

UNTIL HE COMES

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being the

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PREFACE

Every Christian is one who “waits for the coming of his king.”

Jesus promised that He would return (John 14:3). The angels also declared, “This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Peter declares that “The day of the Lord will come like a thief and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up” (II Peter 3:10).

How shall we live, then, as we await the return of our Lord? This is the burning question which every Christian asks and seeks to answer in his everyday choices and decisions throughout his life.

The Lectureship committee has chosen as the theme of this year’s Lectureship program “Until He Comes.” It is the sincere desire of this committee that this Lectureship program serve to focus our attention on the importance of daily Christian living. This volume is sent forth with the sincere hope that each one who reads its contents will be brought closer to Him who has gone to prepare for us a place and will return to receive us to Himself.

CARL BRECHEEN
Lectureship Director

Main Speeches

Seeking the Lost

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Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and

the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:1-7, RSV)

Seeking the lost is the most important work in the entire world. It is more important than securing peace in the Middle East, more important than solving the energy crisis, more important than curbing inflation, more important than reducing unemployment, more important than our own physical lives. Paul even saw seeking the lost as more important to him than his own salvation if, by losing his own soul, he could have saved the souls of the Israelites. He said in Romans 9:1-3:

I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race.

When we place the same value which Paul did on reaching out to the lost, we will clearly see that it is the greatest work in the world.

I want to show why seeking the lost is the most significant work on earth and then show how this truth should influence every one of our lives.

The Most Important Work in the World

In the first place, seeking the lost is the most important work in the world because it springs from the very nature of God. What is the nature of God? We do not have time to develop a complete answer to this question, but it is possible for us to describe some aspects of the God who created the heavens and the earth. We notice first of all that God is merciful and just. In Exodus 34:6-7, the Bible says,

The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Our God is merciful, but he is also just.

Knowing of God's goodness and purity helps us appreciate the next insight into his nature. In II Peter 3:9, the Scriptures say, "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." Our God, who is so merciful that he forgives and yet so just that he cannot overlook sin, does not wish that any person should perish.

This leads us to a very logical conclusion borne out by biblical history. Our God is a seeking God. He was a seeking God when he destined Jesus, before the foundation of the world, to die for our sins (I Peter 1:18-20). He was a seeking God when he promised to bruise the head of the serpent in Genesis 3:15. When he saved Noah and his house (I Peter 3:20), and when he called Abraham (Genesis 12), he was seeking lost mankind. He was seeking the lost when he founded the Hebrew nation and when he brought them out of Egyptian bondage. When he made Israel to be a light to the nations and when he reached out to man through Jesus Christ, our God was a seeking God. The apostle Paul beautifully describes what God did for mankind in II Corinthians 5:17-21:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you in behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

There is no doubt that God has always reached out to man. John confirms this loving concern when he says, "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (I John 4:10). Since God has always sought the lost, can we do less than he?

In the second place, seeking the lost is the most important work in the world because it springs from the nature of Jesus' ministry. Jesus said that he came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). When he was accused of receiving sinners, he described the nature of his work as that of seeking the lost (Luke 15:1-7). The Old Testament prophecy concerning Jesus and his work describes in detail that his work was a work of seeking the lost.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:4-6).

When we look carefully at the ministry of Jesus, we are led to say with the apostle Paul, "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners . . ." (I Timothy 1:15).

In the third place, seeking the lost is the most important work in the world because it springs from the nature of man's need. Let us notice five very important points concerning man. First of all, he was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). Secondly, because of sin, man's condition changed. The image of God became sullied and not one righteous man was to be found on the face of the earth.

As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one

does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood, in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they do not know." "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:10-18).

Thirdly, man is lost and cannot find his way. Jeremiah the prophet explains this in Jeremiah 10:23, saying, "I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps."

Fourthly, fallen and wayward man is accountable for his sins. The apostle Paul writes in II Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body."

Fifthly, since man has sinned, is lost, and is accountable for his iniquities, he must have help to escape the eternal judgment of God, for judgment is surely coming as Jesus says,

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment (John 5:28-29).

When we learn how man was in the beginning, then discover what sin has done to him, and finally face the chilling fact that he is accountable for his transgressions, we can understand why seeking the lost is the most important work there is.

In the sixth place, seeking the lost is the most important work in the world because it springs from the very

nature of love. In Matthew 7:12, Jesus tells us how we are to treat each other: "So whatever you wish that man would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." Can we obey this great command to treat others the way we want to be treated and refuse to seek the lost? Absolutely not. We are reminded of the story of the four lepers in II Kings 7, during the terrible siege of Samaria. Food had virtually disappeared. Just how critical that siege became is seen in the story of the two women who made a pact that each would kill a child on two different days. The two women would eat the first child's flesh until it was gone. Later, they would kill the other woman's baby and eat it. When starvation reaches that point, things are critical.

The prophet had promised that the situation would change drastically and that there would be plenty of food, but there were few people, if any, who believed what the prophet said. The Scriptures tell us that the army which had laid siege to Samaria heard a noise and was convinced that it was the noise of an army gathering to destroy them. In panic the Syrian army fled, leaving behind all of its food and equipment. Four lepers were sitting at the gate of Samaria, not knowing what to do and not knowing that the enemy army had fled. Convinced that it was useless for them to sit at the gate of the city and die, they decided to look for mercy from the Syrians. These four wretched creatures made their way to the Syrian camp. When they got there, to their utter surprise, the army had disappeared.

The four men began to gorge themselves. They ate until they could eat no more. They drank until they could drink no more, and the Scriptures say that they carried off the silver, gold, and clothing and hid them. Finally, they came to themselves and said, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news. If we are

silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come. Let us go and tell the king's household."

These four lepers realized that it was wrong to know something which other people needed to know and not tell them. It was wrong to possess something which other people so desperately needed to possess and not share it with them. Surely that is the way it is with the gospel. How can we who claim to love others as we love ourselves know of the great and good promises of almighty God, know of the condition of lost humanity, know of the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, and not share that news with those who are lost.

I believe that the case has been made for the truth that seeking the lost is the most important work in all the world. This truth, however, is a dynamic truth. When believed, it changes people and it changes churches.

We Must Reach Out

Since seeking the lost is the most important work in the world, here is what we must do about it. First of all, we must give seeking the lost top priority. I learned a lesson from a mechanic a few months ago. He had just moved into a new garage. He did not have very much in the garage. Prior to that he had had a shop in another location and for a time even did his automobile repair work in the driveway of his home. On this particular day, as I visited his new shop, he explained to me that he had not moved all of his new equipment to the new location. Explaining to me why he had not taken time to move everything from the other two locations he said to me, "Money comes first. I can move those things when I don't have any customers needing work done on their cars." I thought to myself when he said that, that here

was a man who knew how to establish priorities. He knew how to keep his life from becoming cluttered with competing and conflicting goals. I wish we could say the same about ourselves.

We must give seeking the lost top priority in our own personal lives. Many things keep us from doing this. Our jobs shove seeking the lost into the background. Our hobbies sometimes blind us to that primary responsibility. Our inhibitions and our fears keep us from seeking the lost. Sometimes our very limited circle of acquaintances stymies our efforts to save souls. There is a tendency among us, the longer we remain in the church, to become more and more involved with each other and less and less involved with those people in the world who need to be saved. We must break through this barrier. This summer, Jane and I took a campaign group to Brazil. While there, I had the opportunity to preach to a small congregation of about 25 or 30 people which met in a kitchen out on the east side of Sao Paulo. For me, it was the high point of the summer. That congregation was built almost singlehandedly by a Brazilian man named Abramo Lucarelli, who is an elder of the Nove de Julho church in Sao Paulo. He is one of the most amazing men I have ever met. He is a man who refuses to be hedged in by jobs, hobbies, inhibitions, limited acquaintances, or any other barrier to reaching out to lost people. I asked him what he was doing to make contacts in that part of the city. He told me that each day on his way to work he observed the people who were standing at the bus stops waiting for the long bus ride into the center of the city. He said to me, "Since I have to pass through the center of the city anyway to get to my job, I decided that I would begin offering rides to people that I thought might be interested in the gospel. You know, every Brazilian wants a ride so that he won't have

to go to work on the bus. I offer the person a ride and then I evangelize him all the way to the center of the city." This kind of dedication and this kind of commitment is absolutely necessary if we make seeking the lost the top priority in our own personal lives.

We must also give seeking the lost the top priority in our families. The disintegration of the home is largely the result of false priorities. Mothers and fathers, your main work is not to seek your own happiness. Neither is it that of furthering your own careers. It is not putting food on the table for your children, and it is not giving them a college education. Your main job is seeking the souls of your children and pointing them toward heaven. One of the greatest mission fields in the world today is the American home. The greatest evangelists for bringing the lost to Christ within the home are mothers and fathers who put God first. Because they put him first, they naturally seek the eternal good of their children.

If we give seeking the lost top priority, it will also have an effect on the church. So many churches have lost sight of what should be their number one task. So many times our churches are concerned about things which hardly concern the heart of God. If we put evangelism, seeking the lost, as our number one priority, there will be some changes in our churches. The College Church of Christ in Oklahoma City is one of the greatest churches in our brotherhood. I do not know of any church anywhere with a better eldership than that congregation has. But the elders are concerned that they are giving too much of their time to taking care of the material aspects of the church's program. They are concerned that they are not giving time to the cure of souls. At the present time, they are in the midst of a reorganization which has as its number one goal that of enabling the church to

seek the lost in a better way than it has ever done before. If seeking the lost is the important work, surely it deserves first place in our individual lives, in our homes, and in the local churches.

In the second place, since seeking the lost is the most important work in the world, we must encourage our most capable thinkers to plan strategies for reaching the unsaved. Jesus insists that we use our brains. In Matthew 10:16, he said to his disciples, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." Jesus expects us to use our intelligence to the maximum of our ability. But how we hate to do it. The church in Corinth is a classic example of a church which really did not desire to think. There were problems of lawsuits in that church and rather than put themselves through the rigors of thinking, studying, evaluating, and passing judgment to keep those lawsuits out of the secular courts, they preferred to put their minds in neutral and let pagan judges decide questions that the Holy Spirit said people in the church should be deciding.

