church, the home, heavenly hope and Bible examples should never be bartered away on the cheap blocks of earthly offerings and enticements. We should never, Never, NEVER give up.



...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. 5:14).

We may seldom consider it, but Christians come from a long history of God's people whose faith and growth was challenged by heavy burdens and temptations. It is frankly amazing that the faith of these people survived such challenges.

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women

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received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted,[f] were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth (Heb. 11:32-38).

After this reading we turn the next page to Hebrews 12 and read that today we have a great cloud of witnesses to encourage us. Those faithful saints, now living in eternity, continue to help us persevere. How many times in your Christian walk have you reasoned in your heart, “*...this is hard, but of course I haven't suffered as much as Paul.*”

These are the trials which move people to lose their grip on their faith before their time is finished. Their growth is stunted and diminished. Sometimes we struggle merely because we're part of the human race. Other times we suffer because we are Christians (1 Peter 4:15-16). Naomi faced life's bitterest enigmas and told people her name was “*bitter*” (Ruth 1:20), but I want to be more like Paul who suffered arguably more than Naomi (2 Cor. 2:22-29), yet ended his life with these words: “*I'm now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand*” (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

There are two key things Jesus taught us about endurance and persevering in the faith. First, that

GLENN COLLEY

we all must expect our cross, and our “*crosses*” are whatever we must individually bear to follow Him faithfully. Consider His words:

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me (Matt. 10:37-38).

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Mark 8:34).

And second, that people should consider the price before committing to Christ.

Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish?’ Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or

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else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:25-33).

For the rest of this chapter I want to consider a few crosses people bear today to be followers of the Lord. Observe that some of these are beyond the control of the one facing them, and others a result of one's own choices. Some, sadly are bearing a cross which they fashioned themselves while pursuing life away from God.

We cannot help but wonder how long it will be before Christians bear the cross of persecution as in New Testament times. If Islam had its way in the world, we would be facing it now. Yet, there are other "*crosses*" being borne which are as varied as the people who bear them. What is yours? What stands in the way of Christians growing to full age are the trials. As I was writing this speech and thinking of people's various "*crosses*," I realized that I know many people who bear many. You do too.

Family Issues

Jesus said,

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me (Matt. 10:37-38).

In other words, I cannot give up my faithfulness regardless of what my loved ones choose to do.

"My wife isn't going to live." I know a man whose wife of forty-five years is in her last days. She no longer knows him. His life is dramatically changed forever because of her disease. In his shoes many would question their faith and my God. *"How could He do this? Why doesn't He answer my prayers?"*

"My husband is dead." I know a Christian woman with two children whose husband was driving home from work one afternoon when a large truck coming from the opposite direction pulled inexplicably into his lane. The crash was devastating, and this deacon in the church lived only a few moments. I wonder how I would have reacted in this poor wife's shoes. Maybe we would cry as Martha, *"Lord, if you had been here my brother wouldn't have died"* (John 11). The point of such a prayer is this: *"I need an explanation from You. Have you let me down? Are you there?"*

"My husband isn't a Christian." Beginning at the birth of the church there have been Christians married to unbelievers. Husbands and wives don't always obey the Gospel at the same time and this situation is created when one is baptized and the other isn't. Other times a Christian marries an unbeliever. I know such a woman. In the broad sense her husband is a good man, but he doesn't believe what we are preaching because of his past prejudices. For her it means sitting on a pew singing all alone. I don't understand how a man could choose not to attend if only out of love for her. I suppose the preaching gets too uncomfortable.

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What is she to do? Peter taught this:

Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror (1 Peter 3:1-6).

“My wife is divorced from me.” As with most Gospel preachers, there have been a number of couples I couldn’t marry, despite the fact that I love them. Jesus established law regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage, and we must respect Him (Matt. 19:9). I just won’t pretend to join in marriage those who God will not join. I know a man in his thirties whose wife became unsettled and frustrated. She left him. There was no adultery, just disgust. He’s so lonely. One day he said to me, “*I’ve met a woman who is lovely and kind. I want to marry her. But Jesus said in Matt. 19:9 that such would be adultery. I know I can’t marry.*” He lives alone, and is very involved and faithful in the church. He lives a difficult life.

“My children have grown up and left the Lord.” I know a Christian woman whose son left the true faith (Jude 3) for Catholicism. Pressure was immense in the family. Now some years have passed and her family worships with the Lord’s church every week—except for her and her son. She was so distraught that she left the Lord’s church and worships in error with her son. She became a slave to her family pain.

I know a widow whose husband was a faithful preacher. When they grew into adults, her children all left the church and thus left faithfulness to the Lord. But not her. She devotedly comes by herself to worship and involves herself in the things of her Savior. I am convinced her knowledge of the Scriptures and her conviction of the truth will see her through this life. She still loves her children, but she will serve her God faithfully no matter what they choose.

If our children become unfaithful, we must not compromise our dedication in an attempt to show them love. Perhaps the spiritual loss of one’s children poses the most difficult challenge to faithfulness, but I cannot love my children more than I love my Lord. I must serve Him devotedly even when my precious children are choosing to do wrong. *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted”* (Gal. 6:1).

“I’m rearing my son alone.” I know a single mom who made many mistakes in the past, but is now the mother of a fine 11-year-old boy who possesses an eternal soul. The boy’s dad is a deadbeat. This mother must constantly try to reduce the influence

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the wicked father has over his son. She works long hours to try and make a living. Do you suppose such a person can keep growing to a full age spiritually? Just coming to worship takes a major effort.

Disappointment With Men

“An elder I long trusted got caught up in sin.”

It may be that the cross you bear is disappointment in men—perhaps the one who taught you about Jesus or maybe an elder in whom you've had great confidence, or the woman who taught your Bible class when you were small. I know a man, a Christian and an elder, who fell into sin from which he will evidently never repent. Have you ever faced this heartache and disillusionment? What of those whose deepest secrets are entrusted to him? What of those who have sought his counsel? Do you suppose such disappointment has moved some to die spiritually before they finished the course?

“My Husband Committed Adultery.” A man I once counseled fumed, *“I committed adultery with my co-worker. My wife found out. I repented. But now my wife is unreasonable. She's given me this ultimatum: ‘Leave that department where she works, or leave the job altogether.’”* He went on, *“I think one day my wife and me, and her husband and she could be friends and enjoy having a meal together sometimes.”* How do you suppose his wife felt? Imagine her disappointment in the man she had trusted with her life in matrimony. Adultery has made big fools of some small men. Can you imagine how hard her life must seem right now?

How will she feel when, each week, she walks into the house of worship? Embarrassed? Broken? Will her faith sustain her?

Attachment To Sinful Living

“Christianity is fine for some people.” I knew a man once who was in his late sixties. He was a kind man, friendly. Retired. He loved to talk about the Lord, and would sometimes read the Bible. But, he died the other day outside of Christ. He enjoyed the gambling casinos, the wild women, and his alcohol so much, and as it turned out, he never pulled himself up from that mire to walk in the light. His life was rather defined by worldliness.

Paul wrote,

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

Can any sin turn into an addiction? We'd have to answer yes. Jesus apparently had those kinds of things in mind when He said,

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell (Matt. 5:29).

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If I've developed sinful habits, they must go! I must mortify them if I want to belong to Jesus (Col. 3:1-5).

"I feel trapped in my sin." I know a woman who is challenged in this sort of way. Another woman's husband visits her from time to time in a sinful way. She doesn't particularly like him, but he helps her out financially when she's in a bind. In their culture, this relationship is neither shocking nor uncommon. Recently she became a Christian. Sometimes she still is short on money and he comes knocking at her door. She has trouble making ends meet, and he is very persistent. The consequences of severing her relationship him is some of the cross she must bear to be right with her God.

We all have the desire to be liked by the people around us. We find ourselves talking, dressing, even thinking like them. There are some very real ways I must become separate. Can I keep the same friends when I become a Christian? Not if they influence you to your old life of sin.

Job Issues

"I will face new temptations with this success." I have a friend who, with two other men, invented a computer program that would do one, very important thing. A major company bought it. His part was of the profit was in the millions. He is the patriarch of a devout Christian family. On the day he received the news of the sale, he took his wife out to dinner and broke the news to her gently. Her reaction: "What a

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burden we must bear." She knows her Bible so very well, and she works every day to not be conformed to the world. Isn't it interesting to think of all the ways money and possessions can challenge our faith? The Proverbs writer prayed,

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain (Prov. 30:8).

Mark related,

And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions (Mark 10:17-22).

A man who has much money bears a sort of cross. Much is required of one who has been entrusted with much.

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“Keeping my job requires dishonesty.” I know a woman who is a brilliant young scientist and chemist—Bio technology. Dishonest things were being done in the company for which she worked and she knew it. She was connected to it because her name was attached. She reported it, and tried to rectify the problem, but failed. She eventually resigned from the job she loved.

“Keeping my job requires losing some of my influence.” I know a woman who had a recording contract with RCA during the 1970’s. She was a bright young star making money and climbing the entertainment ladder. But she was expected to sing in places Christians don’t go. Once she was in a big photo with Chet Atkins in a major Nashville newspaper at a party of entertainers. He was holding a drink of alcohol. She was holding Sprite, but you couldn’t tell it from the photo. Convicted by her conscience, she left the entertainment business.

Mortality

“I’m not going to live.” I knew a devout Christian who suffered from an extended illness. Her cancer had become unstoppable. No hope. Yet her faith was strong and she kept it until the end. At such times the faith you’ve been building over all these years is put to the ultimate test. Will you trust Him now? Will your anchor hold? At her funeral the preachers had no trouble knowing what to say. She had persevered and maintained her devotion to God until she was finished living here.

Conclusion

Some of these trials of faith, we might say, are “*excruciating*.” The word excruciating literally means, “*out of the cross*.” The Latin form excruciatu*s* means “*the pain from the crucified one*.” What are you facing right now that strains your faith? Don’t give up! Think of all who have gone before you and have clung to their God. See your life in a broad, panoramic way and decide, “*I will grow to full age spiritually and never leave my Lord.*”

“*Wherfore we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses...*” (Heb. 12:1). These witnesses are apparently the faithful listed in Hebrews 11. They are all dead, but forevermore encouraging. For example,

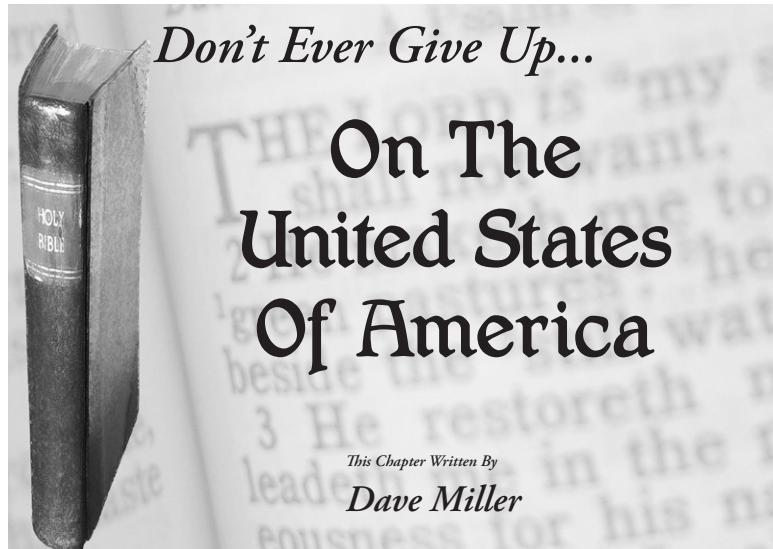
By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible (Heb. 11:24-27).

Paul wrote,

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are

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seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Cor. 4:17-18).



God has graciously enabled you and me to be born in a country that is blessed beyond all other nations in human history. We have been granted a social environment in which to pursue the practice of Christianity without the persecution and opposition that many Christians in the past 2,000 years have had to endure. With all of its shortcomings and blemishes (especially those that have developed in the last 50 years), America remains the land of the free and the home of the brave. Yes, sinister forces from within have been pummeling us incessantly—like hurricane force winds. They seek to destroy our moral and spiritual foundation, expelling God and Christian principles from public life. But we must not give up!

What Can Be Done?

If Christians do not rise up and act, the downward spiral will continue, eventually resulting in inevitable

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catastrophe. So what may be done? What would God have Christians to do? “*If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?*” (Psm. 11:3). There are no cryptic solutions and no magic formulas. The way to saving our nation is actually simple. Only human stubbornness and unwillingness to con-form to God’s laws make the solutions seem impossible. Consider the following succinct listing of seven recommended actions that can help turn the nation around if enacted by a sizable number of Americans:

I. Self-examination and rededication of one’s own life to serious devotion to God, Christ, and the moral principles of the Bible. Imagine if we could stand before both houses of Congress and state emphatically to them that if they would all get their lives right with God, He would bless them in their leadership roles. And if we could get God and Christian principles back in the schools, in the courts, and in public life, we could turn our nation around overnight. But God’s solutions are always just that simple.

II. Diligent dedication of one’s own family to God and Christ. Consider homeschooling to shield children from the subversion of political correctness that has enshrouded many public schools. Return to modeling the home according to the Bible’s directives, including:

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you

walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up (Deut. 6:6-7).

Fathers, do not provoke [or exasperate] your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged (Col. 3:18-21, ESV).

He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly. Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction. Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him. Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell. The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother. Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul (Prov. 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17).

III. Pray fervently, consistently, and continually that God will help us. Hold public prayer meetings. That's what the Founders did. In fact, during the seven years of the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress issued 15 public proclamations to the American people, calling upon the whole nation to set aside entire days in which no labor would be performed so that the citizens could devote themselves to praying to God (Miller, 2010).

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The Founders were merely echoing the Bible's own teaching regarding the necessity of petitioning God for national assistance and protection:

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily (Luke 18:7-8, emp. added).

However, keep in mind that a sufficient number of Americans may have rejected God to such an extent that He intends to punish America. The Founders were poignantly aware of this very possibility, as expressed by them in a proclamation they released to the American public on March 20, 1779: "*Whereas, in just punishment of our manifold transgressions, it hath pleased the Supreme Disposer of all events to visit these United States with a destructive calamitous war*" (Journals of..., 1904-1937, 13:343-344).

The time has come to face the fact that America may have plummeted too far in its departure from God's will to be recalled. Young King Josiah came to this very realization when, having discovered the Book of the Law which had been lost amid temple debris, its precepts largely neglected by the nation, in panic he announced: "*[G]reat is the wrath of the Lord that is aroused against us, because our fathers*

have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us" (2 Kings 22:13). Though God was pleased with Josiah's humility and tender heart, disaster was inevitable:

Thus says the Lord: Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants...because they have forsaken Me.... Therefore My wrath shall be aroused against this place and shall not be quenched (2 Kings 22:16-17).

We may be in the same situation as Israel when God, through Isaiah, asked two rhetorical questions: "*Shall I not punish them for these things?*" says the *LORD*. '*And shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?*' (Jer. 5:9). If this be the precise predicament of America, we ought humbly to embrace the attitude of the psalmist when he said:

O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs—O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth! Rise up, O Judge of the earth; render punishment to the proud. Lord, how long will the wicked, how long will the wicked triumph? ... Understand, you senseless among the people; and you fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct, He who teaches man knowledge? The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile (Psm. 94:1-3,8-11, emp. added).

The nations have sunk down in the pit which they made; in the net which they hid, their own foot is caught. The Lord is known by the judgment He executes; the wicked is snared in

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the work of his own hands. The wicked shall be turned into hell, and **all the nations that forget God.... Arise, O Lord, do not let man prevail; let the nations be judged in Your sight. Put them in fear, O Lord, that the nations may know themselves to be but men** (Psm. 9:15-20, emp. added).

When we plead with God in behalf of the nation, our every petition must be tempered with the same resignation Jesus manifested in the Garden: "*O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will*" (Matt. 26:39; cf. James 4:15).

IV. Learn the Bible—deeply and thoroughly. Delve into God's Word. Show respect for His thinking by pouring over its contents. Encourage family and friends to do the same. The Founders viewed the Bible as absolutely indispensable and integral to the survival of the Republic, citing it in their political utterances far more often than any other source (see Lutz, 1988, pp. 140-141). Indeed, consider the eloquent testimony to this fact, as expressed by a few of the Founders. For example, Constitution signer and Secretary of War, James McHenry, insisted:

The Holy Scriptures...can **alone** secure to society, order and peace, and to our courts of justice and constitutions of government, purity, stability, and usefulness. In vain, **without the Bible**, we increase penal laws and draw entrenchments around our institutions. **Bibles are strong entrenchments. Where they abound, men cannot pursue wicked courses** (Steiner, 1921, p. 14, emp. added).

Patrick Henry believed that the Bible “*is a book worth more than all the other books that were ever printed*” (as quoted in Wirt, 1818, p. 402). John Jay wrote to Peter Jay on April 8, 1784: “*The Bible is the best of all books, for it is the word of God and teaches us the way to be happy in this world and in the next*” (1980, 2:709). Noah Webster asserted: “*The Bible is the chief moral cause of all that is good and the best corrector of all that is evil in human society; the best book for regulating the temporal concerns of men*” (1833, p. v). He further claimed: “*All the miseries and evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible*” (1832, p. 339). Constitution signer, Gouverneur Morris, observed: “*The reflection and experience of many years have led me to consider the holy writings not only as the most authentic and instructive in themselves, but as the clue to all other history. They tell us what man is, and they alone tell us why he is what he is*” (1821, p. 30). Declaration signer, Dr. Benjamin Rush, declared that the Bible “*should be read in our schools in preference to all other books from its containing the greatest portion of that kind of knowledge which is calculated to produce private and public temporal happiness*” (1798, p. 100). In a letter to Thomas Jefferson on December 25, 1813, John Adams stated that “*the Bible is the best Book in the world*” (1856, 10:85).

Indeed, Americans need a strong dose of the absolutely critical essentiality of the Bible to both national and private life, as stated by the Bible writers themselves:

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I will never forget Your precepts, **for by them You have given me life.** Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, **make me wiser than my enemies;** for they are ever with me. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts. How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts **I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.** Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psm. 119:93,97-98,100,103-105, emp. added).

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a **discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart** (Heb. 4:12, emp. added).

If you **abide in My word**, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and **the truth shall make you free....** He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the **word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day....** Sanctify them by Your truth. **Your word is truth** (John 8:31-32; 12:48; 17:17, emp. added).

The future of the Republic is inextricably linked with and inherently dependent on the extent to which Americans are willing to return to an intimate acquaintance with the Bible. As Christians, we must never give up trying to point people to the Bible.

V. **Petition politicians, school board members, and the media regarding spiritual (not political) is-**

sues, focusing simply and solely on **morality**—not money. As one steps back and evaluates the moral and spiritual condition of America, it is self-evident that our nation has strayed far from its moorings just in the last half-century. America is now unquestionably characterized by rampant divorce, widespread sexual impurity, gambling, drunkenness, thievery, and the list goes on. Prisons are full to overflowing with more being built as swiftly as possible, in conjunction with early release programs. Crime statistics are at an all-time high in virtually every category. While sin has increased in the land, **two sins stand out from all others in our day**. Two sins, particularly repugnant in God's sight, have swept over America. These two sins have been **politicized**—instead of being left in the moral and religious arena where they belong. These two premiere moral issues facing the country are **abortion and homosexuality**. A nation can survive for a period of time even when murder, theft, adultery, and the like are rampant. (After all, sin is sin. All sin is destructive and eventually will be addressed by a perfect God.) However, history shows that when some sins become pervasive in a given civilization, its demise is imminent. The killing of children and sexual perversion are just such sins.

We may feel momentary discouragement as we see more and more people "*throwing in the towel*." Recently, a prominent, conservative politician, who had always opposed same-sex marriage, announced that he no longer opposed it—when he discovered that his son was homosexual (Lee, 2013). Pepperdine University announced they are now offering a

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scholarship to those are “*promoting the health (mental or physical) and wellness of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) community*” (Barton, 2013). Ultimately, America’s drifting from its spiritual moorings is climaxing in imminent moral implosion and inevitable retribution from God. **But let us not give up on America!** Since leftwing politicians have chosen to politicize critical moral issues, let us do everything we can to oppose their promotion of those issues (and all other moral evils).

VI. Boycott Hollywood. Do not enable the entertainment industry in its wicked assault on morality. Hollywood does not represent what America has always been about. In fact, they are as antagonistic and hostile toward God, Christianity, and true patriotism as anyone can be. And many Americans are insanely enamored with the fluff and glitter of such frivolous pursuits. Indeed, with the passing of the World War II generation, succeeding generations of Americans have little or no interest in the higher, nobler aspects of human existence, cultivating moral excellence and the virtuous development of the human spirit. In-stead, entertainment, pleasure, physical stimulation, and indulging fleshly appetites now take center stage. Millions of Americans spend large sums of money in frivolous pursuits. Does recreation and playing mean more to us than our souls, the souls of our children, and the survival of our society?

VII. Be resolute, steadfast, and unmovable. Do not give up! Stay with the battle. America’s current condition did not develop overnight. It will take time and persistence to turn the nation around.

To capsule these seven items: **Stand up and speak out!** Verbalize and articulate the truth at every opportunity. The solution to all of the problems encountered by humans is the Word of God. The Bible has the answers! We must never give up!

Examples To Follow

Do you remember what God commissioned Jonah to do? He said to Jonah: "*Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.*" That's what you and I must do for America.

Do you remember what God commissioned Ezekiel to do?