When I say that we should encourage the most capable thinkers we have to plan strategies for reaching the lost, I am talking about men and women who can, as Bob Carpenter says, first identify the lost and then identify *with* them. I am afraid that in the church we do not think very much about how to reach lost people. In almost any discussion of methods for reaching out to a lost world, we receive as answers to our queries such statements as, "Door knocking is the way to do it." "Busing children is the way to do it." "The Bible school is the way to do it." These automatic responses may be entirely too simple. Surely, they are not universally applicable. I think of the phenomenal growth of certain other religious groups. I do not believe that they are

more intelligent than we, but I do believe they are out-thinking us. Their growth is coming about because there are people in those religious groups who are using their heads. They are thinking, and that's what we must do if we want to reach the lost. My suggestion is that every local church across the land choose out from among it a group of people whose objective is to devise a strategy for seeking the lost in their community. What will work in one community will not necessarily work in another community. Our approach should not be to bind a uniform method on the entire brotherhood. Our approach should be to study the needs of the area where we are working and devise a strategy for reaching that neighborhood. Such a carefully tailored strategy may be different from the strategy used anywhere else in the world, but that is all right if it is scriptural and if it works. We need to encourage our brightest minds to accept the challenge of reaching the lost.

In the third place, since seeking the lost is the most important work in the world, we must outgrow our regionalism and nationalism and see the needs of a lost world. Let us never forget that Jesus once and for all raised our sights so that we can never be content with just reaching out to our own little neighborhood. Jesus raised our sights and focused our vision on a world which is lost. He said to his apostles in Matthew 28:19-20:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.

Our task is to reach an entire world. It is not just to reach

Texas or Oklahoma or Arkansas. Our mission is to reach the entire world. Bro. J. M. McCaleb said it so well when he wrote,

Of one the Lord has made the race, Thro' one has
come the fall;
Where sin has gone must go His grace: The gospel is
for all.

Say not the heathen are at home, Beyond we have
no call,
For why should we be blest alone? The gospel is
for all.

To focus on our local congregation and forget the needs of other regions of America, to focus on America and forget the needs of the world is to neglect and disobey the words of Jesus and the example of the early church. Jesus said to the apostles in Acts 1:8: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." The interesting thing is that within about 30 short years after Jesus made that statement, the job had been done (Colossians 1:6, 23).

Have we done our job in our generation? If not, do we have a right to quit until the job is finished? Absolutely not. Jesus forever lifted our sights, he forever focused our vision on a lost world. I don't know about you, brethren, but I don't plan to let anybody or anything take my eyes off of that lost world. The Lord being my helper, neither famine, nor disease, nor depression, nor aging, nor inflation, nor war, nor politics, nor fatigue is ever going to take my eyes off of that world which Jesus says we must evangelize.

In the fourth place, since seeking the lost is the most important work in the world, we must be willing to suffer to accomplish our task. Paul was a realist and he knew that suffering was a part of seeking the lost. In II Timothy 1:8, he said to Timothy, "Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but take your share of suffering for the gospel in the power of God." In II Timothy 2:3, 8-10, he again said to Timothy:

Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus . . . Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel, the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal. But the word of God is not fettered. Therefore I endured everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which in Christ Jesus goes with eternal glory.

Paul knew that suffering had to be a part of seeking the lost. He didn't tell Timothy to try to avoid it. He didn't tell Timothy to give up on his ministry because there was going to be some pain associated with it. What Paul said was, "You take your share of suffering."

Peter said almost the same thing in I Peter 4:12-13:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

Yes, suffering is something that we do not like to do. I

don't like to do it. I never have enjoyed suffering. I don't look forward to suffering. In many ways I am a coward when suffering is involved. Too many of us are like a Bud Abbott and Lou Costello movie which I saw many years ago. The picture was filmed during World War II. Bud Abbott was singing in a restaurant. The song he was singing was a song of patriotism. I don't remember all of the words of that song, but it seems that at least one line of it went like this: "I'd give my blood, I'd give my life, I'd give my all for the U.S.A." While he was singing, a man in uniform walked up and handed him a letter. He opened the letter as he continued to sing. When he looked at the letter, his voice trembled in fear. The letter was from the President of the United States advising him that he had been drafted into the United States Army.

We talk about seeking the lost, but we don't like to think about suffering. Churches in the United States which are surrounded on Sundays by expensive automobiles, and have plans for great additions to their present facilities, tremble and quake at the thought of possibly having to suffer financially in order to keep a missionary or two on the field. I wish I could say that the missionaries are different from their congregations. I was a missionary for some 16 years. I know that as a human being there were times when I was not ready to suffer. Missionaries who are on the field must learn to suffer and bear pain in order to reach the lost.

In January of 1956, five young men were slaughtered by the Auca Indians in Ecuador as they tried to make an approach to preach the gospel to that savage tribe. The whole world received the news of their deaths and wondered why young men so talented, so brilliant, with such outstanding futures, would choose to die in an Ecuadorian jungle attempting to preach to Indians who had no desire to hear the message. The answer was found

later in a diary which one of the young men had left behind. He had written, "God himself set the pattern, and if he did not hold back his own Son, why should we hold back our own little lives for the sake of security? We are — and must always be — expendable."

Since seeking the lost is the most important work in the world, of necessity we must do more than talk of its glories. We must be men and women who are ready to give up everything in order to seek those who are hopelessly lost.

Conclusion

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." (Luke 15:1-7, RSV)

Yes, that is the way heaven feels about seeking the lost. It is the most important work in the world.

My Father's Business

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This lecture is not intended to be an exegesis of any passage of scripture in which Jesus referred to his commitment to his "Father's business." There are resources available for such studies, and you are

encouraged to follow your desire for further knowledge through these materials.

The aim of the lecture is to awaken our sonship responsibilities toward the earliest possible conception of (1) a spiritual relationship to our Father, (2) a desire for righteous maturity in our divinely assigned roles, (3) an awareness that serving God can enable us to face life at peace, and (4) a confident trust that at the termination of our human existence God's grace will receive what we commend to him in the name of his kingdom's business.

Early Recognition of Spiritual Values

What spiritually sensitive parent has looked at a child—asleep, at play, in sorrow, or in simple creative achievement—and not inquired within, “What will my child become?” Mary and Joseph must have asked this question often. The poet Wordsworth describes the child as the “father of the man,” pointing to the need to instill spiritual values as early as possible.

Have you ever wished that the Holy Spirit had revealed more about the childhood of Jesus as a guide? The leap in scripture from the infant Jesus to the twelve year old boy in the temple leaves a void. There is little written about the interim period other than some fascinating legends and a few absurd conjectures passed off as literary efforts in the apocryphal writings. The Bible omits any references to the boyhood of Jesus. Other than the presentation of Jesus in the temple eight days after his birth (Luke 2:21-39), the family's flight to Egypt when Herod threatened him (Matthew 2:13-14), and the eventual return to Nazareth (Matthew 2:19-23), we are left to speculate about his earliest years. Luke wrote only the brief comment, “and the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace

of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40), and then moved to a reference to the family's annual journey to Jerusalem for Passover (Luke 2:41-50). This event culminated in Jesus' loving rebuke to his anxious parents, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49), or as the King James Version translates, "about my Father's business."

We can only guess at the impact Jesus' question had on Joseph and Mary. The vital issue, however, is not the phraseology of the translation or the impact on his parents, but rather the precocious concept which Jesus shared with them. It was not one of pride in himself, but simple recognition of his purpose in life, a rare trait that we should be encouraging in our children.

About the only modern parallel we as parents can draw to this incident is the moment when a child reveals the desire to be baptized. Our response depends on the quality of family life and devotion of parents to each other. The spirit-led parents will surely offer a prayer of thanksgiving that the "Father's business" is about to add a new partner. Ideally, one would hope that arms of loving compassion would enfold the child as the parents calmly attempt to determine the depth of awareness without appearing to question sincerity.

On the other hand, where one mate is not devoting attention to being a spiritual model and the other has struggled alone, that moment can be more than a little awkward. How can the disunited husband and wife join together in equal joy at the child's interest in beginning a Christian life? In rare instances, the neglectful father or mother may be reclaimed for the glory of Christ, or perhaps the call for parental help to make the decision may mend an estrangement between husband and wife. In that sense, ". . . a little child" has led a wolf to "life with the lamb," i.e. closer to Christ (Isaiah 11:6).

Too frequently, however, a child may delay any interest in beginning a new life in Christ because of parental discord over spiritual values. The growing child sees a conflict of interest in the parental roles in that all other matters being equal in terms of an acceptable family life, the real values of spiritual commitment are not shared by the parents. The "Father's business" is obviously not the prime loyalty in the life of an otherwise loved father or mother. This may produce tension and guilt for the child who wants to be obedient to Christ, yet fears to alienate the unspiritual parent any further. In that case, the parent who struggles alone to model godly behavior may suffer anxiety for the child who appears indifferent to following the spiritual example that has been set.

The "Father's business" also suffers from another reaction. Those parents whose concept of Christian duty lies solely in mechanical worship assembly attendance, with no growth "in the grace and knowledge" of the Lord, are ill at ease at the announced interest of their children in being baptized. They are uncomfortable because of their quandary over how to speak to the values involved in the intention of their children. A typical reaction includes anything from simplistic agreement to calling in the local minister for evaluation.

Because of the significant intangibles that perplexed Joseph and Mary, some diversity would be natural between Jesus' awareness at age twelve and that of modern boys and girls of the same age. The chasm between Jesus' parents and some parents today seems much greater. Joseph and Mary "did not understand what he (Jesus) was saying to them," but they maintained a family faith which continued to influence a spiritually growing son "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." There is an uncomfortably

well-founded suspicion, however, that for some modern parents and families, *attendance at* worship assemblies is equated with *attention to* maturing spiritual values.

In reality,

. . . the progress of the church consists in absorbing more and more of Christ, in understanding Him better, and becoming more and more moulded (*sic*) by His influence.

Although early spiritual values for children are certainly aided by excellent Bible class teachers, motivational evangelists, and influential members of his Christian peer group, the father/mother models in home and family living rank among the most influential factors, either positive or negative. Jesus' respectful question to his anxious parents assumes that he was practicing what they had been nurturing in him.

Ongoing Fulfillment in Spiritual Progress

Later during the ministry of Jesus we read about his encounter with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4:4-26). The conversation ended with her return to her village minus her water jar, but with "living water." The Lord's disciples returned from that village in time to witness the closing of their conversation, and in addition to their surprise over the questionable circumstance, they were perplexed about his seeming indifference toward the food they brought to nourish him. He accounted for this with another gentle rebuke by saying, "My food . . . is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34). The Master's disciples had broken custom and dealt with Samaritan food

merchants, which was practical business. Jesus dealt with one Samaritan woman who would soon bring the whole town out to see him, and that was the "Father's business."