And He said to me: "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. For you are not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel, not to many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you. But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are **impudent and hard-hearted**. Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; **do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks**, though they are a rebellious house." Moreover He said to me: "Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. And go, get to

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the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ **whether they hear, or whether they refuse**” (Ezek. 3:4-11).

“Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the Lord GOD, “and not that he should turn from his ways and live?... Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,” says the Lord GOD. “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the Lord GOD. “Therefore turn and live!” (Ezek. 18:23,30-32).

That's what we need to do for America. Like Ezekiel, we are to blow the trumpet and warn the people (Ezek. 33:3).

Do you remember what God said to Jeremiah concerning nations? *“The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it”* (Jer. 18:7-8). **That's what we need to do for America**—express God's views to them in hopes that they will turn.

Do you remember Elijah's dazzling, daring defense of God in standing up against the prophets of Baal? Yet when Jezebel put out a contract on his life, he “*ran for his life*” by fleeing into the desert.

He sat down under a broom tree, and prayed that he might die. In his depressed state, he then went to sleep. After consuming food provided by an angel, he continued his journey until he came to a cave where he spent the night. God then spoke to him these words: “*What are you doing here, Elijah?*” (1 Kings 19:9). Elijah whined about being alone in his efforts to stand up to the rising tides of wickedness. So God treated him to several natural wonders (wind, earthquake, and fire), and then asked him again, “*What are you doing here, Elijah?*” And again Elijah insisted that he was alone in his quest to defend God. But God’s response, besides assuring him that he was not alone, consisted of telling him to get back into the fray! God gave him a list of tasks to perform that would further the cause of righteousness. And, folks, that’s precisely where we are today. We’ve got tasks to perform. Let’s not waver in our commitment to those tasks.

Things look bleak in our country. As a culture and civilization, we have declined and degraded beyond what any of us could have imagined 50 years ago. **But we must never give up!** We have work to do, duties to perform, and people to influence. God wants all of us to “*fight the good fight of faith*” (1 Tim. 6:12) and “*war a good warfare*” (1 Tim. 1:18). He wants us to “*take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand*” (Eph. 6:13). Stand! “*Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong*” (1 Cor. 16:13). “[S]tand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and

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not in any way terrified by your adversaries" (Phil. 1:27-28). "*So stand fast in the Lord*" (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 3:8). We have the power to do so, because we have the power of God unto salvation—the Gospel (Rom. 1:16). Having the words, ideas, thoughts, and views of God, we have the advantage over all others. We are in the right on all the pressing issues facing our nation. All we need to do is remain faithful ourselves and, in the process, articulate God's views to those around us.

Conclusion

We do not know the outcome of this spiritual war. America may very well fall or be destroyed. Or she may simply be transformed into a socialist state and allowed to continue indefinitely. We don't know. **But we do know that we must not give up!** "*If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us*" (2 Tim. 2:12). "*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*" (Rev 2:10). "*Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him*" (James 1:12). Let's not give up on America.

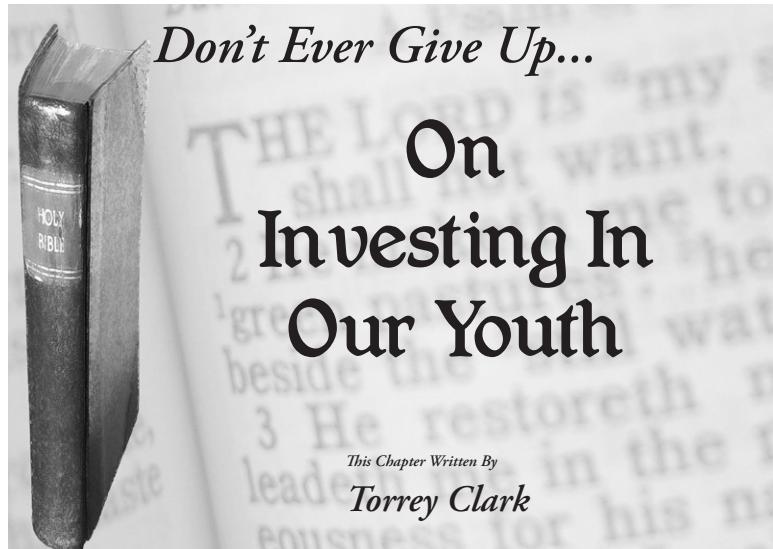
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Consider the definition of what it means to “*invest*”: “*to devote one’s time, effort or energy to a particular undertaking with the expectation of a worthwhile result*” (New Oxford American Dictionary). The English word is a descendant of a Latin root which carries with it the notion of giving one’s capital a new form. The church of Christ is called to be an investing entity. Its members are to devote their time, effort, energy and finances into souls for the purpose of drawing them to Christ. Every soul is a worthy investment because each soul is worth more than the whole world (Mark 8:36). Christians are never to give up investing in other souls. Christians are to invest in the lost (evangelism), the saved (edification) and the needy (benevolence). One unique segment of souls to be invested in are the “*youth*.” Now, perhaps more than other periods of history, the need to invest in youth is dire. In this author’s estimation, we are

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living in a time of intense persecution and trial in the United States. This trial is not of a physical nature, but rather intellectual and volitional. It is in this environment that our youth are formulating their view of the nature of reality, what is going to be important to them and how they want to spend their lives. The time is long past where being “*good, church-going folks*” is the cultural default.

However, in this environment exists great opportunity! Bible and church history both show that in times of difficulty, the faithful have an opportunity to refocus on what is truly important in religion, to develop deep wells of faith from which to draw, to purge out the “*leaven*” of error and apostasy, and ultimately to let God purify for the purpose of salvation (1 Peter 1:6-9). There seems to be a negative “*buzz*” alive regarding the fate of our youth. This author is far more optimistic about and confident in the young souls in our churches. However, some approaches may need to be re-evaluated and adjusted to meet the challenges of today and to fall in alignment with Scripture. The call of the hour is to return to Christ-centered, biblical, proven methods of discipleship.

I do not have any insights from a substantial amount of experience in youth ministry or parenthood. Nor do I pretend to be an expert on the subject. However, my present age (27) may give me a unique perspective in that I still remember what it was like to be a teen and in my early twenties, while I also have grown to appreciate the standpoint of my older

brethren. I pray this study will be of some benefit to those who would invest in young people. I wish to disclaim that I believe it is the parents primary responsibility to disciple their children. However, most of my observations are geared toward the church at large for broader application. These truths could be applied to parents even when parents are not specifically mentioned.

The topic will be considered by answering the following questions: (1) What is the Biblical worldview of “youth?”; (2) What are some misconceptions about investing in youth?; (3) What are some unique challenges of youth?; (4) What are some suggested ways to invest in our youth? This study will hardly be comprehensive. The author has purposefully attempted to present some insights that have not previously been highlighted in brotherhood works. I commend you to two recent brotherhood essays that effectively deal with topics regarding youth: “*Why Are We Losing So Many of Our Youth*” by Caleb Colley, 2011 POWER Lectureship and “*The New Testament Christian Loves Young People*” by Brad McNutt, 2013 Memphis School of Preaching Lectureship.

What Is The Biblical Worldview Of Youth?

The first area to be examined is what the Bible says about the character of youth. The world sets forth many views of youth. We are interested in what God has said concerning youth so as to embody a robust understanding of the Christian worldview about such. Consider the following excerpt from the Dictionary

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of Biblical Imagery regarding the Bible's teaching on youth:

A majority of the Bible's more than three hundred references to young or youth use the term in a neutral sense to designate age or a grouping within society. Poetic writers of the OT often use the words children and youth synonymously. The stock phrase "*young and old*" is a Hebrew merism—naming opposites with the implication that everything between is also included. We move in the direction of symbolic meanings with the stock phrase "*from my youth*" (or variants "*from his youth*" or "*from youth*"), where youth designates a starting point—the beginning of either life or adult accountability. Yet we should not limit the status of being "*young*" to the pretwenty segment of society; sometimes the term is extended to cover a large span of the population between children and old people. One may be married (Pro. 5:18) or a father (Ps. 127:4) and still considered a youth (975).

Therefore, depending on the context, "*youth*" may refer to children up to those who are in the early phases of adulthood. Per these parameters, it is evident that "*youth*" does not always refer to those in their teens and early twenties. However, for the purposes of this study the general age-category under consideration will be limited to late childhood to mid-twenties.

The Bible depicts youthfulness as a time of promise:

The young are virile, possessing a future,
laden with potential, brimming with promise.

Three dozen references to young women or young virgins, for example, hint at feminine attractiveness at its most resplendent. References to young men are much more numerous, and usually we can infer that young men are the prime physical specimens of society. The evocative phrase “*the wife of your youth*” (Prov. 5:18; Mal. 2:14) speaks of the era when romantic devotion between a couple burns most brightly. In a similar vein, “*the sons of one’s youth*” (Psm. 127:4) pictures early parenthood, when the venture is new and filled with optimistic energy. Daniel and his compatriots are sketched as “*youths without blemish, handsome and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to serve in the king’s palace*” (Dan. 1:4)—in short, the best one can imagine (Ryken, 976).

Youth indeed are full of promise and potential. They seemingly have their whole lives ahead of them. Adults tell them they can do anything they put their minds to. This uniquely outfits youth to be great encouragers to the older generation. Parents who have regrets of their past misgivings glean hope that their offspring will have opportunities and successes they they were not able to have. The elderly are reminded of days gone by when spending time with a younger individual. It is for this reason that a faithful and invigorated youth group can bring great strength to congregations.

While the Bible depicts youth as a time of great promise, it also depicts youth as a time “*characterized by waywardness of one sort or another, along the lines*

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of our proverbial ‘misspent youth’” (Ryken, 976). The strength and beauty of youth combined with a lack of life experience and a frontal lobe (the area of the brain that in part processes the long-term consequences of present behavior) that is not yet fully developed can result in a youth’s feeling of invulnerability. Because of this, many young people engage in risky and sinful behavior. Ryken elaborates:

Here youth is a time when people do things that they regret later in life, as captured especially in the phrase “*the sins of my youth*” (Psm. 25:7; Job 13:26). The implied contrast is between mature experience and responsibility on one side and the careless, unfettered behavior of youth on the other. Thus youth is linked with acts of shame (Isa. 54:4), disgrace (Jer. 31:13) and lewdness (Ezek. 23:21). In the seduction story of Prov. 7:6–27, it is “*among the youths*” that the seductress finds “*a young man without sense*” (Prov. 7:7). When mature adults look back on these youthful indiscretions and follies, they do so with a tone of chagrin (Psm. 25:7). As the writer of Ecclesiastes looks back at his misspent years, his conclusion is that “*youth and the dawn of life are vanity*” (Eccl. 11:10) (976).

The truth that young people are especially vulnerable to making foolish mistakes helps us to realize the need of parents to protect them from such dangers. Teenagers should be learning how to make good decisions for themselves, but some decisions need to be made for the children so as to protect them. How many teenagers have engaged in activities that have ruined their lives because Mom and Dad lacked

the backbone and love to protect the child from a certain environment or influences?

The Bible also depicts the youth as a time when individuals establish a positive pattern that exists through their lifetime:

Obadiah captures the ideal when he speaks of himself as someone who has “*revered the LORD from my youth*” (1 Kings 18:12; cf. Psm. 71:5, 17). Sometimes in the Bible, youthful years are pictured as a formative time of commitment that sets the tenor for the adult life to come. Often these pictures emerge from the earnest exhortations and commands of adults to young people, as in the repeated addresses to “*my son*” in the book of Proverbs. As the writer of Ecclesiastes nears the climax of his reminiscence about having looked for satisfaction in all the wrong places, he advises his youthful readers to be spared the dead ends he pursued and instead to live life in the double awareness of God as Creator and Judge, beginning and end:

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment....Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth (Eccl. 11:9; 12:1).

The psalmist offers this advice to a novice: “*How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to thy word*” (Psm. 119:9).

NT references continue such exhortations to the young to be models of piety. Paul exhorts

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Timothy to “*shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace*” (2 Tim. 2:22). And again, “*Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity*” (1 Tim. 4:12). In the book of Titus the writer offers moral advice to various groups, with the advice apparently matching the besetting sins of that group; in this catalog appears the advice “*Likewise urge the younger men to control themselves*” (Titus 2:6). When speaking of youth as a time of godly commitment, the biblical writers generally treat it as the time of laying an adequate foundation for life and serving as an example to others (Ryken, 976).

Thus, while youth is a time of danger, it is also a time of great opportunity. I have brought to the attention of youth groups that they are in an advantageous position because they can more easily form habits and patterns that will carry through to their adult lives. Those who are older will readily admit that it is easier to “*do it right*” the first time versus having to change later on.

Therefore, the Bible depicts the youthful years as a time of strength, beauty, energy and ability with much potential to formulate a positive manner of living. These attributes are not without their pitfalls, however, because youth are susceptible to make foolish mistakes.

With the character of youth from a Biblical perspective in mind, misconceptions about youth will be identified.

What Are Some Misconceptions About Youth?

If we are to properly invest in our young people, we must learn to break down the ever growing culture barrier between the “*young*” and the “*old*” generations. David Kinnaman conducted an extensive research study on 18-29 year-olds and why they are leaving the church. This study was published into a book called You Lost Me (I enthusiastically recommend preachers, teachers and youth workers read this book). Keep in mind Kinnaman’s study was conducted for “*Christendom*” at large, so the study includes denominations. In commenting on the generation gap that exists in our culture today, he recounts a conversation he had with Bob Buford:

“I think this next generation is not just slightly different from the past. I believe they are discontinuously different than anything we have seen before.” As proof, Bob turned to his files and pulled out a copy of a recent research report on Mosaics, or Millennials. He flipped to a page that showed the prevailing self-identities of each of the four primary generations in American culture and began to read the top five words or phrases each generation had used to describe itself: “*Elders used words like these: ‘World War II and Depression,’ ‘smarter,’ ‘honest,’ ‘work ethic,’ and ‘values and morals,’*” Bob half-read, half-recited from memory. “*Boomers describe their generation with terms like ‘work ethic,’ ‘respectful,’ ‘values and morals,’ and ‘smarter.’ Busters use these terms: ‘technology use,’ ‘work ethic,’ ‘conservative/traditional,’ ‘smarter,’ and ‘respectful.’*” He

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chuckled. “*Everybody thinks they’re smarter.*” “*But now, look at this,*” Bob continued. “The Millennials use these five phrases to describe their generation: ‘technology use,’ ‘music and pop culture,’ ‘liberal/ tolerant,’ ‘smarter,’ and ‘clothes.’ Where has respectfulness gone? Where is work ethic? To me, this shows that the next generation is not just sort of different; they are discontinuously different.”

Based upon Kinnaman’s research on said generation gap, he concluded:

I believe a reasonable argument can be made that no generation of Christians has lived through a set of cultural changes so profound and lightning fast. Other generations of Christ-followers have endured much greater persecution. Others have had to sacrifice more to flourish or even survive. But I doubt many previous generations have lived through as compounded and complicated a set of cultural changes as have today’s Christians in the West.

Given the dramatic nature of the culture gap between younger and older, those who would invest in youth must do all they can to break down barriers. One way to do that is to identify and correct misunderstandings and misconceptions.

Misconception #1: They are incapable of contributing anything substantial to the Lord’s church. Chuck Norris, in the foreword to “*Do Hard Things*” by brothers Alex and Brett Harris said,

Today we live in a culture that promotes comfort, not challenges. Everything is about finding ways to escape hardship, avoid pain, and dodge duty.

In the past, young people were expected to make significant contributions to society. Today, our culture expects very little from teens—not much more than staying in school and doing a few chores. A sad consequence of such low expectations is that life-changing lessons go unlearned (Harris).

It should be of no surprise to anybody that when expectations for youth are low, then performance will follow suit. One problem today is that expectations are set so low for youth that they grow up believing Christianity is an exercise in formality. Many times, they are not challenged to learn God's word, they are not challenged to serve other people, and they are not challenged to participate in any work of the church! Many parents would have no problem with their child spending hours per day playing video games, but will not challenge them to lift a finger when it comes to getting busy for the Lord. To say that young people are not capable of taking on substantial tasks or responsibility is folly. At age 20, Bill Gates co-founded Microsoft. At age 21, Thomas Edison created his first invention; Steve Jobs co-founded Apple and Alfred Tennyson published his first poetry. At age 24, Johannes Kepler defended the Copernican theory and described the structure of the solar system. Admittedly, these are outliers in their respective fields, but it cannot be denied that young people are capable of great things. The Bible is replete with examples of young people doing great things for the Lord and displaying mature levels of faithfulness: (1) Samuel (1 Sam. 2:18); (2) David

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(1 Sam. 17:33); Josiah (2 Kings 22:1); Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5); Jephtha's daughter (Judges 11:36); Ruth (Ruth 1:16f); Mary, mother of Jesus (Luke 1:38).

Part of the problem is many adults have convinced themselves that youth do not have anything substantial to bring to the table when it comes to the work of the church and therefore the youth are never challenged. This has not always been the case for youth. Consider the training of ancient Jewish children:

For centuries education was based in the home and was centered around the religious tradition and passing on the family trade. A girl was prepared for marriage, so it was important that her virginity be preserved and that she be trained as a competent manager of the household (Prov. 31:10–31). For boys, education was primarily religious education centered on the study of Torah. This began with learning biblical Hebrew, then reading and memorizing large portions of the Scriptures. One of the major rituals for adulthood for boys occurred at age thirteen when they took on the *"yoke of the Torah."* This signaled the completion of an education process and the assumption of responsibility for further study and observance of the Torah. Marriage, generally perceived as an obligation, concluded childhood for both girls and boys. It was arranged early and most often occurred in the mid-teens for girls and late teens for boys (Evans).

Granted, religion was woven into the fabric of family and culture in those days, and therefore it makes sense that they gave more preeminence

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to rigorous training in studying the word of God. However, culture is no excuse when it comes to the God-given commandment to train children for service to God. Consider the following New Testament passages regarding the necessity of training one's children:

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Additionally, the behavior and stature of one's children have a bearing on whether a man is qualified as a deacon or elder:

one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (1 Tim. 3:4).

Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well (1 Tim. 3:12).

While not authoritative, the Didache provides additional insight into how the early church viewed the training and discipline of children: "*You shall not withhold your hand from your son or your daughter, but from their youth you shall teach them the fear of God*" (Didache 4:9).

The Lord used children to teach profound soul-saving truths:

Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is

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the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3–4).

Many times it is the young ones who have a lesson or two to teach the older.

We need to realize that every child is “*precious in His sight*” and if they are a Christian, they should be expected to carry out the duties and responsibilities of any other member according to their abilities and with the understanding of their inherent limitations. Even those members who seem to be the most feeble are necessary (1 Cor. 12:20-22). Many young people even feel frustrated that not much is expected of them. One sixteen year old young man said, “*Sometimes, teenagers have great ideas, and nobody would ever know because we are stereotyped as inexperienced and lacking in maturity.*” Another young lady observed, “*If adults raised their expectations, a lot of teens would rise up to meet them...teenagers are definitely capable of doing huge things, but they do need some guidance and encouragement.*” We need to extend our expectations of our young people and not write them off to the “*future of the church*” only category. Perhaps we need to be doing more to empower young people with responsibility and a sense of ownership in the cause of Christ. Are we deliberately making sure that young people are being trained and utilized in the service of the Lord?

Misconception #2: They do not care about knowing the truth and biblically serving God.

There certainly are cases when it appears that certain individuals are not interested in knowing

biblical truth. However, it seems that any one who presupposes to know someone else's heart and whether or not they want the truth may have a problem. This problem is compounded when a person presupposes to know whether or not a whole demographic wants the truth or not. It is a problem because it fails to understand the nature of the Christians' work: to scatter seed (Luke 8:4ff). Christians should be more concerned about actually scattering the seed than speculating about the soil. The Lord taught not to "*cast our pearls before swine*" (Matt. 7:6) and there certainly are situations where suspending teaching another person because they have proven to be obstinate in receiving the truth would be appropriate and right. However, it has been this author's humble observation that those who say things like "*those people will never accept the truth*" or "*they don't care about the truth*" are those who are the least likely to ever teach anyone the gospel. Perhaps this phrase is a self-righteous lazy excuse for not teaching others. This author is very glad that the Lord, His apostles, His faithful soldiers of the cross, right down the line to the person that taught me the gospel did not write me off as not wanting the truth (Matt. 22:39)!

The country we live in is becoming increasingly hostile toward Christianity. It is less 'accepting' of the truths of the gospel at large than it was in years past. However, this does not necessitate the assertion that "*no one wants the truth*" today. In fact, if hostility toward Christianity is a measuring stick as to how effective evangelism will be, then the first century

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church should have been destroyed and written off as another failed religion of history. We know this is not the case. It is especially bothersome when individuals say "*young people don't want the truth today.*" Young people are those who may be most willing to hear the truth! The Christian Chronicle reported a study that was conducted among teens in the churches of Christ that discovered the following among other things: (1) Teens want more upbeat worship and meatier Bible study; (2) Teens seek deeper, more meaningful relationships with adult Christians; (3) Teens desire to go out and serve beyond church walls. Is it true that many young people are apathetic toward Christianity today? Unfortunately, yes. It is also true that many young people want a more deeply rooted and committed relationship with Christ and His church.