How quickly disciples, then as now, forget that "blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). For the same reason Jesus forgot his fatigue and hunger, the Samaritan woman forgot her water jar. The "Father's business" *will* obscure both the cares and routines of life to which we so frequently give most of our attention.

Now, let's relate this biblical narrative to present-day relationships. Humanism at best has little comprehension of the real life-sustaining elements. Without "the gift of God," people trudge from one wearying job to the next, anxious about what they will eat and drink, how they will be clothed and sheltered, unaware that even the birds and the flowers of the field are cared for by the Father. Non-Christians still seek after material things as though no one in this self-seeking world cared for them.

Urged by the most clever advertising techniques man can devise, they throw themselves at life in frenzied anticipation of "gusto" before the conclusion of their once-around-the-world lap. Self-denial is regarded as synonymous with senility, and Browning's memorable line, ". . . the best is yet to be," is thought to be a mask for boredom—that plague of ageing, useless years. Their prodigal instincts, longing to be free, cry, "Untie the restraints and let youth taste of the good life."

Because humanism has become so infected by hedonism, people carry their "jars of water" while striking for shorter work weeks and more pay, feeling that the "Father's business" is for economically

depressed lower classes who can't afford the finer things of life.

John Vassar once spoke to a lady about her soul, and the lady told her husband of what he had said. "I should have told him," said her husband, "to mind his own business." "If you had been there," said the lady, "you would have thought it was his business." 2

Modern life is a treadmill of speed without destination, trans-Atlantic communications with meaningless connection, outer-space vehicles sent to lifeless planets, computer technology minus any moral responsibility, and pharmaceutical research products which dull ethical judgment. George Buttrick once wrote about the impressions of an eastern observer in our western culture:

You call your thousand material devices "labor-saving machinery," yet you are forever "busy." With the multiplying of your machinery you grow increasingly fatigued, anxious, nervous, dissatisfied. Whatever you have, you want more; and wherever you are, you want to go somewhere else. You have a machine to dig the raw material for you . . . , a machine to manufacture (it) . . . , a machine to transport (it) . . . , a machine to sweep and dust, one to carry messages, one to write, one to talk, one to sing, one to play at the theater, one to vote, one to sew . . . and a hundred others to do a hundred other things for you, and still you are the most nervously busy man in the world . . . Your devices are neither time-saving nor soul-saving machinery. They are so many sharp spurs which urge you on to invent more machinery and to do more business.³

The “meat” of humanism is to do one’s *own* will, to become consenting adults who can practice moral individuality. This has led to social exploitations that exceed the wildest abuses in history. Its real accomplishments have been more detoxification centers, more clinics for the mentally ill, more and crowded penal institutions, less education in basic skills under the name of openness, less regard for the sanctity of newborn life, less concern and compassion for the ageing. It appears, to borrow a popular advertising phrase, that we are getting “more for less.” In language too clear to be misunderstood, however, Paul wrote to believers in Rome; and to believers of all ages:

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature (Romans 13:13, 14).

So we must ask what is being accomplished by people who claim loyalty to the “Father’s business”? There is more to the Christian life than merely rejecting the impulse toward destructive behavior. Growth in the quest for mature development in the likeness of Christ requires commitment to *creative living*.

Creative living is defined not be economic well-being, prestige, longevity, or convenience, but by a dedication to fellowship with the Father and usefulness to him as vessels of honor. We simply cannot be indifferent to the only lasting alternative life style. Godly life will do more to contribute toward eternal awareness and fulfillment than we may ever know until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This business of our Father is wider in scope than most church programs reflect. When we as spiritual people shed our upper middle class mentality, refuse to allow church involvement to be limited to high-pressure campaigns, and balance our centers of attention between the core cities and the everwidening suburban edges, our message and example will air to a prime-time audience.

We are uncomfortable with the truth in Harvey Seifert's evaluation:

Contemporary churchmen have low visibility because, chameleon-like, they have taken on the protective coloration of their environment. With a religion derived from culture rather than Christ, they are conspicuously inconspicuous. If they are to be true to the demands of modernity and of their religious calling, churchmen must now adopt a pattern of life more adequate and creative than is customary. Such a life-style will involve radical renovation for some. As sensitivity increases it will require considerable change for all.⁴

The Spirit has been quenched and many of our spirits are dried up, but the Father's business involves risk—even for those with a single talent. Do we need to be reminded that burying the Master's trust and returning it uninvested and unriskened results in his outraged disapproval?

We are not entrusted with a *thing*. We are stewards of the "life and immortality (brought) to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). No believer's life is fulfilled if he starves both himself and others. Our "meat" is also to do the Father's will. Only spiritually fed people can attract the malnourished to the King's feast. Some will not honor the invitation for the same reasons pointed out in the Lord's parable (Matthew 22); some will try to

enjoy the feast without true commitment; but those who do come, and dedicate themselves to the unexpected transformation from street-walking to dining with the King, will bear the news to all nations!

Peace from Labor Expended

In the garden of Gethsemane, the lonely figure of Jesus prayed. In part his prayer was an evaluation. Present and imminent anguish aside, he humbly and gratefully said to his Father, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4).

Some of today's efficiency technicians would have disagreed with Jesus' assessment. They would have fed the data into their computers and read the evaluations in negatives. Crowds have fallen off; temple dignitaries have been offended; rulers planned arrest charges; the closest followers of Jesus were vexed by fears and anxieties; one of the Lord's own men was even negotiating a betrayal. How could any man in his right mind say his work as God's representative had resulted in glory to the Father or completion of a divine mission? The "Father's business" was surely *not* concluding on a note of success!

This would not be the first or last time technology was mistaken about the constitution of achievement. Statistics often share the same dilemma. As an honorary chaplain to one of our state legislative assemblies, there was an undergirding suspicion that the services rendered in the name of respectability were like the preface to a book which was already accepted for publication—ceremonial rather than scientific. But the prayers of Jesus were *not* ceremonial to events already locked into

his Father's undissuadable will. You will remember the drawing of Peter's sword in the garden when soldiers came to arrest Jesus. The Lord spoke the truth when he said he could call on his Father, and he would at once put at His disposal more than twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53). This was spoken *after* Jesus had accomplished his mission, and after he had submitted to his Father's will rather than his own.

Jesus was at peace with his Father and himself because he had revealed the Father to many who subsequently obeyed the message of God through the Son (John 17:6). Not everyone had trusted and submitted to the revelation of Jesus. Even one of his intimates was doomed to destruction after being privileged to know and respond to what he learned. Yet, Jesus possessed that "peace of God which transcends all understanding," and keeps our "hearts and minds" in the divine will (Philippians 4:7).

In the grand labor with God, we are not to define achievement in terms of majority consent. Like our brother, Paul, we are commissioned to make known to everyone the administration of the mystery that Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:9, 6).

Only as we dedicate ourselves to this business of our Father will we face our own hours of trial with a peaceful sense of accomplishment. The one-sentence obituary for which we must strive is the principle accorded to David: "For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep" (Acts 13:36).

On that basis, we *must* be about the ongoing business of our Lord God. The trivial, distracting preoccupations with earthly concerns cannot be allowed to co-exist by some strategic arms limitation treaty between the

kingdoms of darkness and light. Congregations should not be reduced to corporate enterprises whose function is seen as hiring and/or firing a paid staff. The "ministry of reconciliation" is not fulfilled until it is the pervasive spirit in the life of every believer!

Some congregations are in trouble because they are burdened with finance-fearful officers and egocentric preachers who equate attendance with achievement, meeting the budget with accomplishment, and pulpit magnetism with excellence. The alternative, however, is *not* to be indifferent or heedless toward these external barometric readings. The alternative is to channel the mentality of Christians into a service image where we can *exercise* what we learn from the holy word of God (Romans 12:1-2; Hebrews 5:14).

Unless we analyze our body-life needs as members, slogans and high-powered campaigns will insult the general public. Sporadic drives, bussing, and door-to-door gospel sales pitches are sometimes as irrelevant to the internal "righteousness, peace, and joy of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17) as some commercially gilded ads are irrelevant to the product worth they proclaim.

The peace our Father desires for all his children is a peace that comes *after* efforts on his behalf are risked in the market place of God's world. It is a peace that is not available in worldly circumstances, just as the appreciative knowledge of the Holy Spirit is not perceived by the world at large (John 14:17, 27).

Final Commitment to Grace

The impact of the last statement Jesus cried aloud from the cross belongs to all Christians: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). The

business of the Father was returned in person, not by a servant who had buried it in fear of his master's stern expectations, but by a Son who knew his Father had entrusted a stewardship that was to be carried out faithfully "to death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).

We know instinctively that our decision-making processes are marked by tension, fear, and struggles between self-will and God's will for us. Though the Holy Spirit has not recorded every event which pitted Jesus against decisions, it is not irreverent to assume that he faced these same struggles while being "tempted in every way, just as we are . . ." (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus believed in his Father's business, which is to justify us by grace. If we also believe that (1) our sins keep a gulf between us and any fellowship with God, (2) the atoning death of Jesus builds the bridge of forgiveness for whoever believes, (3) such amazing grace demands the all-or-nothing response of our faith, (4) we are privileged to be co-workers with our Lord in continuing the Father's business as proclaimers of the good news, and (5) this is the decision of Spirit-led people who are compelled to implore others to "be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20), we, too, will commit ourselves into the living, everlasting arms of divine grace.

Freedom from the condemnation of our sins has been achieved by the Son (John 8:36; Romans 8:1,2), yet he would never have achieved this freedom out of disregard for his Father's just law against sinful behavior. It was humanity that was weak and powerless, not God's law of death for sin. Christ did not come to balance society, but to save a "crooked and depraved generation" (Philippians 2:15).

We are faced with the decision to be or not to be

committed to the ongoing business of our Lord. Christ makes it very clear that there is no middle ground: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters" (Luke 11:23). Unless we die to ourselves, and are raised into life in Christ and Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20)—we have no spirits to commit into the Father's hands when we meet with our appointed time to die. What is there to commit to the Lord in death if we have committed ourselves to a life style of trivia? We need to have his reason for life before we can accept his reassurance at death.