Perhaps instead of writing young people off, we should be asking ourselves constructive questions. Why is it that there is such apathy? Could it be that parents and church leaders and teachers are not connecting Christianity with their every day life? Could it be that parents and the church is not confronting difficult issues that address our young people today? It could be a host of things, but if we believe that one soul is worth more than the whole world, then we need to get serious about rising to the challenge of engaging young people with God's word. We must always have confidence in the word of God to cut people to their core (Heb. 4:12) and to change their lives. We must be committed to the

truth that faithful and relevant teaching of Biblical truth will always do exactly what God desires:

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it (Isa. 55:11).

What Are Some Unique Challenges To Youth?

Having addressed two broad misconceptions about youth, we will now turn our attention to some unique challenges to youth. We have already identified the fact, and it is commonly known, that young people face unique temptations to sin because of hormonal changes, strength, energy, beauty and inexperience. It should go without saying that young people must be protected, trained and guided to preserve their purity and practice holiness. This section will examine some unique challenges that are facing the youth of the present generation. The main points are derived from Kinnaman's thorough and rigorous research on the trends of youth leaving "*Christianity*." Again, I underscore the fact that Kinnaman's study includes denominational Christianity, but nonetheless his findings appear to be consistent with what we are seeing in the Lord's church. I am fully aware of the weaknesses and pitfalls of such statistical study.

First of all, Kinnaman does not ignore the fact that there is an epidemic of young people leaving Christianity. I highly recommend the book, but I

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will attempt to summarize some of the information here. He identifies three general categories of young people who “*quit church*:”

Nomads	Prodigals	Exiles
At some point during their teen or young adult years, nomads disengage from attending church or significantly distance themselves from the Christian community. Most, however, do not discard it entirely.	Consists of young people who leave their childhood teen faith entirely. This includes those who deconvert (including atheists, agnostics, and “nones,” those who say they have no religious affiliation) and those who switch to another faith.	Those who grew up in the church and are now physically or emotionally disconnected in some way, but who also remain energized to pursue God-honoring lives.
They still describe themselves as Christian. They have not disavowed Christianity but are no longer particularly committed to their faith.	They feel varying levels of resentment toward Christians and Christianity. Many still have positive things to say about specific people (such as their parents), but the overall tenor of their perception is negative.	Exiles are not inclined toward being separate from “the world.” Exiles want their faith to matter. One-third of young Christians (32%) identified with the statement, “I want to find a way to follow Jesus that connects with the world I live in.” They long for their spiritual lives to be connected, to be whole, and to make sense.
They believe that personal involvement in a Christian community is optional. They see going to church or being with Christian friends for spiritual purposes as options, not requirements.	They have disavowed returning to church. They feel deeply wounded by their church experience and do not plan to ever go back.	They are skeptical of institutions but are not wholly disengaged from them. Even while they sense God at work outside of church, not all are post-institutional in their faith. Just one-fifth of young Christians (21%) say that the institutional church is a difficult place for them to live out their faith.

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Nomads	Prodigals	Exiles
		<p>(Continued)</p> <p>Many young exiles are infrequent participants in conventional faith expression, such as regularly attending a church worship service, but most of them remain connected in some way to a faith community.</p>
<p>The importance of faith has faded. They admit that Christianity was more important to them at some point in their past. If they describe it as important, it is on their own terms. About one-quarter (24%) of the young Christians we interviewed say they may be willing to return to church later in life, but it's not particularly urgent to them.</p>	<p>They have moved on from Christianity. Prodigals describe themselves as “over” Christianity, saying it just does not make sense to them. Their spiritual needs, such as they sense them, are being met elsewhere.</p>	<p>Young exiles sense God moving “outside the walls of the church.” This was among the most common views of any we assessed in our research—God is moving outside the church and exiles wanted to be a part of it. As Ryan’s story at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, many young people want to participate in ministry outside of conventional forms of Christian community. We explore their perceptions more fully in later chapters, but in a nutshell, exiles are dissatisfied with a church that is a weekend event, not a movement of God’s people on mission for Christ.</p>
<p>Most are not angry or hostile toward Christianity. They tend to find their personal history with the faith amusing, or perhaps distressing, but they are not generally angry about their past.</p>	<p>Their regrets, if they have them, usually center on their parents. In other words, they recognize that their faith choices have made a significant impact on their parents yet they feel as though they were compelled to deconvert.</p>	<p>They are not disillusioned with traditions; they are frustrated with slick or shallow expressions of religion. In some of our research, we discovered a</p>

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Nomads	Prodigals	Exiles
		<p>(Continued)</p> <p>common theme to be “I want to be part of a Christian community that is more than a performance one day a week.” Similarly a frequently expressed sentiment was they “want a more traditional faith, rather than a hip version of Christianity.”</p>
<p>Many are spiritual experimentalists. Nomads find meaning and spiritual stimulation from a variety of activities in their lives, which sometimes include trying on other religious experiences for size.</p>	<p>They feel as if they have broken out of constraints. Many prodigals feel that the Christianity they experienced kept them stuck in a box or demanded that they become someone other than their true self. They experience leaving as freedom.</p>	<p>Exiles express a mix of concern and optimism for their peers. This generation is certainly self-centered but they are also very communal and peer-oriented. A related concern is the feeling of loss many young Christians reported about their peers. Many described being very concerned about seeing so many of their generation leaving the church.</p>

These categories are not rigid, and some individuals may exhibit characteristics of each of these. They are merely three general profiles that were generated from the research. In addition to developing these three profiles, Kinnaman identifies problem areas, or *“disconnections”* as he calls them. Recognizing the inherent difficulties in such a study, Kinnaman said,

While we explore the reasons many young adults disconnect, keep in mind that our research

examines primarily their perceptions of what's gone wrong. Research is not infallible and it requires interpretation. Most people are not fully cognizant of what, exactly, causes them to leave church or faith, and part of our job as researchers is to analyze all the responses and look for themes to emerge.

Two of these challenges of why young people are falling away from the church are as follows:

Challenge #1: "*Overprotective*"

This "*disconnection*" has to do with the perception of young people as viewing the church as "*overprotective*." What is meant is that we live in a culture that appears to have an obsession with safety that appears to have impacted the church. Kinnaman asks a penetrating question;

Is it possible that our cultural fixation on safety and protectiveness has also had a profound effect on the church's ability to disciple the next generation of Christians? Are we preparing them for a life of risk, adventure, and service to God—a God who asks that they lay down their lives for his kingdom? Or are we churning out safe, compliant Christian kids who are either chomping at the bit to get free or huddling in the basement playing World of Warcraft for hours on end, terrified to step out of doors?

Are we guilty of failing to live and teach the risk aspect of following Christ? Are we guilty of forgetting what the Lord taught about discipleship? Jesus said "*So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake*

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all that he has cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33). Christianity of the New Testament appears to be quite an “*adventure*” of faith, but we put safety bars and foam padding around it to make it more safe and palatable. Young people see this and do not understand why Christians aren’t fulfilling the words of Christ:

An overprotected generation has been sold the lie that “*Christian living*” means material blessing, automatic protection, and bulletproof safety. Two millennia of Christian martyrs beg to differ, and many young adults today are interested in those martyrs’ lives of jeopardy and fulfillment. They are desperate for a new way to understand and experience the worthy risks of following Christ. Life without some sense of urgency—a life that is safe, incubated, insular, overprotected, consumptive—is not worth living. The next generation is aching for influence, for significance, for lives of meaning and impact (Kinnaman).

Challenge #2: “Shallow”

Young people have the perception that the church is shallow in that religion is not interwoven into the fabric of life, but rather conveniently separated. On the whole, young people do not have a deep understanding of their faith. Many of today’s youth who claim Christianity actually believe what Smith and Denton call “*moralistic therapeutic deism*,” which could be described like this: this:

God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he is always on

call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process (Smith, 165).

This anti-Christian, shallow version of faith does not require a faith community to sustain it and therefore it makes sense that those who believe this would not be interested in faithfully participating in such.

God has charged His preachers to “*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching*” (2 Tim. 4:2). Congregations that fail to have sound, accurate, challenging and engaging preaching will likely have Christians who may fall into the “*shallow faith*” category. Faith’s roots are meant to run deep:

But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of
water, That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever
he does shall prosper (Psm. 1:2–3).

Preachers who forsake their God-given responsibility to preach His inspired word by preaching human philosophy, politics, feel-good niceties are not only dishonoring God, but are also promoting said shallow faith that draws people away.

The New Testament also charges teachers to be able to effectively refute the errors of the day. Paul said,

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal
but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,

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casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:4–5).

In these verses, arguments against the knowledge of God are pictured as defense strongholds that men hide behind to shield themselves from accountability to God. Paul charges teachers to tear such barriers down and expose the error of the arguments in order to bring them into captivity to the one called “*The Truth.*” Peter likewise charges Christians to:

Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15).

Christians are to stand ready to give an answer for the faith. Unfortunately, many times today the church either ignores error or gives a shallow response that leaves the brethren lacking. As a result, young people do not get their questions answered about matters of eternal importance and may seek them elsewhere.

Brad McNutt, in his essay “*The New Testament Christian Loves Young People*” sets out some “*perils*” for young people that are too excellent not to cite: (1) Receiving no attention in a world that is too busy; (2) Difficulty finding purpose in a world that has none; (3) Finding value in a world of degradation; (4) Finding role models in a world of wrong models. Additionally, McNutt cites unique pressures of young people today: (1) Pressure to conform to appearance; (2) Pressure to conformity in attitude

(regarding worldly attitudes); (3) Pressure to conform in abilities (in reference to Americas obsession with entertainers and athletes) and; (4) Pressure to conform in acceptance.

What Are Some Ways To Invest In Our Youth?

A great deal has been said about the nature of youth, misconceptions about youth as well as challenges facing youth in the 21st century. What are some solutions? There is no magic bullet. There is no cutting edge theory or program that's going to solve all of our woes.

There is a book that tells us about a Savior who draws all men unto Him. There is authentic discipleship practices that worked for Jesus, His apostles and the early church. While the complexities of the age must be considered and handled with wisdom, the ultimate solution lies in the old Jerusalem gospel. 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).

The answer lies in what it means to make disciples.

**Investment plan #1:
Develop Meaningful Relationships With Them**

Many young people feel that older adults don't understand their doubts and concerns, a prerequisite to rich mentoring friendships; in fact a majority of the young adults we interviewed reported never having an adult friend other than their parents (Kinnaman).

What a tragic statement! This is especially true considering that "*the more high school and college students are engaged in the overall life of the church [i.e. engaging in relationships with older members], the stronger their faith*" (Kinnaman). Christianity is about relationships. It's about our relationship to God (Matt. 22:37). It's also about our relationships with other people (Matt. 22:39). The local church is supposed to be characterized by relationships of sacrificial, familial love: "*Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart*" (1 Peter 1:22). How can we love someone fervently without having a relationship with them? What ever happened to Titus 2 being put into practice in local congregations? Older women are to:

Admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed (Titus 2:4–5).

What are we doing as churches to ensure that the older, mature children of God are discipling and mentoring the younger generation?

TORREY CLARK

How many young people yearn to have their questions and concerns addressed, but either lack the opportunities or don't have someone they can trust? A brother who I respect dearly has done a great job facilitating these types of opportunities in his role as a youth worker. The congregation where he labors has a special class for the teenagers that consists of all of the youth hearing a lesson together for half of the class, and then they break into small groups to review and discuss the lesson. In each group is an adult volunteer, usually the parent of one of the youth, who guides the discussion and is there to answer any questions. Because of these unique opportunities, that congregation has seen six baptisms in the first quarter of this year as a direct result of the class. The class has been so successful that they are going to replicate the format for a second class during the week. It is examples like these that help us to see the value and necessity of getting invested in the real, meaningful relationships with young people. Youth do not want to be treated as just a member of a demographic. They do not just want to be known as another number on the youth roster. We sometimes have a tendency to have a mass-production approach to investing in young people (i.e. having enough events, programs, parties, devotionals, trips). These things can be good and have a place, but they cannot be a replacement for individual care and concern for every soul in the youth group.

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Investment plan #2: Have regular contact with the youth and their parents.

I once read an article entitled “*What a preacher learned from a drug dealer about youth ministry.*” The article depicts a conversation between a drug dealer and a preacher. The preacher was trying to figure out why he couldn’t get more young people to come to worship and why they were staying on the streets. The drug dealer gave away his secret to keeping the young people on the street. Simply put, he was present. He was there when they went to school, when they got back from school and at night. The point is that often those who have the most regular contact with youth tend to have a profound impact. I fully understand that the primary responsibility to disciple and rear children falls upon the parents. However, in our day and time there are more and more children without Christian parents, if any parents at all. It becomes imperative for the church to help. After all, in the first century the church continued “*daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart*” (Acts 2:46).

Jesus could have chosen to start a private university for the twelve, keeping them at a safe distance. We know that Jesus called them to follow Him and be with Him daily. We would do well to learn a lesson about frequent contact from Jesus. Churches should do what they can in their capacity to facilitate regular meetings with young people

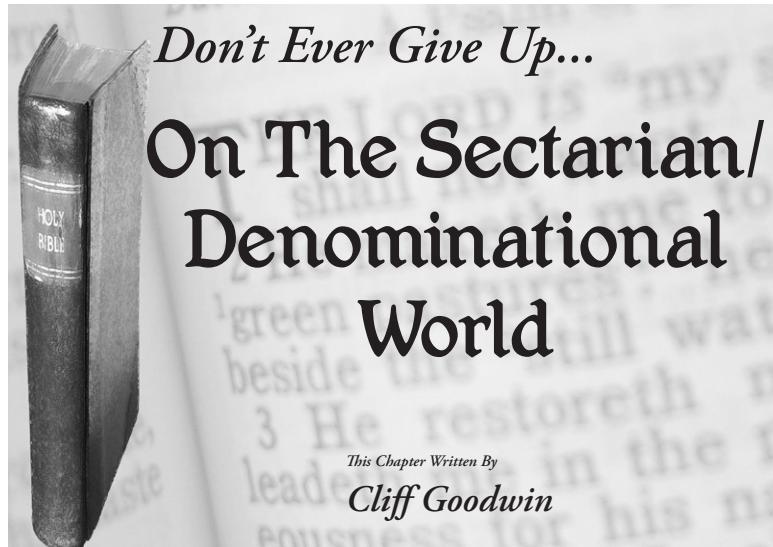
that are intentionally designed to build relationships and lead them to Christ. The same youth group I mentioned in the last section meets two-hundred and twenty-seven days out of the year (62% of the days of the whole year). Their meetings go beyond Sunday and Wednesday night meetings, but also on other nights of the week, which provide opportunities for relationships to grow and for the youth's friends to attend.

Conclusion

One thing that is not an option is giving up investing in our youth. McNutt points out that if businesses were losing profits at the same rate as we are losing our young people, something drastic and urgent would certainly be done! The call of the hour is to invest in our young people by returning to biblical methods of discipleship (that should be applied to all individuals). Much of what this essay has attempted to show is some areas of concern of which Christians should be aware and some ideas for ways to invest in youth in particular. Souls are won on a case-by-case basis. The church only invests in youth to the extent that you and I invest in our youth. I challenge you (and myself) to choose an individual and take him or her under your wing to show them the way and love of Christ. Pour yourself into that person and invest in our youth!

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It has been said that the Christian life is like unto a marathon—not a sprint. How true this is! Heaven does not await those who begin well, only to give out and flounder near the end. Heaven will be the home of the faithful and persistent. The Scriptures clearly teach that endurance is indispensable to salvation. In discussing the judgment of God and the eternal destinies to be meted out, Paul wrote the following.

Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath (Rom. 2:6-8).

The words "*patient continuance*" translate the Greek **hypomone** meaning "*steadfastness, constancy, endurance*"

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(Thayer). This word is used thirty-two times in the Greek New Testament. In the present text, however, *hypomone* is used in direct connection with “*well doing.*” This very idea provides the starting point for our present study.

Christians are to “*keep on keeping on*” in good works—works congruent to the word of Christ and His mission. Good works, in fact, should characterize a Christian’s life (cf. Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14). In this way, a Christian servant is fruitful before his Master. Jesus described the good soil,

But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience (Luke 8:15).

Note again that **hypomone** (patience) is used in connection with bearing spiritual fruit.

The apostle Paul again sets forth a very similar idea. He wrote,

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:9-10).

The “*reaping*” in this passage is contingent on one’s not growing weary and not fainting. **Hypomone** would be the answer to both of these problems. As one begins and continues the Christian life, he commits himself to doing the Father’s will—in all things and at all times. This is a daily practice. No matter the opposition that arises or the difficulty

attending thereto, a Christian must “*keep on keeping on.*” Christians work to the very end, trusting the grace of God and expecting one day a triumphant harvest!

In this regard, there is much work to be done in the fields of the sectarian, or denominational, world. Jesus said,

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest (John 4:35).

The fields of humanity are truly ripe for the harvest, and no doubt, souls lost in denominationalism would be included. This particular area of soul-winning can hold at the same time both great potential and great frustration! Faithful New Testament Christians must rise up and go out, working with their friends, neighbors, even family members who believe in Jesus Christ but do not know His way of salvation.

Why This Work Can Be So Frustrating

Without a doubt, evangelizing those in the denominational world presents its challenges. Honestly, however, this statement could be made regarding virtually all soul-winning pursuits. All souls who are lost in sin fit into the following Pauline description. The apostle was exhorting the younger Timothy as an evangelist when he said:

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose

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

Lost souls are in the spiritual clutches of the Adversary, and he certainly does not want to let them go. The Christian must ever remember this as he labors in the fields of humanity.

Discussing and studying the Bible with those of sectarian backgrounds can be difficult at times, and even frustrating. One may come home from such a study completely “*worked up*,” or agitated. The child of God must be careful to maintain his composure in all such studies. On the other hand, this author has concluded such study sessions before, only to be really tired thereafter—feeling like he had “*wrestled with a bear*.” Whether the soul-winner comes home “*worked up*” or “*worn out*,” he must always remember that souls are at stake! In order to arm ourselves against discouragement, let us look at some reasons why this good work can be frustrating at times.

Prejudice and Preconceived Bias

Every soul one approaches has a spiritual background. This background forms a mental framework from which they approach religion and religious ideas. This fact alone can pose many challenges to evangelism. Those of denominational backgrounds often have their minds “*made up*” already—long before a child of God comes with the light of simple New Testament Christianity.

The soul-winner has his work “*cut out for him*,” as he approaches one who has prejudged a number of religious determinations.

Especially difficult are those situations in which a sectarian is “*familiar*” (or, at least, thinks he is “*familiar*”) with the church of Christ. Often such a person has been fed misinformation most of his life regarding the Lord’s church. If not misinformation, perhaps he has been given information for which he was not spiritually prepared—doctrine that had been taught without the proper prerequisite foundation. He’s already been told that the church of Christ doesn’t believe the Old Testament; they believe they are the only ones going to heaven; and even that they are a cult. To say the least, His mind is prejudiced. It is helpful for the soul-winner to know this up front—perhaps even expect it. In this way he can be prepared for any antagonism and can skillfully begin the study by laying the proper foundation first.

Studying with one from a denominational background inherently involves studying with one of a denominational mindset. In other words, there are many people who cannot conceive of Christianity apart from a divided, compartmentalized structure—the very structure that exists in the sectarian world! To them, denominations are an unavoidable reality. Some even go so far as to say that denominations are a blessing and are part of God’s overall plan! How unthinkable to a child of God! Yet this is the mindset of many and the mental framework in which they approach the Bible. This false idea poses

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at least two hurdles to the soul-winner. One, in all likelihood the prospect will think of the church of Christ as simply another denomination. Given the person's background, this should not be surprising. Two, the prospect will probably also believe that one denomination is just as good as another (with few exceptions, of course). The resulting conclusion based on these two assumptions is as follows: the church of Christ is just another denomination and is not any better than any other. In fact, going even further, given the perceived "strictness" of the church of Christ, to many it is not even preferable among the many denominations. Such is the preconceived bias with which many soul-winners meet.

Entrenchment in Error

It is truly an eye-opening experience for a child of God to begin doing Bible studies with his denominational friends and neighbors (something all of us should strive to do!). One will quickly be surprised at the unscriptural and even outlandish doctrines that many hold. Some of these false doctrines are very complex and confusing, yet the soul-winner will find that many souls are completely wrapped up in them and devoted to them. Premillennialism is one such doctrine. So many facets of this doctrinal system are fanciful and contrived. Assumption is piled upon assumption; texts are wrested from their contexts; and Biblical truth is veiled or distorted. Such is the case with religious error. Calvinism provides another example of this kind of religious fallacy. Every basic

tenet of Calvinism relates to the others in a seemingly logical manner, yet each one is palpably false in light of the scriptures! (Total hereditary depravity, Ezek. 18:20; Unconditional election, Acts 13:46; Limited atonement, 1 John 2:2; Irresistible grace, Acts 7:51; Perseverance of the saints, 2 Peter 2:20-22).

So many of our denominational friends have been fed both of these doctrines their entire religious lives. Both Calvinism and premillennialism have an insidious way of flavoring and skewing a person's overall approach to the Bible. These pervasive doctrines are far-reaching in their consequences, implying so many conclusions that contradict so many other clear, Bible doctrines. It is sadly astonishing to see a soul balk at and struggle with simple gospel truth—simply because error has filled and contaminated that person's thinking. Nonetheless, this is what a child of God encounters, when he sets out to reap the harvest from amid the denominational world. Error abounds, and its proponents are many. Unsuspecting masses are rooted and grounded in that which is false.

For this reason, the soul-winner often has to do what is known as "*unteaching*." While it is not normally best to take every false doctrine to task at the beginning of a study, often many errors do have to be addressed from the standpoint of simple Bible truth—as the study progresses. Patience is key in this regard. One must remember that souls do not become entrenched in error "*overnight*." By the same token, neither are they likely to be won out of that error "*overnight*." Often it is the case that the mantle

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of error must be chiseled away piece-by-piece with the hammer of truth (cf. Jer. 23:29). One must ever pray for God's blessing and Providential oversight in these lengthened and deliberate endeavors.

Personal Attacks

As one works more and more in striving to win sectarians, he will soon be no stranger to personal attacks. Not every misguided soul is immediately thankful for having the error of his way pointed out. The initial response of many is to become defensive—and this they do, ironically, by lashing back at the one who has exposed the fallacy of certain beliefs. In one way this is a natural response, and the soul-winner should not be shocked or disheartened.

In fact, the child of God should not take personal attacks *"personally."* When one suffers for righteousness' sake, he should realize and remember that it is simply the light's being hated by the darkness (cf. John 3:19-20). Those who attack God's children are actually attacking the Lord Himself—and the truth He has given. It is all part of the ancient struggle between good and evil. The soul-winner must be cognizant of this reality. Also along these lines, he must ever recognize the pitiable condition of those who allow themselves to be blinded by the god of this world (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4). Sinners who attack soul-winners often do so out of ignorance. Christians must always take the high road (cf. 1 Thess. 5:15; Col. 4:6; Rom. 12:21).

Why One Must Not Give Up!

Both perspective and attitude are crucial to the soul-winner. Perspective pertains to one's outlook—how a person views situations and reacts to challenges. Attitude, of course, involves one's prevailing disposition of mind and heart. These are inseparably linked.

As a child of God gathers sheaves for the harvest, he must never allow an attitude of negativism or defeatism to prevail. Such would sour his outlook on both the Christian life and the Christian mission. The gospel has always been and will always be GOOD NEWS. Still today it is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). It is likewise true, as John wrote to Christians, "*greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*" (1 John 4:4). All of these facts should serve to bolster our faith, temper our attitude and enlighten our perspective. Ours is the greatest work in the world, and truth will ultimately prevail! In light of this assurance, there are many reasons why God's people must never give up on those in the denominational world. Let's consider a couple of these reasons.

Sectarians Hold Great Potential

The fields of denominationalism can produce great harvests, when the pure word of God is sown and hearts are turned from error. After all, most of these people already believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and already accept the Bible as the word of God. What a wonderful place from which to start! In some ways evangelizing sectarians is parallel to

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Paul's preaching in the Jewish synagogues. Upon coming into a new city with the gospel message, the first place to which Paul went was often the Jewish synagogue. Why? The better question would probably be, "*Why not?*" Among devout Jews the apostle met with people who already knew of Jehovah, the true and living God. They already possessed and accepted the Old Testament scriptures. The soil was tilled and cultivated, ready for the gospel seed. So much of the preliminary labor was not necessary. Polytheism and idolatry didn't have to be refuted. A higher moral plane was already taught and accepted. The devout Jews of the first century simply needed to hear that their Messiah had come, fulfilling the old law, establishing His kingdom and furnishing the New Covenant.

There are some differences between the conversion of ancient Jews and that of modern sectarians. One major point is this: so-called "*Christian*" denominations have never been God's accepted form of religion. The denominational spirit has been condemned from the first century (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10-13). There was a time, however, when Judaism was acceptable before God. Under the Mosaic dispensation, Judaism was God's prescribed and accepted religion (cf. John 4:22). From Pentecost onward, Judaism was a defunct religion. Denominationalism represents counterfeit religion.

There are denominationalists who are sincere and devout. These are souls that will obey the truth—when they learn it. The gospel seed always produces a harvest when sown into good and honest hearts (Luke 8:15). One needs to consider the great potential for good

that exists in turning a sincere sectarian to the truth. All that devotion and piety will then be channeled in the proper direction—the true cause of Christ! Saul of Tarsus comes to mind in this vein. His religion as a Pharisee had obviously been zealous and sincere (cf. Phil. 3:4-6). In fact, he had lived in all good conscience before God (Acts 23:1). Nonetheless, Saul had been religiously wrong. Sincere but wrong—such is the plight of some sectarians today. May their stories become like that of Saul! Turned from error to truth, his sincerity continued and flourished in the cause of Christ. He labored “*more abundantly*” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10), and the world has not been the same since. What God can do with the sincere and devout, once they have learned and obeyed the truth!

Further, the conversion of sectarians can have somewhat of a “*snowball effect*.” The conversion of one often produces a “*chain reaction*” within a family. Husbands teach their wives; wives teach their husbands. As parents obey, they begin immediately in teaching and guiding their children. It is exciting to see entire families change the course of their lives, turning in heaven’s direction! Such influence can even extend beyond the borders of immediate families into extended families and kinspeople.

The aforementioned “*snowball effect*” is not limited to a convert’s relatives, however. Once converted, former sectarians possess special insight into the psyche of those in denominational error. This author has long believed that such a resource should be tapped and used, probably much more often than

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it is. Obviously these converts must be nurtured and aided in maturing spiritually. But once they are rooted and grounded in the truth, they need to be trained and employed as soul-winners themselves. They will be able to relate in a special way to those of their former sect.

The Gospel is Still Powerful

The greatest reason for optimism in reaching out to the denominational world is the power of the pure gospel. One must ever remember that the converting power is inherent in the gospel itself—not in the messenger, or man.

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. 1:16).

In light of this truth, a soul-winner does well to remove self—as much as possible—from the disciple-making equation. True soul-winning has never been personal, in the sense that it has never been about the messenger. The power is in the message, and the due emphasis should be on that. There is much that one can do to hinder the gospel message, but there is nothing one can do to improve upon it!

Isaiah recorded an important principle that is pertinent to the current subject matter. The text reads as follows:

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow
from heaven, and returneth not thither, but
watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth

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and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isa. 55:10-11).

God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9), but neither will He force salvation on any accountable person. Endowed with free moral agency, man chooses his own spiritual course (cf. Josh. 24:15). Man's choice will result either in life or death (cf. Deut. 30:19; Jer. 21:8). This is where God's word factors into the equation. God's word will NOT return unto Him void, as Isaiah wrote above. God's word will save all those who submit to it in humility (cf. James 1:21; 4:6). On the other hand, it will judge all those who resist and rebel (cf. John 12:48). God's word (the gospel) has been compared to a magnet—it either draws or repels, depending on man's heart and will. In this way God's word will function properly and accomplish God's purpose. God's children, then, must simply preach the word to all (Mark 16:15; 2 Tim. 4:2).

Realizing that the power is of God, the Christian simply goes forth and teaches God's word. This realization is actually liberating. Every child of God should rejoice and be thankful that he is used in the Master's service (cf. 2 Tim. 2:21). Paul wrote,

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

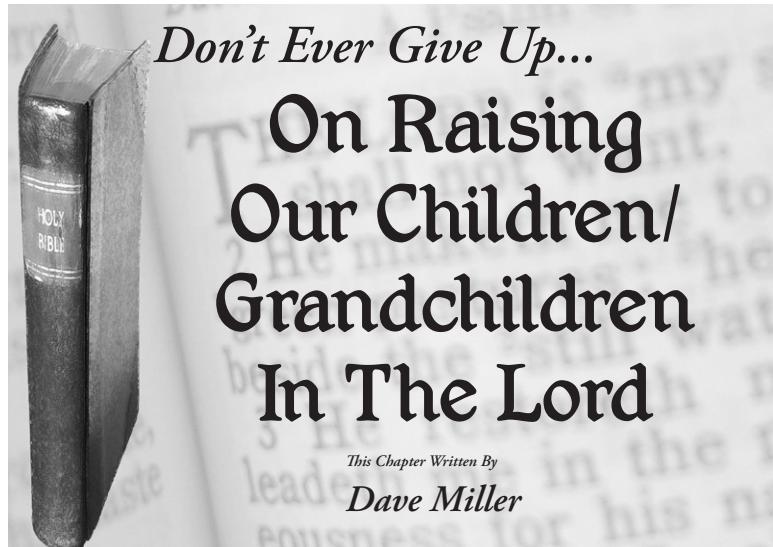
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So then neither is he that planteth any thing,
neither he that watereth; but God that giveth
the increase (1 Cor. 3:5-7).

The gospel is still powerful, and God still gives the increase. New Testament Christians must take the gospel to the sectarian world and let the word do its work!

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God obviously intended for the home to be the foundational building block of the human race. It is the fundamental platform on which society is based. God placed the home on Earth before He placed the church here. As the home goes, so goes the nation. Our nation is in trouble because the home is in trouble. The rearing of the adolescent population is a critical key to the survival of the nation. We must never give up on this indispensable responsibility.

God has assigned to the mother and father the very specific task of rearing their children *“in the Lord.”* Since the father is the head of the home, he is charged with leading in this important responsibility. He must be an **active participant in child rearing.** Many men think raising children is *“women’s work.”* But God says otherwise. Being the head of the home includes the awesome responsibility of making certain that children are properly trained, that spiritual

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principles are instilled within them, and that they achieve emotional stability (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21). God expected Abraham to understand this point: “*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*” (Gen. 18:19). Job possessed the same concern for his children and attended to their sanctification on a regular basis (Job 1:5). Joshua saw to it that his own family was committed to serving the Lord (Josh. 24:15). The law of Moses required the same thing (Deut. 4:9-10; 6:2,7; 11:19; 32:46). A man is not to be appointed to be an elder in the Lord’s church unless he has seen to this responsibility (1 Tim. 3:4-5). When Eli failed to be the head of his family in this regard, disastrous consequences followed (1 Sam. 2:29; 3:13). The man who becomes so busy in his chosen profession that he neglects this responsibility, or tries to push it off on his wife, is guilty of sin and shirking his manhood and headship.

The Children

What are some principles that enable us as parents and grandparents to not give up on our kids? The Bible has a great deal to say about children as they relate to the family (e.g., Deut. 4:9-10,40; 5:29; 6:2-7; 11:2,5,19-21; 12:28; 30:19; 31:12-13; 32:46; et al.). Children are to respect their parents and all authority (Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-3; Prov. 17:6). The tremendous swing to the left in society’s understanding of the discipline of children that took place in the

fifties and sixties continues to dominant. Yet the Bible speaks decisively on this matter (Deut. 21:18-21).

Good literature exists to assist parents in the training of their children. Perhaps the following principles will provide a starting point for those who wish to explore this area further:ⁱ

1. **Demand Respect.** A child simply must be trained to develop respect for parents. Failure to instill respect for parents will result in the child's lack of respect for authority in its other forms—school, societal, and divine. The disrespectful child will also typically reject the religion and value system of the parents. Defiant, stubborn, rebellious behavior ("sassiness," backtalk, telling a parent "no") on the part of the child must be dealt with firmly and consistently. A battle of the wills is inevitable and the parent must win. Corporal punishment is appropriate and should have as its objective to change the defiant attitude of the child. Until the attitude changes, discipline is incomplete and respect is still lacking.

2. **Communicate Before and After Punishment.** Of course, this insistence upon respect for parental authority must be accompanied by genuine expressions and demonstrations of positive reinforcement—perhaps in the ratio of three to one. The parent must explain the administration of discipline to the child so that the child fully understands the purpose of the punishment. Forgiveness and physical warmth are essential after the discipline elicits genuine repentance and humility from the child. The child learns that the parent is rejecting the child's inappropriate behavior and not the child himself.

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3. Do Not Nag and Give Constant Verbal Control. We parents tend to fall into the habit of verbally directing our child's every move. We are especially inclined to load the child down with a multiplicity of daily directives that have nothing to do with Christianity and responsible human behavior (e.g., "*keep your room free of clutter every day,*" "*don't sit on the living room furniture,*" "*turn the lights off when not in the room,*" etc.). We then tend to elevate these directives to the status of Scripture—making the child feel as if this multitude of matters is as important and critical as the stipulations of God's Word. We can so overburden our children with a thicket of eternally unimportant matters that they are desensitized to what is truly important in life. They then tend to categorize even our spiritual admonitions as simply additional verbosity and frivolous control.

We parents also tend to issue threats and warnings—especially to small children—that we then fail to follow through on. We should only issue instructions on matters we genuinely intend on enforcing. When children receive constant verbal monitoring which they discover the parent is not willing to back, they stop listening. They have learned the parent does not really mean what he/she says. We should limit our verbal reprimands to the more important directives and then we should overcome our laziness and inconvenience by following through with enforcement of those directives.

4. Do Not Indulge Materialistic Appetites. Spoiling children is probably the norm of current American society. Children today do not understand

what it means to sacrifice and do without. They have had it too easy. They are soft. They do not understand the value of money and possessions. They have been conditioned to think they must be entertained and provided with all the latest clothes, toys, games, and amusements. Parents simply must limit their children's access to luxuries and niceties if they expect to instill in their children an appreciation for the true, spiritual values of life.

5. Avoid Disciplinary Extremes. A parent must not be overbearing, intolerant, or oppressive. He must not be harsh, mean, or uncaring. A child needs to feel that the parent genuinely cares for him. He needs to understand that parental input is not rejection. Physical displays of affection for the child—as well as between parents—is healthy and encouraging to the child. On the other hand, a parent must avoid being permissive. The child must not be made to feel that the world revolves around him. The parent must not dote or hover over the child, smothering the child's independence and need to grow, expand, and mature.

6. Enforce the Rulesⁱⁱ

Two primary roles of the parent are (1) to train and prepare children to live their own Christian lives, especially helping them to form good habits that will make their Christian walk easier as adults; and (2) to portray the nature of God to a child through training and disciplinary procedures. Regarding the latter role, children must learn that:

- a. **God is full of joy and peace.** It is important that our children know that the Christian walk

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is a happy and joyous life. Our homes ought to include smiles, laughter, hugs, cuddling, tickling, and happiness. Even in times of family stress, we should strive to radiate joy and peace in the home. Kids should be encouraged do the same—be happy and joyful, even in suffering. We must teach them to learn how to “*glory in tribulations*” (Rom. 5:3). Our homes should not be dominated by worry, stress, depression, dissatisfaction, guilt-trips, and anger. The joy and peace mindset should characterize the household the vast majority of the time. This is the nature of God.

- b. **God also punishes.** When disobedience and sin has occurred, an attitude-adjustment must be made. Joy and peace cease to be in effect, and justice takes its place. This feature is also a reflection of the nature of God. Punishment can actually demonstrate love. “*My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights*” (Prov. 3:11-12; cf. Heb. 12:6).
- c. **God is consistent, trustworthy, and just.** He follows through. He is not “*wishy-washy*,” as the liberals would have Him to be. He says what He means, and means what He says. If a rule is made, it must be enforced. If He says one must be baptized to be saved, then all who fail to do so will be lost. He will not let some people off the hook. Salvation comes through Christ alone (Acts 4:12). “*Good*”

Muslims, Buddhists, etc. will not be let accepted. He cannot do so and still be “*faithful*” (1 Cor. 10:13). He cannot do so and not be a liar (Tit. 1:2).

In light of these attributes of God, if a parent sets a rule and does not enforce it with the child, it communicates several harmful factors to the child:

- a. It teaches the child that it’s okay to **lie**—since mommy and daddy do. However, the Bible firmly condemns lying (Rev. 21:8). A failure to enforce rules teaches a child that the parent’s word is not important. Not enforcing the rules fails to teach a child the important principle that a Christian’s word should be ironclad and able to be counted on as true. As Jesus said, we should let our “*yes*,” mean “*yes*” (Matt. 5:37).
- b. Failure to enforce the rules takes away the **security** that children get from pre-set, immovable, unchanging boundaries. When rules and punishments fluctuate from day-to-day, based on the mood of the parent, the child becomes confused and frustrated. “*You didn’t spank me for this the last two times! It was okay then, why are you spanking me now? This isn’t fair!*” God does not operate in this fashion, nor should parents. We should not provoke children to wrath by hypocrisy and inconsistency (Eph. 6:4; Col 3:21).
- c. Not enforcing the rules teaches the child that **God does not mean what He says.** It

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communicates that God sets rules, but doesn't really expect us to follow them. He's like a cosmic Grandpa—a softy Who'll let you get away with a lot. This is not God, and it should not characterize parents either, since parents teach children the nature of God and authority by their behavior. God is consistent and He is faithful (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:18). He is neither a liar, nor a hypocrite. He can be counted on and trusted in every way to do what He says He will do—whether reward or punishment. That certainty gives us hope and security. Those who fail to obey, will suffer punishment (2 Thess. 1:8). Those who are faithful, will receive a crown of life (Rev. 2:10). God can be counted on to follow through with His statements. A child must learn this principle and thereby to learn to "*fear God*" (Eccl. 12:13-14), by fearing the only "*god*" they are truly familiar with at their young age—their parents.

- d. Not enforcing the rules teaches the child that **respect for authority** is unimportant. Children must learn to respect all authority (Tit. 3:1; Rom. 13). They must learn what it means to "*honor*" parents (Eph. 6:2) through obedience. They must learn that God's authority is supreme (Matt. 28:18; Col. 3:17), and human beings have no right to adjust His statutes regarding worship, entrance into the kingdom, etc. The principle of authority must be taught at a young age by requiring children to respect their

parents' authority. This respect cannot come without consistent enforcement of the rules.

- e. Not enforcing the rules teaches the child that **disobedience and sin** is "*no big deal.*" However, as Samuel said to Saul, "*Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams*" (1 Sam. 15:22). Learning obedience is critical for adults and must be emphasized with children in order to prepare them for adulthood and God's expectations. Samuel emphasized that disobedience to God's commands is "*rebellion...as the sin of witchcraft*" and "*stubbornness...as iniquity and idolatry*" (vs. 23). God is dissatisfied with disobedience. It will lead to hell. Children must learn to obey and heed (Eph. 6:1-2). Enforcement of the rules will develop such habits.
- f. A failure to enforce the rules through disciplinary action tells a child that he/she is **not loved**. As noted earlier, discipline is a show of love towards a child. "*He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly*" (Prov. 13:24). "*My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives*" (Heb. 12:5-6). Contrary to contemporary teaching, discipline is a show of love towards a child. It will "*deliver his soul from hell*" (Prov. 23:14).

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- g. Failure to discipline generates unresolved **guilt** in the child. Appropriate disciplinary action purges the child's guilt. "*Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, as do the inner depths of the heart*" (Prov. 20:30). A child, having a God-given conscience, knows when he deserves punishment. To not give a punishment in keeping with the seriousness of the act allows guilt and pride to fester in a child—which is very detrimental. The punishment should be neither in-sufficient, nor excessive. This principle, consequently, affects the definition of a "*spanking*" each time it is administered. The attitude of the child must be observed, and the discipline should be carried out until humility and penitence has been achieved. The proper implement (i.e., a "*rod*"), applied on the proper body location (i.e., a location that will allow for con-science purging through pain while not bringing about serious physical damage—Prov. 23:13), and with the proper frame of mind (always for the benefit of the child and never in unbridled, selfish anger) is the proper approach. A child who receives a "*spanking*" that does not hurt fails to achieve a clear conscience, leaving vestiges of guilt and self-disapproval. Inadequate pain will also fail to deter the same behavior in the future; and it will quietly engender a prideful attitude ("*That didn't hurt. I won. They can't hurt me!*").
- h. A failure to enforce the rules will lead, ultimately, to **unhappiness** in life. It is through

obedience to God's commands that we will achieve true happiness in life. "*Happy is he who keeps the law*" (Prov. 29:18). Emphasizing obedience to the rules will cause children to emphasize the same in their own life as they grow older. In the long run, their lives will be happier.

- i. Not enforcing the rules consistently sends the misimpression that one can disobey God, be in sin, and still love Him. Think of the host of individuals who engage in corrupted worship directed to God, the whole time thinking they are showing love to God. In actuality, it is through obedience to God's rules that our love is shown to God. "*If you love me, you will keep My commandments*" (John 14:15). 1 John 5:3—"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." It is through obedience to God's rules that we can know we are in Him (1 John 2:3-6). We emphasize and teach this principle to our children by consistently enforcing rules.
- j. Failure to enforce the rules militates against instilling self-control in the child. Self-control is taught early in life. Adults who are "*out of control*" with alcohol, drugs, gambling, and a host of other evils, were likely never discipline correctly and consistently, and facilitated to develop self-control early in life. A sufficient amount of pain, properly and strategically applied to the child, will cause a child to consider his own mortality and instill in him the ability to control himself.

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We do our children and grandchildren a great disservice when we fail to enforce rules consistently. We are effectively leaving them to themselves to cope with sin, which will ultimately bring shame. Proverbs 29:15 says: "*The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.*" If a matter is important enough for you to make a rule, it is worth enforcing. Parents need to be cautious about what rules they make for their children. They must not be frivolous rules or rules that merely benefit the parents; they should be rules that will help the children to grow in the areas mentioned above. We should be very certain that our rules emphasize development of these important Christian values.

7. Spanking is Necessary. Spanking is emphasized in the Bible time and time again (Prov. 13:24; 19:18; 23:13-14; 29:15,17; Heb. 12). Obviously, spanking is certainly not the only method of discipline, and spanking varies, depending on the age and demeanor of a particular child. Infrequently, there are times when a child's attitude clearly indicates that corporal punishment will be unnecessary in helping the child to obey next time. At such times, it is not used. God's mercy is shown in this action as well. However, caution should be used in such cases, due to the tendency for guilt to linger in the child without effective purging through disciplinary action.