Think of those two sorrowing and perplexed disciples traveling to Emmaus on the resurrection day of Jesus. They did not recognize the Master when he joined them on their journey, but as Jesus reminded them of the prophetic fulfillment which explained the empty tomb, their eyes and hearts were opened to his identity. "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us" (Luke 24:32)?

G.H. Morrison comments:

Christ does not startle us with unexpected novelties; he touches with glory what is quite familiar. It is the familiar experiences that He explains. It is the familiar cravings that He satisfies. It is the familiar thoughts which have filled the mind since childhood that he expands into undreamed of fulness. We have known what sin was since we were at school. Christ meets us and talks about our sin—and we learn that sin is more exceedingly sinful than we had ever thought in our most reproachful moments; we learn, too, that He died that we might be forgiven, and that there is pardon for our worst, this very hour. We have known what pain was and we have

known what death was, and we have known that there was a heaven and a God; but when Christ meets us as we travel by the way and talks to us of these familiar things, there is such promise and light and love about them all that everything becomes new.⁵

That is what modern discipleship needs—more burning hearts because of our encounters with Christ in the business of his kingdom, and less heartburn from the excessive preoccupation with anxieties. Muckrakers, like the character depicted in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, never see above ground level. There is a "crown of righteousness" for those who set their minds above (Colossians 3:1,2; 2 Timothy 4:8). Unless we are committed to the business of our Father, however, the higher spirit in us cannot be enlightened and fortified by the eternal Spirit of the words of our Lord.

FOOTNOTES

1. Maclaren, Alexander, *With Christ In The Upper Room*, Baker, 1956, p. 131
2. Thorne, Henry, *Notable Sayings Of The Great Teacher*, Sterling, 1893, p. 65
3. Buttrick, George A., *The Parables Of Jesus*, Harper & Brothers, 1928, p. 134
4. Seifert, Harvey, *Power Where The Action Is*, Westminster, 1968, p. 26
5. Morrison, George Herbert, *The Unlighted Lustre*, Armstrong, 1905, p. 140

HOMESICK FOR HEAVEN

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My grandparents migrated to Oklahoma territory soon after the Cherokee Strip was opened in 1901. They came from West Virginia with several other families. My grandmother used to tell me how it was when they first

came to that wild, unsettled country. It was hard. It was lonely. They got homesick — very homesick. Settlers lived in sod shanties and dugouts. There were no roads — no fences. There were no trees — no streams. Barren, treeless plains of the West were a far cry from the well-watered, tree-covered hills of West Virginia. They were homesick. The neighbors would get together and share their loneliness. They would sing about *Those West Virginia Hills Where I Was Born*. Big burly men would cry. They would talk of home and share every bit of news they had received. Things which reminded them of home would be put in a prominent place in their crude sod shanty. They were homesick.

Recently I became grandfather again. During the time the baby was tiny, we had the privilege of keeping the other two grandchildren. Bobby, the three-year-old, was with me in the pickup one afternoon. We were having a good time talking about things he liked — cows, basketball, pickups, and Dairy Queens. All at once, he got quiet. He didn't say anything for a long time. I finally asked him, "Bobby, what are you thinking about?" He looked a lonely stare into space and said, "Mommy and Daddy." He was homesick — oh so homesick. He was being a "big boy" and not complaining, but he wanted to see his Mommy and Daddy.

Every Fall at ACU, there is an epidemic of sickness. It gets students down, they can't study. They're dissatisfied. They complain about the dorms, the food, and the weather. It sometimes gets so bad they have to go home. They want to see their folks. They miss their friends. They miss all of their familiar places. They want to go home. They are homesick.

The poet plucked the right heartstrings when he wrote:

No more from that cottage again will I roam;

Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.
Home, home, sweet, sweet home!
There's no place like home, oh there's no place like home!

The early Christians were sky watchers. They were always looking for Jesus to come in the clouds. You remember the account of Jesus' ascension, don't you?

And as they were gazing intently into the sky while he was departing, behold two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched him go into heaven. (Acts 1:10-11)

They believed the promise. They waited and watched. They cherished the promise that Jesus made the last week of his ministry.

. . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:2-3)

They felt like foreigners in a strange land. Heaven was their home. They might have a native land — but heaven was their homeland. They might live in a hovel or a palace — but that was not their home. Heaven was their home. Paul expressed it like this:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 3:20)

The early Christians often got homesick. When it seemed that evil would win, they would want to go home where truth always triumphed. When trials and persecution robbed life of its joy, they would want to go home to be with Jesus. Particularly when they would witness death of loved ones — they wanted to go home where none would never die again.

Paul wrote a comforting message to Christians at Thessalonica who had experienced the death of loved ones.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus . . . For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words. (I Thessalonians 4:14, 16-18)

When Jesus comes — those who have died in Christ will be with him. Won't that be wonderful? It makes you want to watch the sky — morning, noon, and night. It makes you want to sing that wonderful song: *Jesus Is Coming Soon*.

Troubles will soon be o'er, happy forevermore;
When we meet on that shore free from all care;
Rising up in the sky; telling this world goodby
Homeward we then will fly, glory to share.

Jesus is coming soon, morning or night or noon,
Many will meet their doom, trumpets will sound.

All of the dead shall rise, righteous meet in the skies
Going where no one dies, heavenward bound.

Amen and Amen! Christians are sky watchers!

New Testament writers were homesick for heaven!
This is reflected in their writings.

In the last epistle Paul wrote —, in the last chapter, he expressed this homesickness.

. . . the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future [now hear this] there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. (II Timothy 4:6-8)

Paul was soon to die — but he did not dread it. He knew that death was the gate to glory. He was ready to be offered. He was ready to see Jesus. He was ready to go home.

In the last chapter of the Bible and next to the last verse, we have this prayer. "Come, Lord Jesus." The whole text reads like this:

He [that is, Jesus], who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' (Revelation 22:20)

You can almost hear John respond to this promise by a hearty "AMEN!" He then prays, "Come, Lord Jesus."

James, in the last chapter of his epistle, is trying to give comfort to those who were suffering persecution. He encourages them to endure with patience because Jesus is coming.

Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of

the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too, be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (James 5:7-8)

Have you noticed that there are not many songs being written about heaven lately? Have you wondered why? Perhaps it is because, "we have never had it so good." Heaven songs are written during times of trials and persecution. That's when Christians get homesick. If we learn to love the world and the things of the world, we forget the love of the Father. We like this world so much, we don't long for heaven. As tragic as it might seem, world-loving Christians might need a depression, an oppression, a persecution, or a bloody war to make us homesick for heaven.

Perhaps the most homesick statement in all of the New Testament is that found in II Peter 3:10-13. Open your Bible to that passage.

What is the context? This is Peter's last epistle. This is the last chapter. Peter, the old man, knew that the time for "putting off this tabernacle" was drawing near. He wanted to share the good news of getting to go home. It made no difference to him if the road home meant martyrdom. Tradition says he was crucified upside down. He could rejoice in the pain and the shame if it meant "getting to Jesus." Like a soldier coming home from war, his thoughts were at home. Like a child returning from a summer camp, he could hardly wait to get home. Peter was homesick and wanted the world to know.

In this chapter, Peter has been refuting false teachers who scoffed at the coming of Jesus. They were saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" "For ever since

the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation" (v. 4). Peter refutes them. There were scoffers when the flood destroyed the earth, and there will be scoffers when the earth is destroyed by fire. Besides, God does not count time as man does. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years. If you really want to know the reason why Jesus has not come — Peter says, it is because of his longsuffering. "He is not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance" (v. 9).

Now our text begins. Listen!

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat. But according to his promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. (II Peter 3:10-13)

Peter was homesick, wasn't he? "*Looking for and hastening* the coming of the day of God," he says: "We are looking for new heavens and a new earth," he cries, "I wanta go home," he says, "I wanta go home!"

By observing the text, we are able to see why Peter was so homesick. Notice verse 10. He calls the coming of Jesus the "day of the Lord." We will get to see Jesus. Notice verse 11. When Jesus comes, "all these things are to be destroyed." That is why John said not to fall in love with the world. The world and all the things in it are passing away. Color them PERISHABLE. Notice verse

13. This is a promise. There are "new heavens and a new earth." Not like this one, but one in which only righteousness dwells. Glory, Hallelujah, Praise the Lord! No wonder he was homesick.

Peter was homesick to see Jesus. It will be the "day of the Lord." The Lord is coming. It will be the day we see Jesus as He is. John makes this promise in I John 3:2:

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. (I John 3:2)

The first time Jesus came, he was born in a manger and died on a cross. Then he was rejected by the world. When he comes again, he will be coming in the clouds and will sit on a throne. Then he will be glorified by his saints. It will be a great day then. Paul describes it thus:

When He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed. (II Thessalonians 1:10)

Won't it be great to meet Jesus in the air and go home with him to heaven? I don't know exactly what heaven will be like. But I know that to be with Jesus will be heaven itself. That's why we sing in times of homesickness.

O I want to see him, look upon his face,
There to sing forever of his saving grace:
On the streets of glory, let me lift my voice
Cares all past, Home at last, ever to rejoice.

Heaven is home because that is where Jesus is. Listen to these words:

Home is where our loved ones are
It makes no difference where.
It may be just an humble shack
Or a mansion bright and fair.

Bricks and boards don't make a home,
Nor kin by blood we share
What really makes a house a home
Is loved ones who are there.

This is the reason we are homesick for heaven. Jesus, our loved one, is there. We want to be with him.

Peter was not tied to this world. He was what the theologians call "otherworldly." His feet were on the earth, but his heart was in heaven. He had good reason to be like this. He had read the last chapter of the book of God and knew how things were going to come out. "All these things are to be dissolved."

We wouldn't invest our life's savings in a company we knew was going bankrupt. We wouldn't buy a house we knew was going to burn down. We wouldn't buy a prize bull we knew was going to die. Then tell me, why do we invest our time and energies and life itself in those things that are passing away?

Peter knew that "the elements will be destroyed with intense heat and the earth and its works will be burned up." That is the reason the world had no strings on him. That is the reason he would admonish in verse 11, "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be . . . ?" The answer is, a holy and godly people. Jesus' disciples are not wedded to the world. They lay up for themselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt, neither do thieves break through and steal.