Training children and teaching them rules is reinforced by several disciplinary tactics, including warnings, verbal reprimand, single thumps on hands, etc. Since selfishness should be a central concern of the parent in disciplining their children, techniques

that force the child to be unselfish are critical. For example, when a child refuses to share a toy, taking the toy away and giving it to the other child forces the child to see that he can and must be able to relinquish such trivial baubles. Removing privileges or special treats is another form of discipline. The older generations would wash a child's mouth out with soap if the child used unacceptable language. However, when a rule is broken, some sort of disciplinary action **must** ensue, and a spanking is effective because of its ability to purge the conscience. Children who are disciplined by proper spanking will manifest a change in demeanor, from sad, guilt-ridden, or defiant faces (shown by a protruded lower lip)—to the post-spanking look of submissive sorrow, hope of being able to conquer the sin next time, and the joy of receiving forgiveness from Daddy and Mommy. Such results make the discipline worth the pain that it causes Mommy and Daddy to administer it.

Once rules are known and understood, they must be enforced with consistency. The spanking helps purge the conscience (Prov. 20:30), deter future disobedience (as does capital punishment—Deut. 13:11), and train good habits (Prov. 22:6). “*Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful*” (Heb. 12:11). Nevertheless, when done properly, children are happier, have “*the peaceable fruit of righteousness*” (Heb. 12:11), and grow even closer to their parents, in the same way God’s discipline does the same for adults (Heb. 12:9).

If a rule is enforced inconsistently (9 times out of 10), it is human nature (as well as a dog’s nature)

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for a child to test the rule over and over until he gets what he wants. However, if the rule is enforced with consistency, the child will eventually give up testing it, and the result is the development of a good habit that will help the child in life. So parents should be cautious in formulating rules, and then strive to be **very** consistent in their enforcement during those formative years when there is still hope—“*Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction*” (Prov. 19:18). There is a point at which it will be too late to discipline a child. Waiting to administer needed discipline to a child is the same as setting “*your heart on his destruction*.” If he’s old enough to intentionally grab something, he’s old enough to be trained not to grab something. The payoff is that if the parents are conscientious and serious about their responsibility, and “*get the job done*,” by about three years old, disciplinary action is rare. Tragically, some parents mistakenly wait until that age to start the disciplinary process. By that time, the most “*formative years*” of the child’s life have passed and the child’s self-willed attitude is already set). The child’s stubborn will may still be conquered, but it will be an uphill and difficult battle.

8. God is merciful and forgiving. Grudges should not be held over the child. Past wrongs should not be thrown in their faces every time a new infraction has been made. We should forgive and forget. God’s mercy and grace is shown in such behavior. Encourage the child. Edify the child. **Teaching mercy and forgiveness is just as important as the principle of consistency.** After the child’s attitude has changed, and after the

child has fully-repent (Matt. 3:8) by righting wrongs (e.g., saying sorry; sharing the toy; trying to repair the broken item; etc.), the child should be welcomed back in the good graces of the parents, who are waiting with a smile and open arms—just like the father of the prodigal son. However, until repentance and humility (a lack of pride) has occurred, forgiveness is not given, in keeping with Luke 17:3. Ignoring disobedience and sweeping it under the carpet without confronting it—no matter how “minor” the infraction may seem—teaches unbiblical principles and ideals to children. All sin, no matter how minor it may seem, leads to separation from God (James 2:10).

When a child demonstrates genuine penitence, parents ought to convey indications of forgiveness and renewal. Receiving the child into their arms with hugs and words of affirmation help to place closure on the incident, clearing the slate to start afresh the next time discipline is called for. When we have made mistakes, owned up to them, and sought genuine cleansing, we do not enjoy being left to continue feeling guilt indefinitely, never feeling completely forgiven, never learning the principle of grace. The message taught is, *“You messed up. You weren’t perfect. Shame on you. Be perfect next time.”* However, this view is not in keeping with the fundamental principle of forgiveness taught in Scripture. Instead, the child is taught to harbor long-lasting, destructive guilt—which can lead to depression and anger. It may lead to self-inflicted pain if the child realizes he cannot reach perfection. Or, it may lead to pride when the child ultimately reaches near-perfection. The principle that should be

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taught, even expressed to the child, is: “*You messed up. It’s okay, you’re human. You can’t be perfect. Mommy and Daddy mess up, too. Make it right, and try to do better. That’s all we require of you, and that’s all God requires of you. We’re here to help. We still love you and are proud of you.*” Another feature to keep in mind is that for every “negative” event that happens, for which the child must be disciplined and humbled (James 4:10), three positives should be given to “lift” the child up and give the confidence necessary to try again.

Conclusion

No children come from the womb mature. They are inherently selfish. Children are full of foolishness (Prov. 22:15) and must be restrained (1 Sam. 3:13). They must be consistently **trained, shaped, and molded** to do right (Prov. 22:6). When you see children who are well-behaved and seem to exhibit happiness—know that it is not due to the inherent nature of the child. It is through the consistent, disciplinary tactics used at home. We grandparents will either help or hinder the process. Shame on us if we hinder!

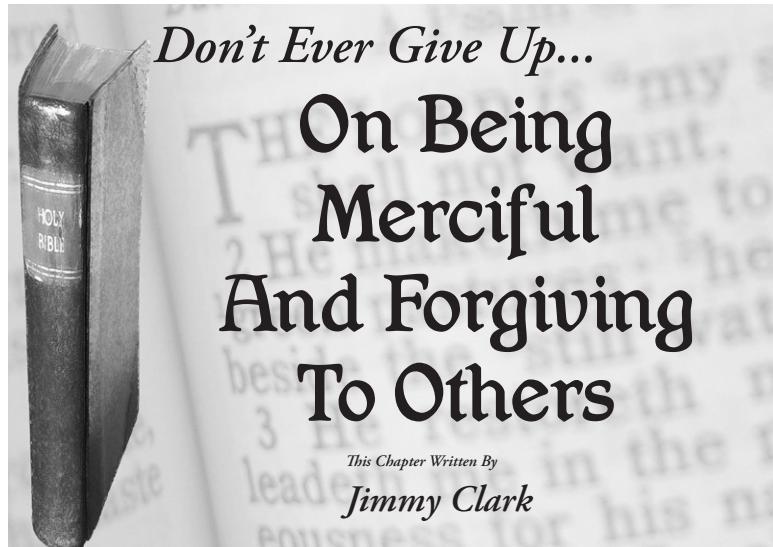
We are all extremely busy. We have a hundred things to do every day. In the midst of all these responsibilities, tasks, projects, and chores, it is easy for us to relegate the more important features of life and Christian living to secondary status. But as Christians, we must have clear sighted vision to recognize our spiritual priorities. The rearing of

children and grandchildren is of central importance. If we want to turn our country around, we need to rear children who can and will do it. “*As the home goes, so goes the nation.*” “*The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.*” “*Bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*” Don’t ever give up on rearing our children and grandchildren in the Lord!

Endnotes

- i The first five principles are summarized and embellished from James Dobson, *Dare To Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970), pp. 25-49.
- ii The rest of this lecture is drawn primarily from Jeff Miller’s *Hidden In My Heart* and pre-publication for *Forming a Godly Family*, available through 334-272-8558.

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When sin entered into the world, the merciful and forgiving nature of God was revealed. Moses wrote,

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15, KJV).

This is the first reference to the promise of God to remedy the problem of sin through His Son, who would also be the son of a woman. Moses would be told centuries later concerning the attributes of God,

The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and

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upon the children's children unto the third and to the fourth generation (Ex. 34:6-7).

This statement that was given to Moses runs throughout the Old Testament (cf. Psm. 103:8-12; Neh. 9:17) with clear declarations of God's mercy and forgiving nature in the New Testament (cf. Eph. 4:32; 1 John 1:9). It is this quality of God that draws the Bible student to the subject at hand.

Everyone who sins and has a proper understanding of the consequences of sin wants to be the recipient of mercy and forgiveness by both God and men. David's great plea for mercy and forgiveness stands out as an example of this.

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions (Psm. 51:1).

This is equally seen in the New Testament of the plea of the publican praying in the temple, as Jesus said,

And the publican, standing afar off would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner (Luke 18:13).

When it comes to being forgiven by men, the mind looks at the attitude of the younger son who wasted his living and returned home with the words that he spoke to his father.

And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and

am no more worthy to be called thy son (Luke 15:21).

Mankind wants the mercy and forgiveness that is needed in times when the sinner has offended and desires peace.

Jesus clearly indicates that there are necessary qualities about the child of God that must be part of one's character in order to receive the mercy and forgiveness of God. Jesus clearly stated, "*Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy*" (Matt. 5:7). He stated also,

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matt. 6:14-15).

One cannot expect to receive what he/she does not intend to apply to his own quality of life. Therefore, the saved emphatically are both merciful and forgiving to others. While these qualities are not all that is necessary to be saved, they are absolutely necessary for blessedness now and eternal life hereafter.

There are three aspects of the subject of being merciful and forgiving that will be addressed. Each builds upon the other as is needed for completeness in relation to both God and men and well as between man and man. They are remission, restoration and reconciliation. Remission involves the sending away or taking away of sins. Restoration involves the bringing back into a proper state as was enjoyed before the separation by sin. Reconciliation involves the treatment

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of the restored as being friends again as though the separation had not taken place. Where sin divides and isolates, the salvation revealed in the gospel draws one back to his better senses and introduces a strong bond of togetherness.

Remission

There are several times in the New Testament where the word “*remission*” is found (cf. Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; Heb. 9:22; 10:18). There is one time where the term “*remit*” is used. Jesus said to the apostles, “*Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained*” (John 20:23). This is said in view of the work of the apostles in the preaching of the gospel and setting forth the terms of salvation as they would reveal it being guided into all truth by the Spirit (cf. John 16:13).

The beginning of remission starts with the compassionate heart that centers in the quality of showing mercy. Jesus said of the scribes and Pharisees,

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone (Matt. 23:23).

When Jesus went about to explain who one’s neighbor is that is to be loved according to the second greatest commandment, he asked the question after giving the

illustration of the priest, Levite and Samaritan seeing the man left for dead on the road to Jericho,

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise (Luke 10:36-37).

When Peter thought he was being forgiving by asking the question,

Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven (Matt. 18:21-22).

Then Jesus went about by the means of a parable to explain both the heart and response of forgiveness. The heart of forgiveness is seen in the words, "*Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt*" (Matt. 18:27). When the forgiven did not have the spirit of compassion that would have moved him to forgive his fellow servant, the lord said, "*Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?*" (Matt. 18:33). The unmerciful servant was shown no mercy as he was to suffer for his impenitent way. Jesus draws the unmistakable conclusion to this parable with the words, "*So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses*" (Matt. 18:35).

When looking at the meaning of the word

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“*remission*,” there is the picture of the blotting out or erasing of sins from the record. The parallel passage to Acts 2:38 is seen in the third chapter of Acts.

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; (Acts 3:19).

Paul wrote concerning agape love that it “*thinketh no evil*” (1 Cor. 13:5). This means that love does not keep a running account of the wrongs that have been done against it. Here is the true compassionate heart that knows what it is to have been forgiven by the love of God and thus seeks to do the same to others. The character of God now motivates the disciple to become like the character of God. Jesus stated, “*Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful*” (Luke 6:36).

Restoration

While someone may say that they forgive the one who has wronged them, restoration is needed for true peace to come between the parties. Paul wrote to the Galatian brethren,

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted (Gal. 6:1).

The term translated “*restore*” is from the word that means to make one what he ought to be. The term was also used to mend nets to their useful state. Where there was division, there is now true unity.

David stated of his own life when he asked forgiveness from God, “*Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit*” (Psm. 51:12). David wrote of the results of brethren having such a fellowship, “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*” (Psm. 133:1).

Brethren will always be called upon to deal properly with the problem of sin that disrupts both within the church as well as without. Many of the letters of Paul had to do with handling problems of the brethren either congregationally or individually. Forgiveness and showing mercy were constant themes. Paul wrote,

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye (Col. 3:12-13).

Even the Old Testament prophets who sought to call the people back to God spoke of the nation being a merciful people. Hosea said, “*For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings*” (Hos. 6:6). Jesus quoted this very citation to point out the desire of God for His people (cf. Matt. 9:10-13). Micah stated clearly in a similar way,

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shown thee, O man, what is good; and

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what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:7-8).

Restoration was the call of the prophets as well as of the apostles in the New Testament.

Reconciliation

While restoration and reconciliation are synonyms of the state of receiving the mercy and forgiveness of God and men, there is a difference in the concepts that needs to be explored. Reconciliation is the true manifestation that restoration has occurred. The term “*reconciliation*” means to become friends again. This involves the healing of the difficulties that were present. Jesus illustrated this in the words,

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift (Matt. 5:23-24).

After reconciliation takes place, those who would know nothing of the past disruption between friends would never know such had ever taken place. Life would go on as it should.

The healing of the relationship between Esau and Jacob is a good illustration of this. After a bitter separation and twenty years of not seeing one another, the Bible says of their reunion, “*And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept*” (Gen. 33:4).

Jesus said of the response of the prodigal's father to his wayward son,

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him (Luke 15:20).

True mercy and forgiveness are seen in the renewed friendship that has a stronger glue of love because of the new dimension of spiritual healing. It is not a matter of whether someone will do something to anyone. It is simply a matter of when and what is one going to do about it.

An illustration of partial reconciliation and the problem that such brings is in the case of David and his son, Absalom. After Absalom had killed his older brother and David's oldest son, Amnon, Absalom fled to his grandfather, Talmai, in Geshur (cf. 2 Sam. 13:37-38) staying there for three years. After Joab had set forth the process to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam. 14:1-23), David gave a condition of the return upon Absalom when he came home. The text reads,

And the king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face (2 Sam. 14:24).

After two years in Jerusalem without seeing the face of David (cf. 2 Sam. 14:28), Absalom gave a response to Joab about his feelings of not seeing his father. The text reads,

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And Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent unto thee, saying, Come hither, that I may send thee to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come from Geshur? it had been good for me to have been there still: now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me (2 Sam. 14:32).

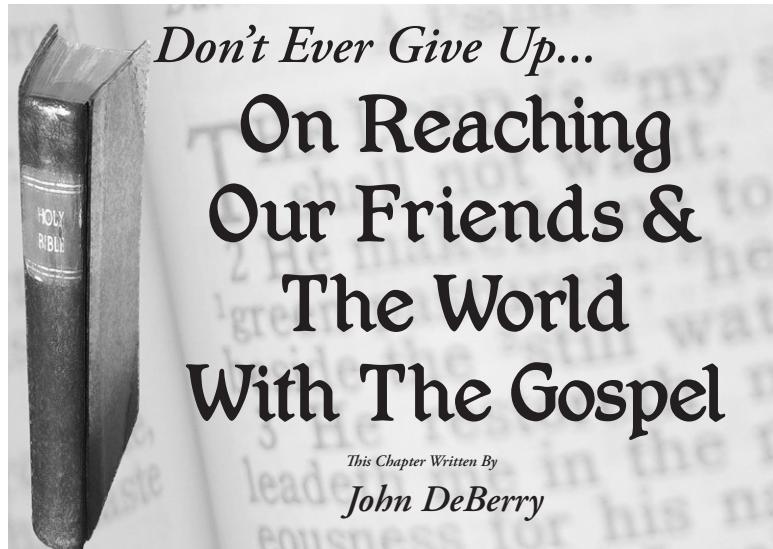
The partial reconciliation even while Absalom was restored to his home in Jerusalem did not bring the peaceable situation needed. When the wise woman of Tekoa stated of God, "*neither doth God respect any person; yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him*" (2 Sam. 14:14). Redemption involves the full restoration and reconciliation from God toward man. Such is clearly needed between man and man for there to be true peace and harmony.

The practical applications of these principles are numerous. No house divided against itself shall stand (cf. Matt. 12:25). Mercy and truth must meet each other (cf. Psm. 85:10). The healing of difficulties between brethren is based upon the healing of the relationship between God and man. Paul wrote, "*And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*" (Eph. 4:32). The member who continually runs from one congregation to another without settling the differences over past controversies does not have the peace addressed in the Bible. There will never be the proper relationship between God and man when he runs from his problems. This holds equally true of the problems between man and man. It takes a spiritual maturity to grow into a strong relationship

JIMMY CLARK

between brethren that when problems arise, then two Christians, not merely in name only, will work it out. Heaven is too precious a place to miss for personal pride and self-will to hinder. While the life of the Christian is no easy path (cf. Matt. 7:14), such is the road that leads to heaven.

DEGU ON BEING MERCIFUL AND FORGIVING TO OTHERS



When sin entered into the world, the merciful and forgiving nature of God was revealed. M
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DEGU ON REACHING THE WORLD WITH THE GOSPEL

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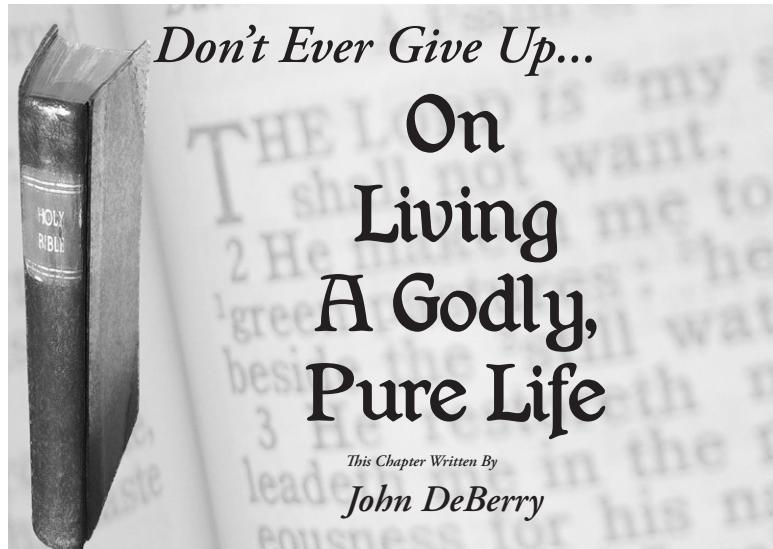
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DEGU ON LIVING A GODLY, PURE LIFE

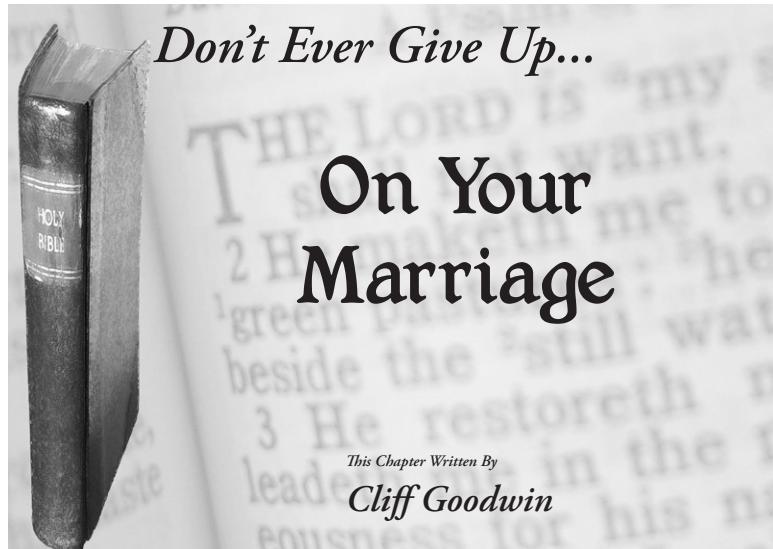
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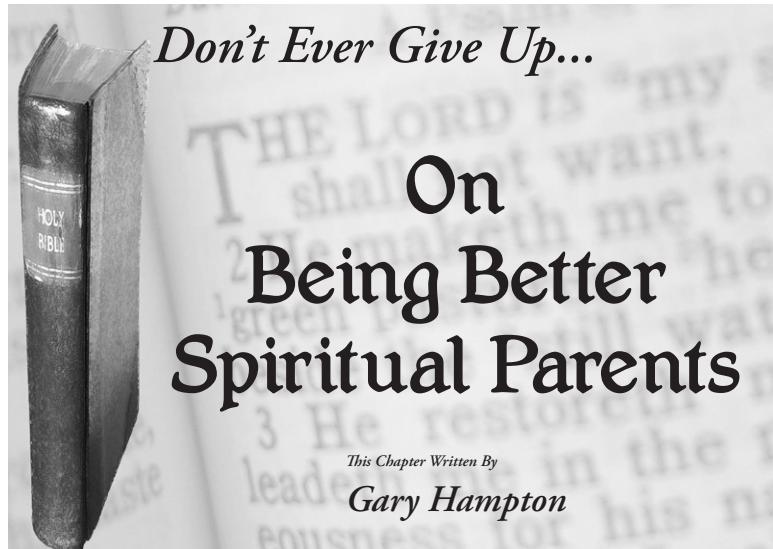


When sin entered into the world, the merciful and
forgiving nature of God was revealed. M
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DEGU ON YOUR MARRIAGE

CLIFF GOODWIN

DEGU ON YOUR MARRIAGE



Socrates declared,

Could I climb to the highest place in Athens,
I would lift my voice and proclaim, ‘Fellow
citizens, why do you turn and scrape every
stone to gather wealth, and take so little care
of your children to whom one day you must
relinquish it all?’

Such a statement may strike guilt in the hearts of some Christian parents. An overpowering sense of inadequacy often tempts conscientious parents to quit.

I beg you to never surrender your struggle to become more godly parents and to grow spiritually. Your experienced insight into the mind of Christ is essential to develop the faith of your children.

When You See Danger, Say “No”

Paul’s revelation to Timothy about the first sin of Adam and Eve often surprises modern parents. “And

DEGU ON BEING BETTER SPIRITUAL PARENTS

Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Tim. 2:14). [All scripture quotations are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] God clearly warned Adam, saying,

Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you will surely die (Gen. 2:16-17).

It seems likely that Adam transmitted God’s instruction to Eve, perhaps adding another layer of protection by telling her they were not to even touch it (3:2-3).

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate (3:6).

Adam was with Eve when she ate of the fruit. He knew the danger. He failed to say “*no!*” The consequences of that surrender of responsibility by Adam touch everyone in history (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22).

Experience tells most adults there is danger in the first alcoholic drink. It is hard to forget images of the poorly dressed, dirty, old before their time alcoholics often sleeping in their own vomit. Tell your children “*no*” when they want to attend parties or go places where alcohol—or other drugs—are likely to be present.

Our children’s pleas to sleep or play a little longer while their work goes unfinished need to receive a loving but firm “*no.*” They need to learn at an early age the danger of developing the lazy habit. It is also

vital to help them see the necessity of competing in a technological world requiring a mind developed to enhance productivity.

Choose The God Life

Abraham trusted his Friend's promise to Divinely bless his obedience to the extent he would sacrifice to keep peace in his family. So, Abraham told Lot to choose which land he wanted so he could choose what was left. This way they would have no range wars among their "*cowboys*." Moses tells us that Lot let his sensuality guide his choice, therefore he took the lush plains and the city life—even accepting Sodom—a city in open rebellion to God (Gen. 13:10-13).

Lot's coveting of the "*good life*" was motivated by greed and ignored the faithlessness of those grabbing for all the sensual and carnal delights possible. He may have sensed the dangers of his choices, but even if ignorant he soon realized his family was living in a city sinking into the moral sewage of loving the world (1 John 2:15-16). Apparently, he watched his family fall into the embrace of their surroundings (Gen. 19:14, 26). Lot himself was bothered, but not enough to move away from danger (2 Peter 2:7-8). The suffering of his family reached terrible depths when the Sodomites wanted a homosexual orgy with his guests and Lot offered his daughters to be abused in their party. Part of his problem was preaching what was right while living in a way that offered tacit approval of the sin around him.

His future sons-in-law thought he was joking when he urged them to flee with his family. His

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wife looked back, despite the angelic warning, and was turned into a pillar of salt. His two daughters thought there was no man left for them to marry, so they got their father drunk on consecutive nights and each had a child by him (Gen. 19).

Parents who would be spiritually successful must learn from Lot and rise far above him. We must focus on heaven and choose the God life. Powerful lessons are provided when we regularly help our children see why we are choosing God's way to grow and live our life (Eph. 6:1-4). This takes a full and careful approach to helping children fully understand and choose Christ over the world. Sometimes this may even have mom and dad explaining why they turned down a promotion in order to live joyfully on a higher plane. It is valuable when we can explain why promotions, etc., would cause us to compromise or even end our spiritual life through carnal choices.

Restrain Your Children

The wise man counseled, "*Chasten your son while there is hope, And do not set your heart on his destruction*" (Prov. 19:18). Eli, a priest and a judge in Israel (1 Sam. 1:9; 1 Kings 2:27), was a living example of the meaning of ignoring the proverb. A good man with great respect for the Lord, was careless in actually rearing his children. His sons, Hophni and Phinehas, became corrupt priests not "*know(ing) the Lord*," which means they rejected an intimate friendship (1 Sam. 2:12). They discarded God's law selfishly wanting to sinfully gorge themselves on people's sacrifices to God.

The Law of Moses defined exactly what was to be the priest's portion of every peace offering (Lev. vii. 31-35), as it also gave express directions about the burning of the fat (ib. 23-25, 31). It was therefore a gross act of disobedience and lawlessness on the part of Hophni and Phinehas to take more than the Law gave them (Fuller 9).

They also turned the tabernacle door into a place of ill repute. When words had little effect, Eli said,

Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the Lord's people transgress. If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?

His two sons continued their misdeeds despite his warning (1 Sam. 2:13-25). This is the point at which High Priest Eli should have commanded obedience or caused his sons to bear the cost of their disobedience (Lev. 20:9, 20, etc.).

God explained to Samuel why he sentenced Eli.

For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them (3:13).

“To judge on account of a crime, is the same as to punish it” (Keil 50). His sin was in not punishing his sons. *“He did not remove them from their office, which he ought to have done”* (Fuller 13).

Swift punishment of sinful actions teaches children to consider the consequences of choices made. Lovingly explaining the reason for discipline can yield a better understanding of the grief the Father feels when his children do not continue to walk in the light.

Do God's Will

Noah's faith moved him to exhaustively obey God by devoting more than one hundred years to building the ark (Heb. 11:7). "*Thus Noah did according to all that God commanded him, so he did*" (Gen. 6:22). There was no special sign that a flood was coming, in fact, rain may not have fallen prior to the first drops that started the deluge.

Acting on his complete trust in God led to the salvation of every soul living in his house. Completely trusting the Almighty clearly showed others could have obeyed if so inclined. Noah, through his deeds and words, proclaimed the good news of God's willingness to deliver those choosing righteousness. Peter was thus inspired to describe him as "*a preacher of righteousness*" (2 Peter 2:5). The failure to follow the Lord's will and the good example of the preacher led to every one else being condemned.

Noah's first act upon leaving the ark was to build an altar and offer a sacrifice to God. The Father was pleased and promised never again to destroy the world through means of a flood (Gen. 8:14—9:1). Modern parents should set a similarly powerful example of faithful obedience. We can highlight God's promises in our Bible and our everyday life, such as,

Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life (1 John 2:24-25).

Make Worship The Center Of Your Life

Abram's life can be traced by the altars he built. The Lord appeared to him when he first arrived in the promised land near the future Shechem. He said, "*To your descendants I will give this land.' And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.*" His next move was "*to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord*" (Gen. 12:7-8). His return from Egypt was punctuated by a return to the "*place of the altar*" (13:3-4). Abram later moved to live "*by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built an altar there to the Lord*" (13:18).

There are two times Abram did not build an altar (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18). Each time he lied and encouraged Sarai to become a liar. Self-reliance is thus shown to be deceitful both for God's friend and the wife who followed his lead (Jer. 10:23).

The maturing depth of Abraham's faith is seen in his willingness to offer his only one of a kind son as a sacrifice to the Ruler of Heaven (Gen. 22:1-19). It is particularly interesting to hear him tell his servants, "*Stay here with the donkey; the lad and*

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I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you." Abraham amazes moderns with his response to Isaac's question, "*Where is the sacrifice?*" He said, "*My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burn offering.*" The writer of Hebrews explained,

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "*In Isaac your seed shall be called,*" concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense (11:17-19).

Such depth of faith exposes the shallowness of many parents today.

There are two clear statements about the sacrifice in verse 17. The first "*offered up*" is a perfect tense, which "*expresses the idea that the demands in the sacrifice were fully met, and that, from an ideal standpoint and as far as Abraham was concerned, the offering was a completed action*" (Lightfoot 213). The second is translated "*was ready to offer up*" in the RSV because the verb is in the imperfect tense which "*vividly portrays unfinished action: Abraham was in the act of offering Isaac when God intervened*" (Ibid).

Children with vivid memories of parents gathered with God's people to worship are far more likely to continue faithfully assembling with the saints. The power of priorities passed on can be seen in Moses' injunction to the second generation of those who came out of Egyptian bondage (Deut. 6:4-9). It needs to be seen by every generation we would influence.

Keep Your Focus On God

Joseph was the father God used to save the ancestors of the Messiah from the ravages of seven years of famine. God's hand was with him even in the household of slavery, the clear evidence of which led Potiphar to put him in charge of everything in his house (Gen. 39:1-6). However, Potiphar's wife saw him as an object of lust to be used sexually. He refused her flirtations, saying,

Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anythings from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? (39:7-9).

Reliance on God sustained Joseph in prison, where God's blessings again caused him to rise to the top (39:20-23). Interpreting the dreams of the butler and baker brought yet another confirmation of God as the real source of any ability to interpret dreams. The Lord who provides used two years of forgetfulness on the part of the butler to bring Joseph into the presence of Pharaoh, where he again praised God for providing the answers (40:1-41:16).

Joseph took no personal credit for the wisdom leading to the deliverance of the Israelites. He told his brothers,

But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day to save many people alive (50:20).

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Joseph provided for them and their children and, as death approached, seized one last opportunity to remind his brethren of God's faithfulness to his promises. He asked them to carry his bones with them when they went up out of Egypt (50:21-26; 15:13-14).

There were no arguments about who would inherit what when my dad died. Instead, each of his children expressed a desire to have a Bible or some other scripture study tool that held special significance in personal recollections. Songs with strong alto leads often move me to tears because I can hear the strong alto voice of my mother singing them in days gone by. All of this leads to a more powerful desire for a reunion in the heavenly home of the faithful. This is likely to be the case in the lives of children whose parents kept their focus on God.

Go Often To God In Prayer

Job's seven sons and three daughters would feast in the house of each brother in turn. The inspired penman tells us,

So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "*It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.*" Thus Job did regularly (Job 1:4-5).

Christian parents should be stimulated by his example and follow his prayerful commitment for the sake of their children!

Jesus set the supreme example of praying for those he loved. His prayer to the Father, which covers all of John 17, included, "*I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one*" (vs. 15). The Lord also prayed for Peter.

Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren (Luke 22:31-32).

Like Jesus, loving parents will often be discovered praying (Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 11:1; 22:41; 23:34, 46). It is good to follow the Master's example by intentionally going to a quiet place to approach the Father's throne in prayer. Praying for each child by name is a good way to focus on the needs of each. Our prayers for our children should be used to implore God to help us be spiritually strong in areas of necessity to develop our children's life.

Conclusion

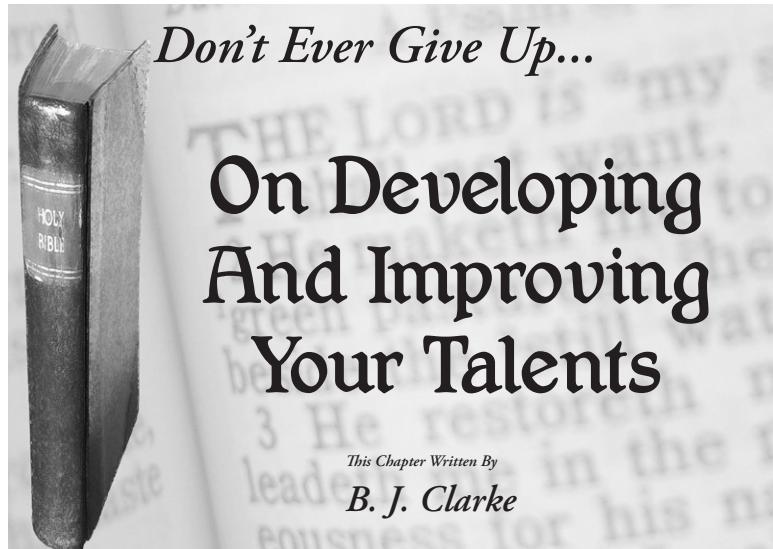
Parents who are growing spiritually will say "no" when they see the danger, choose the God life, restrain their children from doing wrong, do God's will, make worship the center of their lives, keep their focus on God and often go to God in prayer. Participating in such actions will keep parents developing their own spiritual lives and prevent them from over focusing on scraping for wealth like so many citizens of this world. There will also be less reasons to be troubled

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about the children we will one day leave behind. Socrates would be astounded. More importantly, God will be pleased.

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Introduction

One of the evidences of the authenticity of the Bible is that it makes no effort to mask the faults of its characters. From Genesis to Revelation, even the heroes of the faith are depicted as imperfect human beings who needed to develop and grow. This offers great encouragement to us as we evaluate our own walk with God. If we are honest, we must admit that often we fall short of where we need to be in our service to the Saviour. As we read the pages of Holy Scripture, we are reminded that we are not alone. The great men and women of Scripture were not perfect either. Nevertheless, they did not quit. The story of their lives is the story of growth and development in the faith. Let us briefly survey some of the instances where men and women of God refused to give up. Let us explore how these men and women never gave up on developing and improving their talents.

Adam And Eve Did Not Give Up

Adam and Eve had a wonderful relationship with God until sin ruptured their fellowship (Gen. 3:1-20). Consequently, they were expelled from the Garden of Eden when God drove them out and prohibited them from accessing the tree of life (Gen. 3:22-24). It would have been very easy for Adam and Eve to give up. They could have said, *"If God does not want us to live in His presence, then why bother trying to do what is right? We have blown it. Obviously, God is through with us. We might as well give up."*

But Adam and Eve did not quit. Even after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, they endeavored to keep God in their lives. *"Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, 'I have gotten a man from the Lord'"* (Gen. 4:1). They gave God the credit for the blessing of having children. Moreover, they raised a righteous son named Abel (Gen. 4:1-5). The Hebrews writer said of Abel, *"he being dead yet speaketh"* (Heb. 11:4).

What if Adam and Eve had quit after their sin in the garden? What if they had given up and assumed that God had given up on them? Had they done so, there would be a void at the beginning of the Hebrews 11 "Hall of Faith" chapter, for Abel is the very first person mentioned! Adam and Eve did not give up. Rather, they developed a righteousness that enabled them to raise a righteous son named Abel. With Abel dead, and Cain living as a fugitive and vagabond in the earth (Gen. 4:14), Adam and Eve had no offspring to carry on the seed promise given in Genesis 3:15. Hence, God appointed them

Seth to perpetuate a godly seed line of descendants who would call upon the name of the Lord (Gen. 4:26). Consequently, the seed promise made to Adam and Eve would be carried through Seth all the way to Christ (Luke 3:38). What if Adam and Eve had given up and quit after they sinned in the Garden?

Abraham Did Not Give Up

God made a marvelous promise to Abram (whose name was changed to Abraham) that He would make of him a great nation, and that all families of the earth would be blessed through His offspring (Gen. 12:1-3). In order to receive this promise he would have to leave his own country and travel to the land God would show him. Abram was a good man, but he was by no means a perfect man. He lied about his wife Sarai by denying that she was his wife (Gen. 12:11-20; 20:1-12). He listened to the bad advice of Sarai to go in unto Hagar, her handmaid, so that his seed line might be perpetuated through her son Ishmael (Gen. 16:1-16). God had a different plan.

What if Abraham had quit trying to serve God after he lied? What if he had wallowed in his guilt and shame to the point of quitting the faith and giving up on God? Thankfully, Abraham did not give up. He kept on obeying the voice of the Lord his God (Heb. 11:8-9). Where would we be if Abraham had abandoned God before the promised Isaac could come along? Where would we be if he had given up before his journey was completed?

Isaac Did Not Give Up

Isaac committed the same sin his father Abraham committed by lying and saying that his wife was not his wife (Gen. 26:6-11). Yet he did not give up on God and God did not give up on him. Instead, God reiterated the seed promise to Isaac, and Isaac worshipped God with a grateful heart (Gen. 26:30-44).

Jacob Did Not Give Up

Jacob is a tremendous example of faith development. He ruthlessly took advantage of his brother Esau's hunger by enticing him to exchange his birthright for a bowl of red stew (Gen. 25:29-34). Yet, the birthright was not enough for Jacob; he collaborated with his own mother to steal Esau's blessings from his father (Gen. 27:1-39). Isaac had very bad eyesight, thus making it easy for Jacob to lie repeatedly about whether he was Esau (27:1, 21-24).

Esau hated Jacob for all of his deceit and pledged to kill him after his father was dead and gone (Gen. 27:34-41). Consequently, Rebekah sent him to live with her brother Laban in Haran (27:43). On the way, Jacob had a dream at Bethel wherein God informed him that He was still going to fulfill the seed promise, no matter the consequences (28:12-15). Jacob was terrified and grateful all at the same time, and this turned out to be a turning point in his life. God had not given up on Jacob, and Jacob would not give up on God (28:16-22).

Life was about to get much better for Jacob, for he was about to meet the love of his life, Rachel, the daughter of Laban (29:16-18). What goes around comes around, and Jacob, the trickster, was about to be the victim of underhanded activity by Laban. He gave him Leah when he was expecting Rachel. One positive thing that resulted from the union with Leah is that they had a son named Judah (29:35). The seed promise was alive and well, and our Lord would spring forth out of Judah (Gen. 49:10; Heb. 7:14).

Just before an emotional reunion with Esau, Jacob spent the night “*wrestling a man with him until the breaking of the day*” (32:24). The identity of “*the man*” wrestling with Jacob is a matter of some controversy.

Jacob had been struggling all his life; even at the moment of his birth he was struggling with Esau (see 25:26). Later he struggled with Laban (ch. 31). Yet right before meeting Esau, Jacob had the struggle of his life! He who had once grasped his brother’s heel now clung to the bodily form of the living God. Some believe that the Man who wrestled Jacob was the preincarnate Jesus Christ. Others believe the Man was the Angel of God (Gen. 21:17; 31:11). In any case, Jacob wrestled with a manifestation of God (v. 28–30), and because of God’s mercy he survived.ⁱ

Talk about not giving up! Read Genesis 32:24-30, and Hosea 12:2-5, and see the mentality of not giving up exemplified to the nth degree by Jacob! Indeed, Jacob (the supplanter) had come a long way, for he

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was now Israel (God's fighter, one who struggles with God). If he had given up he would never have been so blessed by God!

Moses Did Not Give Up

Moses could have given up on so many occasions, but he kept on, and kept on, until he developed into a mighty leader. He could have given up after killing an Egyptian and fleeing to Midian (Ex. 2:11-15), but he did not. At the burning bush, he wanted to give up before he even started to lead the people out of Egyptian bondage. He gave excuse after excuse to God as to why he should not/could not lead the people, but God was not ready to give up on Moses so soon (Ex. 3:1-4:17).

Moses could have given up when Pharaoh threatened him, but he did not quit. He could have given up when the people constantly murmured against him in the wilderness, but he did not quit (Ex. 15—Num. 20). He could have given up when his own brother and sister spoke against him, but he did not quit. He kept on keeping on and his persistence made him one of the greatest men who ever lived!

Gideon Did Not Give Up

Like Moses, Gideon did not feel worthy or equipped to lead his people against the enemy. God told him to go and lead the people against the Midianites, but Gideon offered one excuse after another (Judges 6:14-40). However, God was not ready

to give up on Gideon. He provided him all of the reassurance he needed, and then some. Gideon grew and grew in his confidence, and led the people to a great victory over the Midianites (Judges 7:1-25).

Jeremiah Did Not Give Up

Jeremiah is called "*the weeping prophet*" because of his words in Jeremiah 9:1:

Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes
a fountain of tears, that I might weep day
and night for the slain of the daughter of my
people!

A study of Jeremiah reveals that there was a time when Jeremiah expressed his intentions to give up preaching. He was ready to quit. What brought him to the point of wanting to quit?

1. **He suffered verbal abuse.** They smote him with the tongue (Jer. 18:18) by cursing him (Jer. 15:10), mocking him and deriding him (Jer. 20:7-8). Their lips rose up against him every day (Lam. 3:62). Part of the verbal abuse he suffered was that of false accusations being leveled against him. He was falsely accused of being a false prophet by those who were actually false prophets themselves (Jer. 28:1-17). He was falsely accused of being a traitor when all he was doing was communicating the truth God had revealed (Jer. 37:13-14; 43:2). In fact, at the very time that Jerusalem was being besieged by Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah

...was shut up in the court of the guard...For
Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up saying,

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Wherefore dost thou prophesy, and say, Thus saith Jehovah, Behold I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon and he shall take it... (Jer. 32:2-3).

The verbal abuse suffered by Jeremiah even escalated to the point of death threats (Jer. 11:21; 26:8).

2. He suffered physical abuse. Pashur, the son of Immer the priest, smote Jeremiah and put him in stocks because he did not like what he preached (Jer. 20:1-2). On another occasion, the princes were wroth with Jeremiah, and smote him and put him into a dungeon (Jer. 37:15). Zedekiah released him from this dungeon, but on another occasion it happened again. Some heard Jeremiah preaching and did not like what they heard so they took him and cast him into the dungeon of Malchijah "*and in the dungeon there was no water, but mire; and Jeremiah sank in the mire*" (Jer. 38:6). He likely would have died there were it not for the heroism of Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, who coordinated his release and rescue (Jer. 38:7-13).

Jeremiah also suffered the humiliation of becoming a captive and being carried away bound in chains (Jer. 40:1). He was released and given the choice to remain in Jerusalem but later was taken against his will to Egypt where he likely remained until he died (Jer. 43:6-7).

3. He suffered emotional pain. Even more painful for Jeremiah to bear than physical and verbal abuse was the emotional pain he suffered at the hands of his own family. After the men of Jeremiah's hometown had threatened to kill him, God approached Jeremiah and informed him of two things: (1) I will protect

you by punishing them (Jer. 11:21-23) and (2) It's going to get even worse for you because members of your own family are going to turn on you (Jer. 12:5-6).

Someone might say, "*Well, at least Jeremiah was comforted in the midst of all of his pain by a loving and supportive wife and by his children.*" On the contrary, God told Jeremiah: "*Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons and daughters, in this place*" (Jer. 16:2). The reason God gave for prohibiting Jeremiah from taking a wife was terrifying enough. He told Jeremiah that wives, mothers, sons and daughters in Jerusalem:

...shall die grievous deaths: they shall not be lamented, neither shall they be buried; they shall be as dung upon the face of the ground; and they shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine; and their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the heavens, and for the beasts of the earth (Jer. 16:4).