I have often thought it would be good for me to make

a rubber stamp like they have at the Post Office. I would inscribe it with the word PERISHABLE. Then I would go around and stamp PERISHABLE on everything I have. All the stocks and bonds, deeds and abstracts, securities and savings accounts, lands and cattle, houses and cars, books and art objects would have, in a prominent place, "PERISHABLE." It would be in red ink. The more a thing means to me — the harder I would stamp it. Everything is passing. I will not take anything out of this world. Paul said as much to Timothy when he was warning about materialism:

For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. (I Timothy 6:7)

There are no pockets in a shroud. The only thing we will be able to take with us is that treasure we lay up in heaven.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal. (Matthew 6:20)

Peter was very conscious of the fact that this world is not our home. In I Peter 2:11, he addresses Christians as "aliens and strangers." He was writing to Christians scattered from their homeland by persecution (1:1). They were aliens away from their homeland, but more than that, they were aliens on the earth. Their homeland was heaven. Christians, like Abraham of old, are always

Looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:10)

If there is ever a song we ought to learn to sing with the spirit and the understanding, it is this old spiritual.

This world is not my home, I'm just a passing thru.
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the
blue;
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world any more.

O Lord, you know I have no friend like you,
If heaven's not my home, then Lord what will I do?
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world any more.

Whatever it takes to make us mean what we say in this song, I pray that it will happen. Be it the fiery trials of oppression, the pain of persecution, the agony of fear, let it be! Be it reiterating the Bible promises of heaven or a revival of spirit in the church, let it be! Be it an economic depression, the sorrow and anguish of personal despair, or whatever is needed, Lord, may it come! Whatever it takes to make us holy, let it come! We need to be homesick for heaven.

Peter was old and feeble. He was plagued and ridiculed by scoffers. He was persecuted, but he was not in despair. He had hope. He had been promised what John was later to see in a vision on Patmos — "a new heaven and a new earth."

He was tired of this old world of pain and suffering. He was looking for a new heaven and new earth. He was tired of the error and deceit of this life. He wanted to be in a place where righteousness dwells. He didn't want to see sickness and death any more. He wanted these, along with all other former things, to pass away.

Peter was ready for that inheritance he spoke of in I Peter 1:4. He called it:

An inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled

and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.
(I Peter 1:4)

This new heaven and new earth is described in Revelation 21-22. John says:

And I saw a new heaven and new earth. (Revelation 21:1)

Then he takes two chapters to describe it in some of the most sublime language that was ever penned. The problem is that he had to use physical terms to describe spiritual things. That's hard. But physical things are the only things we can see and feel and understand. God has to use what we understand to teach us what he wants us to know. He tries to stretch our imagination to the breaking point.

The language of Paul in I Corinthians 2:9 is such an attempt to relate that which is beyond human experience. He quotes Isaiah 64:7, which says:

Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him.

This passage refers to the first coming of Christ in Isaiah. These words also fit the second coming of Christ when he takes us home to heaven. "Eye has not seen him." It is beyond the visual experiences of man. "Ear has not heard." Heaven is beyond the audible experience of man. Neither has its glories entered into the heart of man. Heaven is beyond the intellectual comprehension of man.

Heaven is bigger than big, higher than up, and better than best. Finite mind cannot comprehend all of its glories. It is in a different dimension.

John describes heaven as a city foursquare. He says it

is 1500 miles wide, 1500 miles long and 1500 miles high. It is a cube — a 3,375,000,000 square mile cube. WOW! Doesn't that stagger the imagination?

The city is made of precious stones. Walls and gates are constructed out of gems. The streets are of gold. Think of the dump trucks full of gold dust it would take to pave the streets of a city 1500 miles long and 1500 miles wide. With gold at more than \$400 an ounce, that's expensive.

One of the ways God tries to get us to understand the new heavens and new earth is by using the negative. It is hard to describe an Eskimo igloo to a South Sea native who has nothing with which to compare it. It is hard to describe Minnesota lakes to the West Texas farmer. Such is beyond his experience. He has no frame of reference by which to understand. You have to describe such things in the negative.

How do you describe spiritual things in terms of the physical? You can't. You just have to say they are *not* subject to physical limitation, like pain, suffering, and death. How do you describe eternal things in terms of temporal? You can't. You just have to say they are *not* subject to temporal limitations like wearing out, growing old, and fading away. How do you describe God things in human terms? You can't. You just have to say that He is *not* limited by the frailty of humanity.

The things which on earth are incomplete and inadequate are not in heaven. The things which are evil and dishonest and bad are *not* in heaven. Ten such negatives about heaven are used in Revelation 21-22. Let me list them.

1. There is no sea (21:1). The ancient mariners had no chart or compass. The sea was a terror to them. There is no sea in heaven. 'There is neither the fear nor the terror of the deep.

2. There is no pain (21:4). I talked with my parents this morning. The decline which comes through the aging process and the suffering which comes with sickness was evident. Their once clear voices are now wavering. Their once sensitive ears are now dulling. Their once strong step is now faltering. In their body is pain and in their spirit is depression. In heaven such will never be. There will be no growing old. There will be no crippling arthritis. There will be no migraine headaches. There is no pain.
3. There is no death (21:4). I could not call my father-in-law this morning. He died several years ago. I thought of him and how I missed him through the years. I thought of the sorrow at his death. Thank God there is no death in heaven. There will be no weeping families at an open grave. Death is conquered forevermore.
4. There is no mourning or crying (21:4). Think of the fathers and mothers who are broken-hearted tonight over a child who has rebelled against God and is living in sin. Silent staring into space at moments of remembering pain during the day, and tear-stained pillows at night, testify to the fate of too many, even in the sound of my voice. There is the widow whose life has been crushed over the loss of a companion — whose every hour has a flicker of loneliness in it. There is a friend who has been betrayed by one he loved — who hurts with a pain unsoothed by tears. But in heaven there are no broken hearts or shattered dreams.

There are no tears in heaven fair, no tears, no tears up there. No tears in heaven will be known.

5. There is no temple (21:22). In the Old Testament, the temple was where God made his name to dwell. In the New Testament there is no physical temple, but still worship is hampered by the limitations of flesh communing with a spiritual God. In heaven there is no temple because God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are all present. Our spiritual existence is not hampered by time or matter. We bask in the glory of the great "I AM." Worship will be full and complete. There is no temple there.
6. There is no sun or moon (21:23). Physical imitation lights fade away because the eternal spiritual light of the Lamb of God radiates in glory. There are no shadows. There are no sundowns. There are no gloomy days. The glory of God pierces every corner and crevice of heaven. There is no need of the sun or the moon.
7. There is no night (21:25). Evil and fear flourish in darkness of night, but such will not be in heaven. There are no thieves or robbers. There is evil which lurks in the darkness of night and sin which seeks the cover of darkness. There is no night there. There will be no locked doors or barred windows. There will be no security guards, police, or armies. There will be no fear. There is freedom from fear.

8. There are no shut gates in that city (21:25). Ancient cities were built on a hill and surrounded by walls. In the walls were gates for people to go in and out. At night the gates were closed. During times of war the gates were closed. In that heavenly city the gates of pearl are never closed. You don't have to keep the enemy out. There are no enemies. You don't have to keep the rebels in. There are no rebels. In heaven there are no shut gates.
9. There is no sin (21:27). Nothing hurts more than seeing truth perverted, sin go unchecked, and error find a following. The fruit of sin, the deception of error, surround us in this world. The devil wins many battles, but God is going to win the war. There is no sin in heaven. All evil will be avenged. All lies will be exposed. All error will be refuted. The devil and his angels are in the lake of fire and brimstone. No one is tempted. No one sins. No one lies. No error is spoken. There shall not enter that city anything that works abomination or makes a lie. There is no sin in heaven.
10. There is no curse (22:3). The curse put on the earth because of Adam's sin has been lifted. There are no more thorns and thistles. There is no toil for food. There is no pain in child-bearing. There is new Eden. There is the tree of life and the river of life. There is untainted beauty, joy, and peace. There is no curse.

James Rowe, a pioneer preacher, must have just finished reading these chapters when he wrote that beautiful song, *Won't It Be Wonderful There*.

When with the Savior we enter the glory land,
Won't it be wonderful there?
Ended the troubles and cares of the storyland,
Won't it be wonderful there?

Walking and talking with Christ, the supernal One,
Won't it be wonderful there?
Praising, adoring the matchless eternal One,
Won't it be wonderful there?

Won't it be wonderful there,
Having no burdens to bear?
Joyously singing with heartbells all ringing,
O won't it be wonderful there?

Talking about it makes me want to go there. Oh, we get so homesick in this strange land. It is not the physical description that attracts me so much as it is that truth, justice, and righteousness will prevail. Like the martyrs of Revelation 6:10, I cry out "how long, Oh Lord, how long?"

I'm weary of this world with its pain and despair. I am tired of living in a world full of hate and greed. When will it ever end? When will it ever end? The answer of God is: Everything is going to be all right when Jesus comes. He will right all the wrong. He will vanquish all evil. He will destroy all sin. Truth will be vindicated. Lies will be exposed. Justice will triumph. Oppression and pride will be avenged. There will be the reward of righteousness and punishment of wrongdoing and wickedness. The warfare of this world is over. The children of light have vanquished the children of darkness. We walk in triumph under our captain, Jesus Christ. The forces of evil are disposed. We win in the end. Glory Hallelujah, Praise the Lord!

Oh, I want to go to heaven, don't you? I want to see Jesus as he is. I want the glory of his majestic light to penetrate every fiber of my being. I want to feel the warmth of his bosom and the comfort of his voice. I want to glory in the blood flowing from his side which gave me victory over sin. I want to experience the nature of his risen body which gives me victory over death. Oh, I want to see him!

Oh, I want to go to heaven, don't you? I no longer want to walk this world below. It's passing away, and I want to get off it. It's plagued with sin and sickness and sorrow. I want to leave it all behind. This old body is wearing out. This old earth is cooling off. Food and energy are running out. Sin and evil are taking over. I want to go to heaven, which is incorruptible, undefiled, and fades not away.

Oh, I want to go to heaven, don't you? I want a new heaven and earth. I want to walk the streets of that city foursquare. I want to rest in the garden of God and eat the fruit of the tree of life. I want to be where the bad and ugly and incomplete of this world are negated. I want to reach the end for which I was made and molded by God. I want to be where, "when I've been there 10,000 years bright shining as the sun, there'll be no less days to sing God's praise than when I first begun."

I'm homesick for heaven. "I wanta go home." My sentiments, perhaps, are best expressed in the watchword Paul gave to the Corinthian Christians. It was in Aramaic and means, "O Lord Come." Maranatha! Maranatha! O Lord Come. Let us shout it as a slogan. Maranatha! Let us whisper it to dying loved ones, Maranatha! Let it be the prayer on our lips and the yearning in our hearts. Oh Come, Oh Come, Lord Jesus!

What Manner of People Ought We to Be?

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Introduction:

Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul. Maintain good conduct among

the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation (I Peter 2:11-12).

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness? (II Peter 3:11).

Bruce Morgan once wrote, "The trouble with Christians is no one wants to kill them anymore." Is this a grotesque indictment against the church of the twentieth century, or is it a penetrating insight into the shallow concept of today's Christianity? It seems that everywhere the apostle Paul went to preach Christ there was a riot, or a stoning, or a vow to kill him. Today, preachers are taught many things in college, but there is not one subject on how to handle a riot.

What manner of persons ought we to be? Can you tell the Christians from the world without a program?

Holiness: A Virtue or Requirement?

The Power of a Christian Life

In loving terms, Peter wrote, "I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to . . . live . . . good lives" Peter informs us that we are, "strangers in the world." The world is a territory ruled over by Satan: "You once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air . . ." (Ephesians 2:2). The Christian lives on the earth, and Christ prayed the Father not to take the disciples out of the world, but we are still in a foreign land with our citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20). We are here to do business for our King!

The greatest power in the world, next to God, is the

power of the Christ-like life, whether it be found in the home, church, or community. It is for this reason that Peter admonishes us to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. Conversely, one of the most destructive forces in Christendom is immorality.

An Example From History

One of the causes of the Reformation was the depravity that existed in the priesthood. Pope Leo X is reported to have said, "Let us enjoy the papacy, since God has given it to us," and he proceeded to prodigally waste the revenues of three pontificates.¹ The practice of giving pardon to those who sinned, provided they would pay sufficient money, brought the wrath of Martin Luther upon the Roman Church. In the fifteenth century the power to free people from purgatory was even extended to those who had died, if one could pay the price. It was almost an accepted practice that the priests had concubines, were given to heavy drinking, and some even kept taverns.

Dr. D'Aubigne writes a very graphic chapter concerning the pomp and honor displayed by Tetzl, a monk who had spent sixteen years extolling the values of indulgences. He himself certainly needed to purchase indulgences, if indeed there had been any value in such, because he was convicted at Inspruck of adultery and infamous conduct.

He traversed much of Germany in a handsome carriage, accompanied by three horsemen, and received such a reception as could not have been surpassed had the Lord Himself traveled with him. Carrying a red cross, and robed in the Dominican dress, he moved to the pulpit with an air of arrogance and cried out:

Indulgences are the most precious and the most

noble of God's gifts. This cross has as much efficacy as the very cross of Jesus Christ. Come and I will give you letters, all properly sealed by which even the sins that you intend to commit may be pardoned. I would not change my privileges for those of St. Peter in heaven; for I have saved more souls by my indulgences than the apostle by his sermons . . . But more than this, indulgences avail not only for the living, but for the dead. For that, repentance is not even necessary . . . Do you not hear your parents and your other friends who are dead, and who cry from the bottom of the abyss: We are suffering horrible torments! a trifling alms would deliver us; you can give it, and you will not!²

The battle against sin is real. There can be no compromise. The victory must be decisive. Dick Young, youth director at Westbury, pointed out these interesting statistics:

"Satan" is found twenty-seven times in the Bible.

"Devil" is found fifty-one times.

A total of 679 times the Bible refers to evil, demons, devils, and Satan.

But the Christian can be victorious. "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

We normally think that "fleshly lusts" refer to sexual sins, but the expression "sinful desires" is much broader than that. Barclay informs us that this includes sins of pride and envy and malice and hatred and false and evil thinking which are characteristic of sinful and fallen human nature. From these sins and desires a Christian must abstain.³

Paul encourages the Christians at Philippi what manner of people they ought to be: "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ . . ." (Philippians 1:27). The Christian is to live in such a way that his whole manner of life is a positive influence for good toward those within the body of Christ and all who are outside the family of God. When Plato was told that slanderous charges were being made against him, he replied, "I will live in such a way that no one will believe what he says."

Christians Are To Be Holy

"As He who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct" (I Peter 1:15).

Holiness is not an option: "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

What is holiness, and how is it accomplished? Most people respond to these questions by answering that holiness means, don't smoke, don't drink, don't curse. These prohibitions do deserve our careful attention; however, being holy involves more than just being negative. The reason that so many Christians continually feel defeated in living the Christian life is that they have conjured in their minds that holiness consists of negatives, and they know they frequently transgress in these areas. Holiness also means having a genuine and healthy relationship with Jesus Christ. "He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written, 'let him who boasts, boast of the Lord'" (I Corinthians 1:30-31).

A dean of students in a major university in Oregon was advising college students about how they should be living, but he saw that he had not solved in his own life some of the same problems they battled. He began

meeting regularly on the campus for Bible study and prayer with some of the students. He came to the realization that he needed to evaluate his entire concept of Christianity. He realized that faith didn't come because of his position on the campus, but as a result of his relationship with the Lord. In his own words he stated, "I saw that for thirty-one years I had lived for self." That dean went on to become a United States Senator, Mark Hatfield.

The Necessity of Absolutes

Upon What Can We Base Our Actions?

Man without God follows a trial and error method. The man of the world asks, "Why must there be absolutes? Why can I not choose to do what pleases me?" For example, Karl Marx considered the marriage relationship a part of Capitalism.⁴ In his words, such a relationship was private prostitution. He minimized family life. But because his idea did not work, the Communists later enacted a code of strict family laws. This they did, not because of an ethical standard, but simply because their original way didn't work.

When we work from a Biblical basis, are there absolutes? Are there certain actions that are right and wrong?

Granted, the absolute absolutist sees everything as an absolute, and consequently everyone is at his mercy. The problem with this person is that he holds every opinion with equal intensity and would impose his ideas on the brotherhood. Such a person has absolute convictions about every matter, and the church must bow to his every wish.

But the other extreme that advocates there are no absolutes is just as dangerous. Christianity is insipid and meaningless without conviction and a stand for truth.

Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existential philosopher, argues that if there is no infinite reference point, the idea of a finite point is absurd.

Additionally, Dr. Francis Schaeffer points out, "If there is no absolute moral standard, then one cannot say in a final sense that anything is right or wrong. By *absolute* we mean that which always applies, that which provides a final or ultimate standard. There must be an absolute if there are to be *morals*, and there must be an absolute if there are to be real values."⁵

Man has always been plagued by this dichotomy within him. Adam was not deceived — but still he disobeyed; Cain killed his brother — but could not escape from his conscience; David committed adultery — yet he knew there was a standard of right and wrong that caused him to cry out, "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me" (Psalms 51:11); Judas was an apostle, but betrayed his Lord for thirty pieces of silver — then committed suicide.

Where there are no absolutes, there can be no truth or falsehood. Every man does what is right in his own eyes. But this is disastrous! An example of this can be seen in the life of the painter, Gauguin (1848-1904), who desired to find total freedom for his life. He deserted his family and went to Tahiti, where he thought he could find the ideal life. It proved to be an illusion. In his last painting, "Whence Come We? What Are We? Whither Do We Go?", he attempts to show that man in himself has no answers to these ultimate questions. What was the result of all of this? When he finished his work, he tried to commit suicide, but failed. If there are not ultimate answers, no absolutes, then there is no certainty and no direction in life.

In the sixties some were saying that drugs were the answer to man's problems. They would provide meaning

to life. Timothy Leary's name is the best known of the psychologists and professors advocating this way of life. The results of all of this were riots on the campus, estrangement from parents, bombings, rock singers on narcotics, and death of many young people due to overdose.

There was a vacuum in these young people's lives. The theory, "let me alone, and let me live my own life with minimal outside disturbances" just doesn't work.

When there are no absolutes, man doesn't know right from wrong. This is part of our dilemma in today's society. One is reminded of Isaiah's statement: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! (Isaiah 5:20).

In the words of Schaeffer, it would seem that "The only absolute allowed is the absolute insistence that there is no absolute."

If there is a flaw in the structure of a dam, it will stand just so much pressure. When the pressure becomes too great, the structure fails. A society is much that way. This is the reason that the Christian must live a holy and righteous life. By the standards of God's words, we much judge our personal morals, our presuppositions, and our relationships with God.

Does The World Have the Answer?

The probing question, "how should we live?" is answered differently by the man in the world than the man in Christ.

But does the world really have an adequate answer? Apparently not. Stress has been called the emotional virus of the seventies.

Nathanael Lande, in his book, *Mindstyles Lifestyles*, writes:

1. More than one hundred million Americans take tranquilizers.
2. At least one hundred million Americans support an \$80 million astrology industry, all of which means that people are looking to the stars for their guidance rather than to the God who created the stars.
3. Americans spend more than \$1 billion each year on various forms of psychotherapy.⁶

Dr. Hans Selye, who holds both the Ph.D. and M.D., and is professor of experimental medical and surgery at the University of Montreal, writes: "These days every aspect of society is being evaluated and challenged, and as traditional values fall into disrespect, it becomes more and more difficult for the individual to choose, and to defend, any one pathway."⁷

In his forty years of research on stress, Dr. Selye concludes that there is no single situation that does more damage or brings on more stress than to be faced with alternatives, without having solid criteria upon which a person can make a decision.

Man has fought this battle of living to please himself throughout all of the centuries of his history. The Jewish nation fell into idolatry again and again; this carnality continually dragged them down from the spiritual eminence God intended for them.

Conybeare and Howson point out that the Greeks lived even a more degraded life. "The Greeks spent their life in worthless and frivolous amusements. Their religion . . . was utterly powerless, and worse than powerless, in checking their bad propensities."⁸

Living in Christ Makes the Difference

The Christian Has God

It is precisely at this point that God speaks to the Christian. The Christian has something that is greater than this world. His hope is set on things above and not on things on the earth. He has a noble purpose, an ideal — he has Christ. This changes his entire outlook on life.

In a certain part of Africa a dreadful accident happened in the mission fields many years ago. At first, it was discussed only among intimate friends, but gradually the facts came out. No native African at the time was permitted to carry a gun. The Europeans could; the missionaries could; but the man from Africa could not. If any African village was bothered by a lion, the natives would go to the missionary and ask him to come and shoot the lion.