No wonder Jeremiah wept!

Because of his pain and persecution, and because his hearers scorned his message, Jeremiah said in a moment of great despair, "*I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name*" (Jer. 20:9). However, Jeremiah was so passionate about his love for God, for God's Word, and for the souls of men that he said,

But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay (Jer. 20:9).

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You cannot read the book of Jeremiah without understanding his passion for preaching and for the souls of his hearers. How else can you explain his longevity of preaching to such an obstinate and hard-headed people? He reminded his hearers on one occasion that he had been preaching for twenty-three years “*but ye have not hearkened*” (Jer. 25:3).

There is only one explanation for this endurance on Jeremiah’s part. It was Jeremiah’s passion that spurred him on even after his written words were destroyed by Jehoiakim (Jer. 36:1-26). When word reached Jeremiah of what had been done he did not give up. He and his scribe Baruch reproduced what they had written and “*there were added besides unto them many like words*” (Jer. 36:32). For Jeremiah, proclaiming the Word of God, whether orally or in writing, was not a matter of glitz, glamour, or the limelight. It was a passion. Think of what we would have missed if Jeremiah had given up! How grateful we are that he continued developing and improving his talents!

Peter Did Not Give Up

To read the story of Peter is to read the story of a man who never gave up in developing and improving his talents for the Lord. When the Lord first called him, Peter was frustrated from fishing all night and catching nothing. At the beckoning of Jesus he “*let down the net*” and “*they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake*” (Luke 5:5-6). What was Peter’s reaction? “*When Simon Peter saw it, he fell*

down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (5:8). The Lord saw more in Peter than he saw in himself and thus invited him to travel with Him to "catch men" with the gospel bait (5:10).

The faith of Peter developed even more when he saw the Lord walking on the water and said, "*Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water*" (Matt. 14:28). When Jesus told him to "Come," Peter actually exited the boat and started walking on the water to go to Jesus. No sooner had Peter started walking on the water when he "*saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid: and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me*" (14:30). Jesus caught him and said, "*O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*" (14:31).

On other occasions, the faith of Peter was rock solid. This is not to say that Peter always did the right thing. Far from it! Sometimes Peter could do the right thing and the wrong thing almost within moments of one another. When Jesus asked the disciples, "*Whom say ye that I am?*" Peter responded, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matt. 16:15-16). Jesus blessed him for making such a statement, but within a few short verses He had some very different words for Peter. When Jesus showed His disciples how he must suffer many things, be killed, and be raised again the third day, Peter "*took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee*" (16:21-22). Jesus turned and said unto Peter,

Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things

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that be of God, but those that be of men
(16:23).

How many of us would have quit the faith upon receiving such a stinging rebuke? This author knows of quite a few who have left the faith over far less. But Peter did not quit. He did not give up. Some would just quit saying anything at all after having been so sternly rebuked, but Peter kept blurting out whatever came to his mind. At the transfiguration he suggested building three tabernacles: one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. He was in the midst of making this suggestion when:

...a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him (17:4-5).

Peter asked Jesus how many times he ought to forgive a brother who sinned against him. Before Jesus could answer, Peter offered a suggestion of his own. Perhaps he thought that Jesus would be impressed with his suggestion of seven times, which was twice as many times, plus one, than most Jews believed was required. Yet, Jesus took Peter to an even higher place—Seventy times seven (18:21-22)!

Peter boldly reminded Jesus of how much the apostles had given up to follow Him, and he wanted to know, “*what shall we have therefore?*” (19:27). He was not shy! When Jesus told the apostles that they would all be offended in Him on that betrayal night, “*Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never*

be offended" (26:31-33). Jesus responded by telling Peter, "*Verily, I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice*" (26:34). At this point, Peter did not back down—he doubled down and said, "*Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee*" (26:35). Yet the same man that would die for Jesus could not stay awake to pray for himself and Jesus. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he found Peter and the other disciples asleep, but He spoke directly to Peter, "*What, could you not watch with me one hour?*" (26:40).

Peter was aroused from his sleep by the sound of Judas and the mob that came to arrest Jesus. Never one to be bashful, Peter took out a sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest (26:51). Rather than praising him for his boldness, Jesus told him to put his sword up. He said essentially, "*If I wanted to fight I could call legions of angels from heaven. I would not need these earthly weapons.*"

At his arrest, all of the disciples forsook Jesus and fled (26:56). Peter "*followed him afar off*" (26:58). At the high priest' palace, a damsel accused him of having been with Jesus of Galilee. Peter vehemently denied it, and left the area (26:69-70). He went into the porch area and another maid leveled the same charge. This time he denied with an oath that he even knew the man (26:71-72). After awhile others came and stood by and accused him of the same thing. This time he began to curse, and to swear saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew (26:73-74). What was Peter's reaction to this sound? He,

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...remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly (26:75).

Will Peter quit now? Will he finally give up? Peter told the apostles he was going back to fishing. He fished all night and caught nothing. The next morning Jesus stood on the shore but no one knew it was Jesus. He asked them if they had any meat, and they answered, "No." He then instructed them to cast the net on the right side of the ship and ye shall find. They did as they were told and they were not able to draw it in. Remembering how he first met Jesus, Simon Peter and John had a conversation in which they knew that Jesus was responsible for this great catch (John 21:1-10).

After dining, Jesus asked Simon Peter three times, "*Do you love me?*" Three times Peter affirmed that he did have affection for Jesus, and three times Jesus gave him a task to perform. He was not giving up on Peter (21:15-17). His confidence in Peter's ability to develop and grow was well placed. Peter would lead the way in preaching the first gospel sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). He would play a prominent role in the early history of the church (Acts 1-15). He would write inspired epistles to build up the faith of the saints (1 and 2 Peter). He would become an elder in the Lord's church (1 Pet. 5:1-4). Peter did not give up. He grew up!

John Mark Did Not Give Up
One final example worth noting is the growth

and development of John Mark. He is the one who departed from the first missionary journey to return to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). This did not set well with Paul, for when the time came for the second missionary journey, and Barnabas was determined to take John Mark with them, Paul disagreed vehemently. He viewed John Mark as a slacker when it came to doing the work and getting the job done (15:37-38). This caused such a sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas that they split up and went their separate ways, with Barnabas taking John Mark and Paul taking Silas (15:39-40).

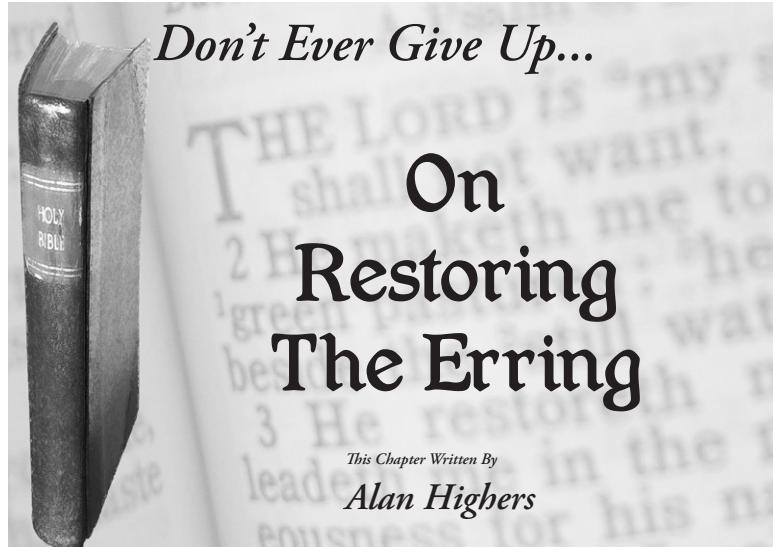
Did John Mark quit? Did he give up because Paul hurt his feelings? On the contrary, John Mark did not give up—he grew up—and Paul recognized this growth in him. In fact, Paul was so impressed by the growth of John Mark that he told Timothy to take Mark and “*bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry*” (2 Tim. 4:11). He never gave up. He kept developing and improving!

Conclusion

Like the men noted above, we have our faults. We sometimes say and do the wrong thing, or we fail to do and say the right thing. However, let us never think that God is so disappointed in us that He has given up on us. He wants to see us to develop and improve. Thus, let us never ever give up. Instead, may we keep on growing up in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18).

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Throughout history man has had the tendency to drift away from God. Much of the Bible is directed toward warning against falling, giving examples of those who fell, and providing the remedy for returning to God. We have the duty of evangelizing, i.e., converting those who are out of Christ, but restoring the erring is saving a lost soul just as much as reaching one who is out of Christ.

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20).

The doctrine of “once saved, always saved” came from John Calvin, not from the Word of God. It is a devious doctrine that provides false assurance to people. Those who teach this doctrine claim to believe in the “security of the believer,” but we all

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believe in the security of the believer. We simply do not believe in the unconditional security of the believer, nor in the security of the unbeliever. One must be “*faithful unto death*” (Rev. 2:10). A believer can become an unbeliever. “*Then believed they his words*” (Psm. 106:12). “*They forgot God their Savior... they believed not his word*” (Psm. 106:21, 24). “*They believed,*” and then “*they believed not.*” The inspired writer warned, “*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God*” (Heb. 3:12). This passage indicates that “*brethren*” can have “*an evil heart of unbelief,*” which leads to “*departing from the living God.*” What could be plainer?

The Unfaithful Multitude

It would be interesting to know how many unfaithful members of the church there are in each community or in each state. Years ago I read that there were enough unfaithful members of the body of Christ in Chicago to fill Wrigley Stadium. This was at a time when many people were moving from the South in order to find employment. When people moved into Chicago or Detroit or some other industrialized city, some of them never became part of a congregation. Even if they were faithful in their home community, they drifted away when they moved to an unfamiliar place. It appears there many have been hundreds, and maybe even thousands, who were unfaithful. Think of what strong congregations could have existed in these cities if all of the unfaithful members could have been restored!

There are unfaithful members in every community. Someone once remarked, "*No matter how many we convert, we still have a leaky bucket.*" They meant, of course, that we are making new converts to the Lord, but we also are losing some of those who once were converted. We must make efforts to restore the erring.

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).

A significant part of the work of elders is to watch for the souls of those who are under their care. Many congregations have members sign an attendance card each Lord's day. What becomes of these cards? With some they are just filed somewhere and never utilized. Some have a more active program. In some places, if a member is absent for three consecutive weeks, the elders make a visit to their home. It may be that there is illness. Some may have had extensive trips out of town. In other cases, people may be drifting away from the fold. In any case, however, it is good to keep up with the membership and to know what is happening. Faithful elders "*watch for your souls*" (Heb. 13:17).

How People Fall Away

Falling away from the faith may not be a sudden occurrence. More often than not, it is a gradual happening. Someone begins missing Wednesday night Bible study, then Sunday evening worship, and

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eventually they are absent whenever the church meets. If this tendency can be caught early and remedial steps are taken, the problem often can be resolved. If no action is taken until people are fixed in their habits, it is more difficult to correct. A member starts to associate with "*the wrong crowd.*" His conduct becomes more worldly and perhaps immoral. These first steps cannot be ignored. We must remember that one first walks, then stands, and finally sits (Psm. 1:1). We must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard "*lest at any time we let them slip*" (Heb. 2:1). "*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*" (1 Cor. 10:12).

The apostle Paul admonished, "*For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die*" (Rom. 8:13). This brief warning says much for our edification. First of all, he is warning about spiritual death because one will die physical death whether he lives after the flesh or not. Further, he is speaking to those who are Christians, because only those who are spiritually alive face the prospect of spiritual death. So, in these few words, we learn that a Christian, a child of God, one who is spiritually alive, may face spiritual death, separation from God, if he lives after the flesh, i.e., lives according to his fleshly appetites and desires. "*For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption*" (Gal 6:8). The Bible is very plain!

Restoring The Erring

God sent the prophet Isaiah out to a rebellious world. "*This is a rebellious people, lying children,*

children that will not hear the law of the Lord" (Isa. 30:9). Why go to such a people? What is to be accomplished? It is discouraging to preach to those who will not hear and to appeal to people whose hearts are made of stone. But here is where our lesson takes us. This is where we learn never to give up on restoring the erring.

When God chose Isaiah to prophesy, he wanted Isaiah to know the enormity of his assignment. Isaiah had said, "*Here am I; send me*" (Isa. 6:8). God responded by telling Isaiah about the hardness of heart manifested by the people. The Lord said,

Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed (Isa. 6:9-10).

The thought here is that by his preaching and by the message presented, the people would become spiritually blind and deaf. He would make their heart fat, i.e., sluggish and dull of hearing. They wanted to continue in their sinful and rebellious ways. Their minds were not open to the Word of the Lord. They would hear, but not understand. They would see, but not perceive. They would close their ears and shut their eyes lest they should hear and see the message from God and be moved away from their false and selfish ways.

The response by Isaiah is understandable and not wholly unexpected. He cried out, "*Lord, how*

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long?" (Isa. 6:11). Have we not all experienced such an inquiry in our hearts? We live in a world not entirely unlike the one in which Isaiah lived. People are motivated by pleasure. The study of the scriptures is frivolous to some people. They are not interested in the preaching of the gospel. The idea of a spiritual or sacrificial life is foreign to them. They crave entertainment, not self-denial. This spills over into the religious realm. Many churches seek now to entertain, rather than to edify. Music with a rock beat fills their sanctuaries, and young people flock to their services as they would to a musical concert. Preaching also is of the "*feel good*" variety. "*Preach the word,*" belongs to the old school (2 Tim. 4:1-2). The pulpit now is to make people feel good, forgetting the cares of the world and assuring them that all is well. It is patterned after the false prophets of Jeremiah's day. They cry, "*Peace, peace; when there is no peace*" (Jer. 6:14). God said his people "*love to have it so*" (Jer. 5:31). Some people want to hear false doctrine. They desire that which makes them feel good. They have "*itching ears,*" and they "*turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables*" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Yes, it is sad but true.

Isaiah asked, "*Lord, how long?*" God sent him to a rebellious people, a people who would close their eyes and their ears and refuse to listen to the truth. Isaiah wanted to know how long he should preach to those who did not want to hear.

The answer given by God is revealing. It probably was not what Isaiah expected to hear. God did not merely say, "*Well, Isaiah, do your best and then sit*

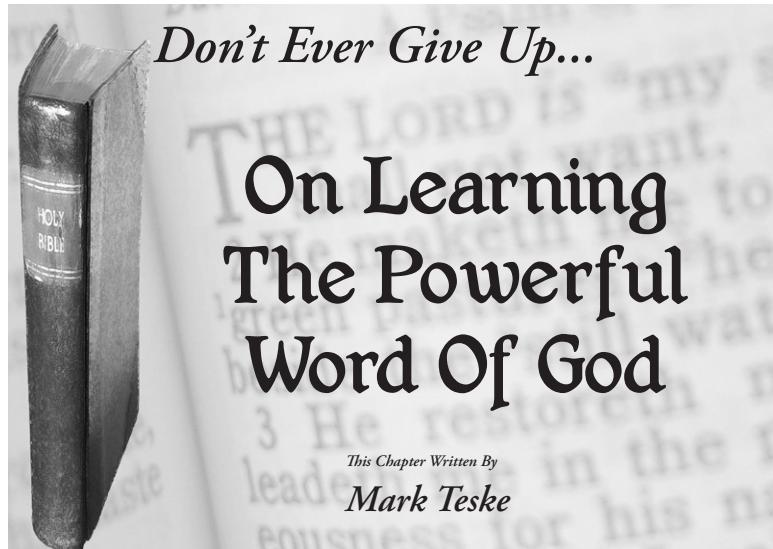
down." Here is God's answer: "*Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate*" (Isa 6:11). How long should Isaiah preach to this rebellious people? As long as there is a city with an inhabitant, as long as there is a man in a house, and as long as the land survives! **Never, never give up!**

I knew a man who was a deacon in a denomination. His wife and daughter were faithful members of the church. He would not come with them, even when his church was not meeting. He finally began to come to dinner-on-the-ground, but he would attend his service first before coming to eat. He seemed to be one of the most hard-hearted enemies of the church that I had ever seen. Finally, we had a gospel meeting and he attended the meeting. Not long after, when he was in the audience one evening, I spoke on the baptism "*in the name of the Lord Jesus*" in Acts 19:1-5. I pointed out that there were about a dozen men who knew only the baptism of John the Baptist, after that baptism was no longer valid. I said, "*They had to make a second trip to the water!*" We stood to sing a song of invitation, and out he came into the aisle and down to the front while the audience was bathed in tears. He made the good confession, and I had the privilege that very night to baptize him into Christ for the remission of sins. As Paul Harvey would say, "*Here is the rest of the story.*" That man became an elder in the church and was a faithful Christian to the day he died. He was one of the last people I would ever have expected to obey the gospel. **Never, never give up!**

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When I was a boy, I had a friend whose parents never came to worship. He always came with an aunt and uncle. His tenacity eventually influenced his parents to come. They were restored and were strong Christians as long as they lived. They were led by a child who never gave up. **Never, never give up!**

In his charge to Timothy, Paul declared: "*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season*" (2 Tim. 4:1-2). Preach the word when it is popular, and when it is not. Preach the word when people like it, and when they do not like it. The gospel is the power to save (Rom. 1:16). Turn on the power. **Never, never give up!**



Throughout history man has had the tendency to drift away from God. Much of the Bible is directed toward warning against falling, giving examples of those who fell, and providing the remedy for returning to God. We have the duty of evangelizing false assurance to people. Those who teach this doctrine claim to believe in the "*security of the believer*," but we all

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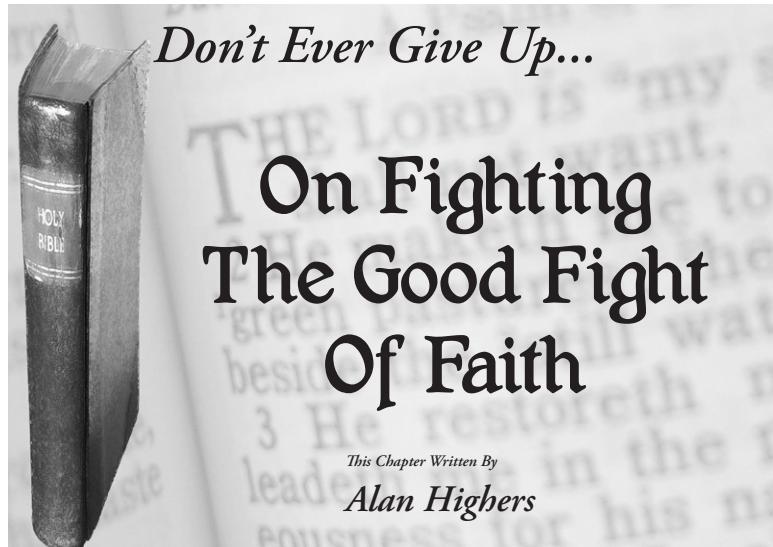
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One of the most beloved passages in the Bible is the apostle Paul's farewell address to Timothy whom he called "*my own son in the faith*" (1 Tim. 1:2) and "*my dearly beloved son*" (2 Tim. 1:2). So far as we know, the second epistle to Timothy is the last book that Paul wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The last chapter of that book, therefore, is the last chapter of the last book that Paul ever wrote, and it was penned to his "*dearly beloved son*" in the gospel. The apostle Paul wrote more New Testament books than any other writer, he is admired for his sacrificial proclamation of the gospel, and it is significant to read the last words that he delivered.

Here are some of Paul's final words:

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

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me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me in that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

What a fitting conclusion to the life of Paul! “*I have fought a good fight.*”

A Good Fight

We do not want to be known as fighters for self, or for ego, or for unrighteousness. Fighting the good fight does not mean being mean-spirited or contentious. The apostle Peter admonished,

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Peter 4:15-16).

Keep in mind that we are fighting the “*good*” fight.

The battle imagery in the Ephesian epistle manifests that the Christian life is a “*fight*.” We are at war with the world and against “*spiritual wickedness in high places*” (Eph. 6:12). Consequently, the child of God must prepare for war. “*Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*” (Eph. 6:11). This armour includes being girt about with truth, wearing the breastplate of righteousness, having our feet shod with the gospel of peace, taking the shield of faith, using the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph. 6:13-17). Fighting against the world and opposing error and false doctrine is no

easy task. It requires courage and determination on the part of God's people. As Paul himself had fought the good fight, so he instructed Timothy to "*fight the good fight of faith*" (1 Tim. 6:12). The Hebrew Christians were commended for enduring "*a great fight of afflictions*" (Heb. 10:32).

Examples Of The Good Fight

The apostles and prophets were bold men with bold messages. Paul asked the Ephesians to pray "*that I may open my mouth boldly*" (Eph. 6:19). He stated that he was "*in bonds*," but he wanted "*therein [to] speak boldly*," and he added "*as I ought to speak*" (Eph. 6:20). Let us remember that boldness in defense of the gospel is how we "*ought to speak*." He was "*set for the defense of the gospel*" (Phil. 1:17). He rejoiced that brethren were made confident because he was in bonds and they were "*much more bold to speak the word without fear*" (Phil. 1:14). In describing his own work and preaching, Paul stated:

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).