One day, a little group came to the missionary and said they feared for their cattle and their little babies because a lion was in the area. "Would you please come?" The response was, "Why yes, I'll come."

The missionary picked up his gun and went through the bush toward the village. He put the bullet in his gun and was prepared. What he did not know was that as he left the area his colleague's little son followed him into the bush. As the missionary approached the village, he heard a sound. He spun around and fired! But he had shot his colleague's little son — shot him dead.

He thought about that bereaved father who was back at the camp. How could he bear to tell him the news? He flung his rifle down, returned to the little bungalow, fell down on his knees before him and said, "Oh, my dear brother, how will you ever forgive me?"

After hearing the staggering news, the father put his hands upon the shoulders of the man who had shot his

little son in that dreadful accident and said, "My dear brother. I am not dealing with secondary causes. I am dealing with God!"

That is the heart of it. In our troubles, in our times of need, we want to deal with God. That's the difference between being a Christian and not being a Christian. The Christian deals with God.

Why One Desires To Live Right

Why did Joseph refuse to commit adultery with Potiphar's wife?

Why should the Christian's speech be seasoned with salt when he is in the company of the most foul-mouthed people?

Why would a Christian make a sacrificial gift even if others did not know who made that gift?

The answer to these questions is: *it is the sense of God's presence in a person's life that causes him to live right.*

David knew this, and it caused him to write, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Psalms 139:7-10).

The heart of religion is the *awareness of divine presence*. This concept becomes the determinative factor in one's understanding of ethics and in his sacrificial life. A Christian understands that God lives in him. This awareness of divine presence has a profound effect upon the way one lives and conceives the Christian life.

Conversely, when one does not live with the realization that God's Spirit is in him, his life is lived in the same way as the man of the world, sullied and alone.

Who can doubt that one reason the Christian religion has not been more influential in the world is that the spirit of the world has invaded the church? It is far easier to *profess* the faith than to *possess* the faith.

The Pharisees, with their austere, rigorous code keeping, serve as an example of people professing a religion. Righteousness was spelled out for them; the way they should dress, what they should eat, the days they could work. But Jesus said to them they were "like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27).

Yet, the gospel demands from us even more than the law demanded of the Pharisees. Is this not a staggering thought? Who is sufficient to live that well? It is somewhat like the man who cannot climb a five thousand foot mountain being told that he must now climb a ten thousand foot mountain.

But there is an answer: we are made righteous by Christ. Although Paul severely rebuked the Christians in some of his letters, and one wonders if they were living on the other side of the cross or this side of the cross, still he calls them "saints." They were not "perfected," but they were made righteous by Christ.

A People Living in Harmonious Relationships

Interpersonal Relationships

In addition to the Christian separating himself from worldly lusts which war against the soul, he must also deal with relationships. Life's real problems are as obviously relational as they are overt sins of the flesh. A Christian is a member of the family of God. Members of the body should have a loving, caring attitude for one

another. Not only must the family of God be doctrinally sound, but also there desperately needs to be quality relationships within that family.

Let me give an example and then make an application. A century ago, doctors were performing surgery and losing many of their patients. No one seemed to know why. The surgery seemed successful, but the patient died. Imagine a conscientious surgeon thinking to himself, "What is wrong? I must return to the classroom and see if there is something I've missed or forgotten." After his return from school, he once again performs surgery. But he continues to lose his patients. Then a doctor comes up with a theory about germs. He points out that although you cannot see them with the eye, this is what is killing the patient. He urges each doctor to wash his hands; sterilize the instruments; use disinfectant everywhere. Some scoff at the idea and reject it. But eventually the theory is proved and the whole medical profession religiously follows procedures that will not permit the patient to die from infection following surgery.

A religious application can be seen here. We, as teachers in the body, can perform spiritual surgery. We accurately diagnose the sinner's problem, and through obedience to the Lord bring him into the body. But later the patient dies. Why? Because of the relational problems. The germs of selfish pursuit, ambitious desires, and the egoists whose appetites are never satisfied so infect the newborn Christian that he dies from spiritual infection. In doctrine the surgery was accurate and precise, but in relationships infections set in and the patient is lost. Is it possible that sometimes in our defense of the gospel our arguments are so forceful that none can disprove them, but then our attitudes and dispositions get in the way, and people forget the sound

arguments and reject truth because they have not seen in us the spirit of Jesus?

There are issues before the church that stretch the fellowship to near the breaking point. There have always been those who have said, "this is the way it is; if you disagree with this conclusion you are wrong! Therefore, we have no alternative but to withdraw from you."

If our lives are not lived as purely as the doctrine we preach, if our hearts are not attuned to the heart of God, and our fellowship fulfilling, people will never hear what we have to say! The focus of Christ's religion is not on the message alone but on a message that changes lives. "You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts, to be known and read by all men" (II Corinthians 3:2).

The Blind Man

The disciples asked Jesus concerning a man who had been born blind. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Do you ever have the impression that we would revel in that discussion and argue the case back and forth had we been there?

As the story unfolds, and the blind man is healed, the Pharisees investigate the healing. They had little concern about the blind man receiving his sight. They had theological arguments to discuss. "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" What were the results of this marvelous miracle of giving sight to a blind man because of the compassionate heart of Christ? "They were divided!" The pathos of the story unfolds as even his parents are afraid to get involved because these religious leaders would put them out of the synagogue.

"He is of age; ask him," they respond.

The Pharisees argued with the blind man concerning this miracle healer. When the poor man dared to suggest

that Jesus could not have been such a sinner as they supposed, because God gave him the power to give sight to the blind, they responded, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" Then they threw him out.

The religion of the Pharisees had gone to seed. They had people known as "the bruised Pharisees" because they would blindfold themselves when they walked in the streets lest they see something that might cause them to lust. They would run into buildings and various obstacles, and so their bruises were evidence of their pious, godly living! Yet, they were guilty before God; not because of their religious beliefs so much as because their hearts were so insensitive to human needs.

Jesus lived the only pure life in the history of the world.

"He did no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth" (Isaiah 53:9).

"Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John 8:46).

"He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

He was "holy, harmless, undefiled" (Hebrews 9:14).

But in spite of this holiness, the religious leaders were very uncomfortable when they confronted Christ. Judaism had become so encrusted with the rituals of religion that when the Son of God came to the world they piously, but violently, snuffed out his life in one of the most cruel ways known to man — crucifixion!

They preached the keeping of the Sabbath; they preached offering sacrifices; they tithed mint, dill, and cummin; they did not commit adultery; but their lives were cesspools of corruption, and so evil they found great satisfaction in putting an innocent man out of the synagogue and hanging a sinless man on a cross.

Above All This Put On Love

In Colossians 3, Paul encouraged the church how to live. Have compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, and forgive one another. "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Colossians 3:14). Love is the *crown* of all Christian virtues; love is the *quality* which distinguishes the Christian community; love is the *virtue* which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

The musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*, speaks deeply to human nature. The main character is a middle-aged Jewish peasant living in a small Russian village toward the end of the 19th century. He has three daughters who make disastrous choices in marriage (as far as Tevye is concerned). The father turns to his struggling wife and asks, "Do you love me?" She responds, "Do I love you?" She asks him who has been cooking his meals, washing his clothes, scrubbing the floors, working the garden, sharing his bed, and raising his children? But that doesn't satisfy him. He asks again, "But do you love me?" She responds in the same way again, and he is still dissatisfied.

We Christians are much that way. You ask, "Do you love me?" I respond, don't I speak to you at church, worship with you, contribute money with you? But the questions haunts you again and you ask, "But, do you love me?"

What manner of people ought we to be? A people who are sensitive to another's tears and heartaches. A people to whom we can bare our very souls and know that here are God's people who care!

That's my soul lying there.

You don't know what a soul is?

You think it's some kind of ghostly

sheet-like thing you can see
through and it floats in the air?

That's my soul lying there.

Remember when my hand shook because
I was nervous in the group?
Remember the night I goofed and
argued too much and got mad
and couldn't get out of the whole mess?
I was putting my soul on the line . . .

Well, that's my soul lying there.

I'll let you pick it up.
That's why I put it there.

It'll bruise and turn rancid like
an old banana if you want to manhandle it.
It'll go away if you want to ignore it.

But if you want to put your soul there
beside it, there may be love.
There may even be God.

Footnotes

1. Smith, Preserved, *The Age of the Reformation*, page 19.
2. D'Aubigne, J. H. Merle, *History of the Reformation*, Vol. 1, pages 241, 242.
3. Barkley, William, *Commentary on 1 Peter*, page 237.
4. Marx, Karl, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.
5. Schaeffer, Dr. Francis, *How Should We Then Live?*, page 145.
6. Lande, Nathanael, *Mindstyles Lifestyles*, page 18.
7. Lande, Ibid, page 19.
8. Conybeare and Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, page. 9.
9. Stech, Ernest, (poem) "That's My Soul."

Christian Stewardship

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I welcome the opportunity to appear on this lectureship program at Abilene Christian University. I extend my sincere gratitude to Dr. Carl Brecheen, and to those who share the responsibility of planning the program, for asking me to be a part of it. Above all, I am grateful to God our Father, who makes this occasion and indeed all blessings possible.

On the theme "Until He Comes," I have been asked to speak on "Christian Stewardship." It is my hope that the

thoughts expressed in our study this evening will be penetrating to the extent that you will be willing to think about, and, if need be, make necessary changes in your lives which will reflect faithful stewardship.

Simply stated, a steward, as the term is used in the New Testament, is the manager of a household, or of an estate, or of that which belongs to another. Translated for us, it means we have the charge, the oversight, of that which belongs to God. We should be aware that our charge as stewards involves more than our money, our time, and our talents, but includes the very essence of our being. Thus, we have the charge of a life which does not belong to us. Paul writes to this point in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God and that you are not your own?" Literally, our lives belong to Him who is above us. We possess a life but do not own that life. That means we are to manage our lives so as to realize God's ideal for us and to serve Him with our lives in the most efficient manner possible. As Christian stewards one of the first things to realize is that we are in possession of a life that we control but do not own. We read in Psalms 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it." Even the possessions of this world pass through many different hands as the years roll on, but through all the years God is the sole owner. What we have belongs to God, and what we are belongs to Him also. We have been created and redeemed and thus belong to Him in whom we live and move and have our very existence. When the Christians just after Pentecost declared that nothing they possessed was their own, they were expressing the attitude of genuine Christian stewardship.