Why was Paul pure from the blood of all men? He tells us by saying, "*FOR I have not shunned to declare unto you ALL the counsel of God.*"

I fear whether some today are "*pure from the blood of all men.*" Have they declared "*all the counsel of God*" about innovations in worship? Have they been set for the defense of the gospel against liberalism,

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postmodernism, and other false philosophies of the day? Have they spoken out when false doctrine was preached or taught in a congregation? I marvel that some congregations seem willing to tolerate error, but they cannot tolerate the truth being taught. They are silent when error is taught, but they are vocal when some preacher of the gospel rises up to oppose it. They are more comfortable with falsehood than truth. The role of a gospel preacher or a faithful elder is not to please men or to placate error. Paul asked the Galatians,

For do I now persuade men, or God or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10).

In Hebrews 11 we read about great men of faith who suffered because they fought the good fight. They are considered heroes of the faith, but think of what they endured to fight for righteousness.

Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens...and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth (Heb. 11:33-34, 36-38).

Sometimes we suffer today for standing for the truth, but our tribulations seem small in comparison to what great men of God have endured. It should impress us that we should never, never give up on fighting the good fight of faith.

Jeremiah The Prophet

Jeremiah was one of God's true noblemen, but he was given a difficult task. He had to warn the people of impending captivity by the Babylonians if they did not repent. His message was not popular. He proclaimed "*violence and spoil*" (KJV) or "*violence and destruction*" (ASV), while the false prophets promised "*peace, peace,*" even when there was no peace (Jer. 20:8; 6:14). Choose your message. Which would you rather hear? Jeremiah said, "*God will bring violence and destruction upon Judah; the nation shall be taken captive in Babylon*" (Jer. 20:4). The false prophets preached a message of comfort: "*Peace, yes, peace and safety, do not worry about your fate.*" The people preferred the comforting message of the false prophets, and they showed disdain for the warnings issued by Jeremiah. "*The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so*" (Jer. 5:31). It is unfortunate that people often would rather be soothed by falsehoods than disturbed by the truth. Thus it was in the days of Jeremiah. Is it true today?

A rebellious generation cried out to Isaiah, "*Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits*" (Isa. 30:10). They did not

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want the truth. This helps us to understand the New Testament declaration about some who “*received not the love of truth*” (2 Thess. 2:10), in contrast to others who “*believe and know the truth*” (1 Tim. 4:3). One’s love for truth, or the lack thereof, can determine whether we will accept the truth or believe a lie.

Jeremiah grew discouraged by the daunting task before him. Many of us can understand his feelings. Most preachers of the gospel, many good elders, along with Bible teachers and other faithful Christians, must confront discouragement from time to time. That is why we must constantly emphasize that we should never, never give up on fighting the good fight of faith.

In his despair Jeremiah complained to God, feeling that God has misled him by charging him with a responsibility that was too difficult to bear. The prophet lamented,

I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me.
For since I spake, I cried out violence and
spoil; because the word of the Lord was made
a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily (Jer.
20:7-8).

I have been where Jeremiah was, haven’t you? Jeremiah was mocked by those who resisted his message. He was ridiculed and scorned. All he was trying to do was uphold the word of the Lord, but some did not want to receive it and they held him up to derision. This is an important lesson that the Lord is teaching us through the example of what happened to that great prophet.

As he felt disappointment and perhaps failure, Jeremiah decided to quit. He declared, “*I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name*” (Jer. 20:9). This is the sting of discouragement: let us give up, let us quit, let us forget all about our duty to God. Sadly, some have done this. They did not have the fortitude to press on. But look at what happened with Jeremiah. After he grew discouraged, after he decided to quit and to speak no more in the name of the Lord, he made this remarkable declaration: “*But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay*” (Jer. 20:9). God’s word burned within his heart, and he could not remain quiet! “*I cannot contain*” (ASV). May we imbibe the spirit of that grand old prophet!

Fire In Our Bones

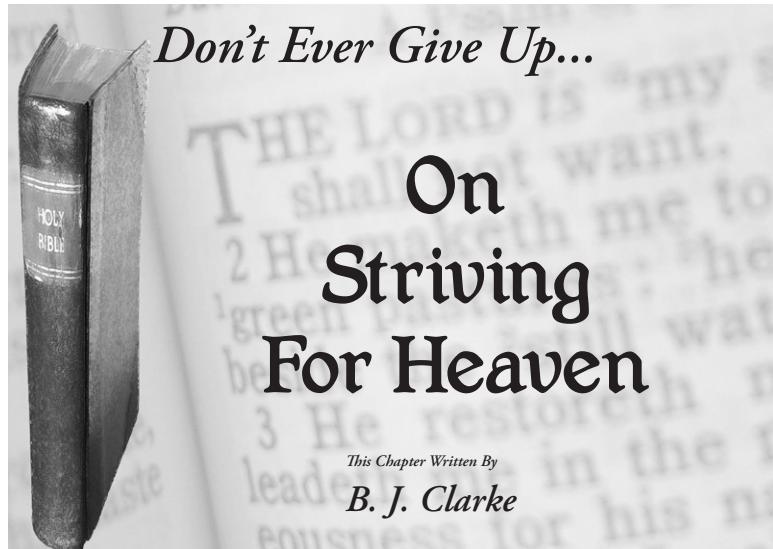
We first need to fill our hearts and minds with the word of God. “*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee*” (Psm. 119:11). “*O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day*” (Psm. 119:97). “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom*” (Col. 3:16). “*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*” (1 Peter 2:2). “*But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18). As the word dwells within our hearts and controls and guides our thoughts and actions, it will become more and more like fire within our bones and we cannot contain!

DEGU ON FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH

Once we consume God's word and ingest it into our very beings, it will become only natural for us to share it with others and to wield it as a spiritual sword against all error and false teaching. Christians, contend for the faith! Stand up and fight! Fight by the life you lead, the example you set, and the message you proclaim! We sing these lines:

Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?

My brother, stand up, stand up for Jesus, and never, never give up on fighting the good fight of faith.



Introduction

As Jesus traveled through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem, someone asked Him a question: "*Lord, are there few that be saved?*" (Luke 13:22-23)? How would most folks today answer the question of whether only few will be saved? More importantly, how did Jesus answer this question, and how would the answers of modern man compare to the answer that Jesus gave?

It is noteworthy that although one individual asked the question ("*then said one unto Him*"), Jesus directed His answer "*unto them*" (Luke 13:23). Jesus knew that the whole crowd needed to hear the answer to this question, and so it is today. What answer did Jesus give? He said,

Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house

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is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last (Luke 13:24–30).

In His response, Jesus made it abundantly clear that (1) Many will seek to enter heaven and not be able; (2) Many will plead with Him to recognize them as His own, but He will tell them plainly that He does not know them; (3) Many will insist that He does in fact know them, merely because they had been present with Him at meals, and when He taught in public places; (4) He will reiterate that He does not know them, and will instruct them to depart from Him because they are workers of iniquity. Moreover, they will experience weeping and gnashing of teeth when they see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, while at the same time they are thrust out; (5) The saved will come from all directions and sit down in the kingdom of

God; and (6) Some of the last shall be first, and some of the first shall be last.

The most critical aspect of the answer of Jesus is the first word in His response: “*Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able*” (Luke 13:24). The English word “*Strive*” is the KJV translation of the Greek word agonizomai. Of course, the transliteration of this Greek word brings to mind the English word “*agonize*.” The Greek word could also be translated with words like “*Struggle, Compete, Fight, Contest, or Contend*.” The word conveys the idea of making every effort to accomplish the mission at hand. The Bauer, Arndt, Danker, and Gingrich (BADG) lexicon defines this word as meaning that, in order to enter the heavenly kingdom, one should be willing to “*strain every nerve to enter*.”

Jesus was not asking His followers to do anything that He was unwilling to do. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He would be in a state of agony (agonia) as He prayed to the Father (Luke 22:44). The word Jesus used in Luke 13:24 (agonizomai) is found six other times in the New Testament. Jesus employed the word in John 18:36 when He said that if His kingdom were of this world that His servants would fight. Paul used the word to describe how fervently Epaphras laboured in prayer for the Colossians (Col. 4:12). Near the close of this chapter, we will examine the other four passages where Paul employs this word.

Our plan of action for this chapter is twofold: (1) To encourage the reader not to quit striving for heaven as did Demas, the Galatians and the Hebrews;

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(2) To encourage the reader to strive for heaven with the same zest as did the characters in Hebrews 11, and to strive for heaven with the same commitment as did the apostle Paul.

Don't Quit Like Demas Did

There was apparently a time when Demas was striving for heaven. He was one of Paul's companions, who sent greetings to the brethren at Colossae (Col. 4:14). Paul even describes Demas as a "*fellowlabourer*" (Philemon 24). Sadly, the story does not end there. By the time Paul wrote some of his last words, he told Timothy that Demas had forsaken him (2 Tim. 4:10a). What had caused Demas to give up on God? Paul explained, "*Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world*" (2 Tim. 4:10). Whereas Demas had made every effort in the past to labour for the Lord, he was now making every effort to love the world and the things that are in the world (cf. 1 John 2:15-17). His affections were no longer on things above (cf. Col. 3:1-4). Demas was no longer laying his treasures up in heaven (cf. Matt. 6:19-21). Rather, he had become a friend of the world and thus made himself an enemy of God (James 4:4).

It would be wonderful to say that the departing disposition of Demas is not among God's people today, but the sad truth is that many continue to follow his path. They "*go forth*" from the watery grave of baptism and serve well for a time, but "*are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection*" (Luke 8:14).

Don't Quit Like The Galatians Did

Paul was absolutely astonished that the Galatians were so soon removed from the Gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:6). For a time they “*did run well*” but were now hindered from obeying the truth (5:7). Hence, Paul asked them in Galatians 3:1,

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you,
that ye should not obey the truth, before whose
eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth,
crucified among you?

Paul pleaded with the Galatians to recognize that to give up on the New Covenant by returning to the Old Covenant was to fall from grace and to place themselves under bondage again to the Law of Moses (Gal. 5:1-4). He urged them to “*Walk in the Spirit*,” and to avoid the “*works of the flesh*” so that they might inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:16-24).

Paul longed for the Galatians to strive once again to reap everlasting life. He knew that Satan would endeavor to deceive them to believe that they would not reap the consequences of their actions, whether good or bad. Accordingly, Paul warned,

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting (Gal. 6:7-8).

Paul was very aware of the tendency of men to grow tired of striving to do right, day after day, month

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after month, and year after year. It is easy to grow weary in well-doing, to grow weary of the struggle, and tired of making the long-term sacrifices necessary to living the Christian life. The Galatians needed to know that heaven was worth striving for, that it would surely be worth it all. Thus he encouraged the Galatians, *“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not”* (Gal. 6:9).

Don’t Quit Like The Hebrews Did

The Book of Hebrews was written to Christians who were giving up their Christianity to return to Judaism. Some had not yet given up their faith, but were contemplating such a decision. Thus the author implored them *“to hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end”* (Heb. 3:6). He warned them not to harden their hearts like the Old Testament Israelites did in the wilderness (3:8-11). He begged, *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God”* (3:12). He encouraged them to encourage one another,

Lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end (3:13-14).

He pointed to the fact that the Israelites missed their Promised Land because they quit striving for it in faith (3:15-19). Then he beckoned,

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Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it...There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God...Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief (4:1, 9, 11).

Knowledge is power, and in order to keep on striving for heaven, we need to keep on striving for more and more knowledge, so that we may be able to take strong meat, and not just the milk of the word (5:12). We cannot remain babes in knowledge. We must proceed to the strong meat so that we may be full-grown and able to use our senses to discern what is good and what is evil (5:13-14).

It would do no good for the Hebrews to become once enlightened, to taste of the heavenly gift, and the Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they quit striving to follow the Christ. In fact, for them to walk away deliberately from Christ would be tantamount to crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting Him to an open shame (6:4-6). Hence, the Hebrews writer beseeches his readers to:

Shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises (6:11-12).

In view of the fact that they had entered "*the holiest by the blood of Jesus*" (10:19) the Hebrews writer entreated,

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith...let us hold fast the

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profession of our faith without wavering...and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works (10:22-24).

The Hebrew Christians needed to understand something loud and clear: if they willfully gave up Christianity to return to the Old Testament system they would be without any sacrifice for their sins under that system (10:26). They would be without any hope of forgiveness. The only thing they would have to look forward to would be "*a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries*" (10:27). The Old Testament punished those who despised Moses' law (10:28). The New Covenant was a better covenant with better promises (8:6). Consequently, the writer asks in Hebrews 10:29,

Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

The conclusion to Hebrews chapter 10 is a compelling exhortation to the Hebrew Christians never to give up their faith:

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my

soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul (Heb. 10:35–39).

Strive For Heaven Like Those Of Hebrews 11 Did

If you are looking for examples of men and women who were determined to never give up in their quest to please God, then Hebrews 11 is the chapter for you. Abraham demonstrated his faith by leaving a place he had no personal desire to leave in order to travel to a place that he had never seen. Yet, because of his faith (unwavering trust) in God, “*he went out not knowing whither he went*” (11:8). He moved from place to the place, dwelling in temporary tents (tabernacles) and longing finally to reach a place where he could put down some roots and permanently reside. Long trips are difficult in any era, but imagine traveling day after day during Abraham’s day. How could he survive this daily struggle? Abraham’s faith in God was the compass for his unknown journey and he never doubted that God would get him safely to his destination (Heb. 11:8-10).

The immediate descendants of Abraham and Sarah did not live on earth long enough to see the ultimate fulfillment of the seed promise (Gal. 3:8-28), but they saw them afar off. They never doubted that God would keep His promise, although the precise time and manner by which He would do so, was unseen by Abraham and company. With eyes of faith they were as persuaded of their ultimate fulfillment

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as those of us who have lived to read about their fulfillment. Because they were “*strangers and pilgrims*” they sought a more permanent dwelling place and they yearned for a city whose builder and maker is God. Instead of looking backward to the country they left behind, they pressed forward, striving for the future. Did Abraham ever make it to a more permanent dwelling with God? Luke 13:28 and Luke 16:22-31 depict Abraham as being in the heavenly kingdom.

In the closing verses of Hebrews 11, one hero of faith after another is paraded before the reader as this inspired treatise on faith comes to a close.

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth (Heb. 11:32-40).

In each case represented above, their faith was evidenced by something they did. These “*strivers*” are a tremendous example to us not to quit even when times are tough! Gideon trusted God to use a band of only 300 soldiers to conquer the Midianites and liberate the Israelites (Judges 6-7). Barak and Deborah led Israel to victory over Sisera and the Canaanites (Judges 4-5). Samson is remembered, not for his foolish and impulsive decisions, but for his faith that God would deliver the people from the Philistines (Judges 13-16). The reference to Jephthah must be in reference to his faith in God to grant victory in battle over the Ammonites (Judges 11). Jephthah did not sit back and wait for God to do all of the fighting. Jephthah did his part because he was first convinced that God would do His part. David is mentioned, most likely, for possessing faith in God to deliver Goliath into his hands (1 Sam. 17). In addition, the faith of David is evidenced in countless psalms that flowed forth from his inspired pen. Samuel was a great man of faith for many reasons, not the least of which was his insistence that obedience to God is paramount (1 Sam. 15:22). He was the last of the judges, and he anointed the first two kings of Israel. The prophets, in general, are remembered as heroes of faith because they proclaimed the truth fearlessly even when they knew that it could cost them their lives. Did they not wonder what would happen to them after they died? While it may be true that they did not grasp the full details about life beyond the grave, they nevertheless were convinced that God would be there to help on their unknown journey.

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Who are the ones who subdued kingdoms? Albert Barnes aptly observes that “*Joshua subdued the nations of Canaan; Gideon the Midianites; Jephtha [sic] the Ammonites; David the Philistines, Amalekites, Jebusites, Edomites, etc.*” In subduing these kingdoms they wrought righteousness by obeying God’s commandments (Psm. 119:172) and cleansing the world from the sinfulness of the nations whom they destroyed.

Of course, Daniel had faith that God could stop the mouth of lions (Dan. 6) and Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) were present when God quenched the violence of fire (Dan. 3). Elijah (1 Kings 19) and Jeremiah (Jer. 26:24) both escaped death by the sword. Hezekiah is just one example of someone who was weak and then made strong (Isa. 38). We have already noted many examples (Joshua, David, etc.) of those who waxed valiant in fight and who turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Both the widow of Zarephath and the Shunamite woman received their dead back to life again (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4). On the other hand, some did not rise from the dead—they were tortured to death because they would not back down from their convictions. They were willing to die because they believed that God would somehow lift them up thereafter.

The prophets were often mocked. Elisha is one prophet who received such treatment (2 Kings 2:23). Jeremiah certainly knew what it was to be mocked and physically mistreated (Jer. 18:12; 37:15). Joseph (Gen. 39), Micaiah (1 Kings 22), and Jeremiah (Jer.

20) all suffered imprisonment. Zechariah, the son of Jehoida, was stoned with stones when he preached the truth (2 Chron. 24:21-22). Jesus indicted Jerusalem for killing the prophets and stoning them (Matt. 23:37). We have no Scripture that decisively identifies who was sawn asunder. Tradition says that Isaiah was sawn in two with a wooden saw by king Manasseh.

Many of the prophets were slain with swords (1 Kings 19:10, 14; Jer. 26:20-23). Concerning the prophets wandering about in sheepskins and goatskins, Craig Keener explains "*Prophets who lived outside society sometimes wore coarse animal skins* (see the *LXX for Elijah's "mantle"); *Elijah and similar prophets also wandered in the wilderness, and the Maccabees were later forced to live in such circumstances.*" In summary, the prophets were often destitute, afflicted and tormented. Because they were often alienated from society, they wandered in deserts, in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. Obadiah took an hundred prophets and hid them by fifty in a cave and fed them with bread and water (1 Kings 18:4). Of course, David also often hid in caves as he was hiding from Saul (1 Sam. 24:3).

Although the world looked upon these men as unworthy to dwell in their presence, in fact, it was the other way around. The world was not worthy of them. "*The world, in shutting them out, shut out from itself a source of blessing.*" Man's estimate of these heroes of faith was a low one; so men persecuted them, arrested them, tortured them, and in some cases, killed them. But God's estimate is entirely

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different. He said that the world was not worthy of these people!

Strive For Heaven Like Paul Did

The apostle Paul made it manifestly clear that he had a single-minded mission to make heaven his eternal home. Consider his words:

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing (Phil. 3:13–16).

Was Paul willing to go through agonizing moments of struggle and pain in exchange for the crown of life? Indeed, he was. In each of the following verses, Paul uses the same word (agonizomai) that Jesus used in Luke 13:24. He told the Corinthians:

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when

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I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (1 Cor. 9:24–27).

The word “*striveth*” in 1 Corinthians 9:25 is from *agonizomai*. The Christian life is not a 100-yard dash. It is a marathon, and running a marathon is a grueling activity. It requires commitment and sacrifice. Paul notes that physical runners are willing to do this in order to gain a corruptible crown, but we are running for an incorruptible crown. To complete the race we must keep our bodies in subjection.

How much agony was Paul willing to experience in order to go to heaven? Does the following passage offer an answer to this question?

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, 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 waters, 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. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches (2 Cor. 11:23–28).

Such a resume gave Paul instant credibility when he told the Colossians of how he laboured, “*striving [from agonizomai] according to his working, which worketh*

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in me mightily" (Col. 1:29). Hence, when Paul told Timothy to "*Fight [from agonizomai] the good fight of faith*" (1 Tim. 6:12) he spoke with authenticity as one who practiced what he preached. It is no wonder then that Paul could write, "*I have fought [from agonizomai] a good fight. I have finished my course, I have kept the faith*" (2 Tim. 4:7).

Paul's marathon race was almost over. If indeed he was the author of Hebrews, as many ripe Bible scholars believe he was, then there is even more of a special significance to the words of Hebrews 12:1-4:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin (Heb. 12:1-4).

Note the word "*race*" near the close of Hebrews 12:1. It is the Greek word agona, which is the root of the word (agonizomai) we have noticed throughout this chapter. The agony of the marathon was about over. The finish line was in sight. The ancient worthies mentioned in Hebrews 11, were cheering encouragement to finish the race.

But the greatest encouragement of all to keep striving for the finish line was the person waiting at the finish line, Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith! After His cross, there was a crown. Likewise, having finished his course (2 Tim. 4:7) Paul could write,

Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

Paul knew that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed hereafter (Rom. 8:18). He knew that this world is full of affliction, but when measured against the joys of the world to come, “*Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*” (2 Cor. 4:17)!

Conclusion

During the Great Depression, W. Oliver Cooper had himself a real “*Daddy’s Girl.*” He loved his sweet little girl with all of his being. When his little girl was two years old his wife died. He was lonely, but did the best he could to raise his daughter on his own. You can imagine the intensity of his grief when his daughter also died!

Mr. Cooper became a very angry and bitter man, and he was not bashful to express his bitterness toward God. One day, on the verge of a nervous breakdown, he longed to die. He fell on his bed and wept, crying

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out, “*God, it’s just not worth it.*” As he cried this out over and over, it suddenly dawned upon him that one day Heaven will ease all of the struggles of this life, and that as hard as this life can be, Heaven will be worth it all. With this as his theme, he wrote this hymn:

Often I’m hindered on my way
Burdened so heavy I almost fall
Then I hear Jesus sweetly say
Heaven will surely be worth it all
Many the trials, toils and tears
Many a heartache may here appall
But the dear Lord so truly says
Heaven will surely be worth it all
Toiling and pain I will endure
Till I shall hear the death angel call
Jesus has promised and I’m sure
Heaven will surely be worth it all
Heaven will surely be worth it all
Worth all the sorrows that here be-fall
After this life with all its strife
Heaven will surely be worth it all!

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