One of the critical things we should realize is that the

way we manage our lives here, and the way we use the blessings given to us by God, will determine not only our future destiny, but also the caliber of our living in this life. That thought is emphasized in an old story. The story concerns a wealthy investor who called in his business manager and showed him some blueprints. The investor told his manager that he was leaving for an extended trip around the world and that while he was gone, he wanted his manager to build a house for him. The investor showed the manager the map indicating that the construction site should be near a lake, for he had always dreamed of having a home on that beautiful spot. So he gave the manager the plans and specifications and a check large enough to cover the entire cost of the construction. A few days later the wealthy investor left on his journey. But the business manager was not a faithful steward. He saw a chance to make some quick money. Therefore, he hired a crooked contractor, employed unskilled labor, and wherever possible he put cheap and inferior material into the building, while keeping the difference for himself. While the house appeared to be beautiful, in reality it was poorly constructed. Then came the day when the wealthy investor returned and went with his business manager to see the beautiful house. He asked his manager what he thought about the building. The manager said, "I think it is a wonderful house." Then the investor said, "I am glad you like it and I am glad you used my money wisely, for I have a surprise for you. I plan to retire soon and I will not be needing your services much longer. I wanted you to have a nice home in your retiring years. This house is yours."

In thinking about the position we occupy as stewards of God we need to ask ourselves, how are we investing the gifts, how are we using the blessings, how are we

treating the opportunities, how are we using our lives which the Lord has given to us? It is a sobering thought that we have to live with the way we use the blessings God has placed in our hands. We do not have to wait until judgment day to reap our mismanagement of the things which God has given to us. We live with that mismanagement right now. Before we get to heaven we must be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Therefore, any steward whose sight is so sternly set on heaven so as to be no earthly good is not discharging the responsibility of a Christian steward. It then is not without great significance that Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:2, "... it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy." In other words, the most important thing about a steward is that one does in this life what his Master tells him to do.

Then Jesus tells us the "how" of being found trustworthy. According to Matthew 6:19, 20, he says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal." Those words deal with a matter of great importance to us as stewards, for Jesus is telling us where to invest our treasure and how to use our lives to accomplish the greatest good. Of course, all of us possess some kind of treasure. Your treasure may not be a bank account, it may not be an apartment complex, it may not be stocks and bonds, it may not be an academic degree. But your treasure is that something that you love the best. It is that something to which our affections, our wills, and indeed our whole lives cling. Not only as stewards do we have a treasure, but we are putting it into one of two places. We are laying up treasure upon the earth, or we are laying up treasure in heaven. Our choice

is strictly limited to these two places. What is it to lay up treasure upon the earth? It is to put the world first in our thoughts, our plans, our affections. It is to take the gifts God has given us, and while going through the motions of building a life for the Lord, in reality we take advantage of every opportunity to keep part of that life solely for ourselves. The person who lays up treasures upon the earth may attend worship services regularly, may give of his means, may talk to somebody about the gospel, and may be considered as a faithful Christian. However, the first objective of the steward who lays up treasures upon the earth is to make it in this life. Therefore, when things spiritual conflict with things physical, the steward whose first objective is winning the world places the physical and the material first. You remember in Luke chapter sixteen, that striking example Jesus gives in the story of the unjust steward, of what it means to invest our all in this world. That man received notice that he is soon to lose his position. What is his reaction? He does not consider how he can be honest and fair to his master. His first thoughts are about how he can continue to pay the car notes and the mortgage payments. He is concerned primarily about how he can make it in this life. Therefore, in order to gain materially, he becomes dishonest and induces others to be dishonest with him. Now this steward may have thought highly of honesty and truthfulness and fairness, but if he did, they were secondary. His supreme care was for things. He was a man whose treasure was deposited in the bank of this world.

To lay up treasure in heaven is to take the opposite course. It is to recognize that while material things are necessary for life, they are not the life of the Christian Steward. It is to recognize that God has given us time, talent, money, and opportunity, and that he expects us

to use those gifts at all times and in all places to better serve Him. It is to recognize that one day our stewardship will be called into an account and that we must answer as to how we have used, misused, or abused the gifts and blessings God has given to our charge. We demonstrate common sense by providing as best we can for the few days in which we may live on this earth. However, it is supreme folly to fail to reckon with the eternity in which we must live. Therefore, the Christian steward realizes that God has given material blessings, opportunities for serving Him as we serve others, time, and a life to live, and that one day all of these things will have to be given up. The Christian strives to live in such a manner so as to change the gifts he now has into those values that will last for time and eternity. It is in that sense that our Lord urges us to invest our lives in such a manner as to receive eternal dividends.

Having seen the meaning of stewardship and that it encompasses the whole of life and that it is the very essence of Christian living, let us look at some practical ways of expressing our stewardship until the Lord comes.

1. We show we are stewards by what we say. Here I have in mind possessing firsthand knowledge about the person who is our Master. There is no way we can serve the Lord faithfully unless we are willing to study his person. People sometimes believe they are fine disciples, good and faithful stewards, but admit they expend little effort in order to learn more about Jesus by studying His Word. One wonders how many are truly converted to Jesus the Christ and how many are converted only to the organization of the Church. Are we stewards of God or servants only to an organizational structure? How often in the maze of business meetings, and committee meetings, and church structure, we lose sight of the

person of Jesus Christ. I am suggesting that a steward of God can give some personal testimony as to what his Master is like and what his Master has done and is doing for him or her. Can we who claim to be Christian stewards really say, "As I try to use my time and talent and money and opportunities for the Lord, here are some beautiful things that have occurred in my life, here are some changes in my life that I can account for only in terms of Jesus my Lord"? Can you say that and really mean it? The early church was blessed with some great preachers. I'm sure those men delivered some powerful sermons. I feel certain that the early church had some exciting Bible studies. But the fact that Christianity spread with great rapidity over the heathen Roman world was not due only to great and powerful preaching, but also the personal testimony of ordinary men and women, boys and girls, who realized they were not their own, who realized as stewards they must be found faithful, who realized that every good and perfect gift came from God, and who told their friends and acquaintances the amazing difference that the crucified Christ had made in their lives. To this day it is true that one of the most effective ways of winning people to Christ is through personal testimony. But in order to proclaim our Lord we must have a personal relationship to Him. We must be able to say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20). I believe that to Paul it was beautiful that Christ loved the world and gave His life for all people, but that would mean very little unless the apostle could say and unless we can say, He loved ME and gave Himself for ME. We express our stewardship by what we say, by proclaiming that we

have a personal relationship to our Lord and Master.

2. But if we express our Christian stewardship by what we say, we express it even more by what we do. Jesus rebuked certain Pharisees of His day not because they failed to teach the truth, but because they failed to practice what they preached. According to Jesus "they say and do not" (Matthew 23:3). Those Pharisees commended a life that they did not live. It is incumbent upon every steward of God to show that what we claim by our words we live by our lives. One reason why the unjust steward was commended was that in addition to facing the facts about himself, in addition to having a plan for his tomorrow, he lived his creed. In effect, he said, "I believe in going after the things of this life," and he lived up to that creed. According to Luke 16:4, the unjust steward said, "I know what I shall do." He knew the direction he had to take and, therefore, he headed straight for his goal. He would not be hindered by any obstacle or turned aside by any value that he considered secondary. Now, remember, he was a man of the world, an unfaithful steward; therefore, he put the gaining of things, the making of material provisions, above everything else. He believed in that philosophy of life and he lived it. But how is it with those of us who claim to be stewards of the light? Do we live our creed? We claim to believe that the greatest values are spiritual. We say no truer words were spoken than those by Jesus in Matthew 6:33, "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness . . ." We believe that every person should put the Lord and His interests first.

But while we are stewards by what we say, often we do not express that stewardship by what we do. For example, many claim to be Christians and yet do not give an hour a week in trying to develop faithful stewardship. Many claim to be Christians and go for

days without looking into God's word to learn how to invest our time and talent and abilities and opportunities more wisely. Often we utterly refuse to make a business of our religion and then wonder why it doesn't have more life in it. When the unjust steward spoke his creed he said, "I believe in the material things of the world." Having told us what guided and controlled his life, he went out to put his creed into practice. When we as Christian stewards express what we believe, we emphasize the values that are in Jesus Christ and the importance of the church in our lives today. But having made our confession, sometimes instead of driving straight for our goal, instead of allowing nothing to turn us aside, we major in minor matters and put what should be secondary in a primary position. Perhaps, unlike the unjust steward, our problem could be that we have not made up our minds just what we really want to do and where we want to go.

The story is told about a business executive who was going to a certain city to deliver an address. He arrived in the city almost at the time he was supposed to be speaking. Therefore, he hurried from the plane, jumped into a taxi, and told the driver to "step on it, hurry up, go fast." So the taxi driver did just that. He exceeded the speed limit and drove rather recklessly through the traffic. After some minutes of burning up the freeway, the business executive said, "Aren't we about there yet?" The cab driver said "I don't know sir, you never told me where you wanted to go." Some professing stewards of God are like that. They are busy and hectic, but have not determined which direction in life they are going to take. They have not resolved exactly what they are going to do. Our Lord stated, according to Matthew 7:21, "Not every one that says unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my

Father which is in heaven." We then should not be surprised to hear him say, "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing" (Matthew 24:46). Until He comes, we express our Christian stewardship not only by what we say, but also by what we do.

Of course the best of us preach better than we practice. This is the case because we have a perfect Lord, a perfect gospel, and the best of us serve our Lord and practice that gospel imperfectly. Yet it is the height of inconsistency when we do not strive to make a part of our lives the Christian stewardship we proclaim to others. Thus being a Christian steward is not a matter of magic, it is the result of vital, energetic, consecrated service to our Lord. Being a Christian steward is when we manage the affairs of our home life, the affairs of our employment, the affairs of our school life, the affairs of our money, and indeed all things that concern our livelihood, with the Lord as priority number one. Certainly what we say is of great importance. But what we do about what we say is of greater importance. Until the Lord comes we express our stewardship by what we do.

3. Then we manifest our stewardship not only by what we say and by what we do, but also by giving our special attention to that specific responsibility that the Lord has given to us. The Lord will not give you more than you can manage. He is not going to ask you to oversee that which you are incapable of doing. He is not going to condemn you for not doing that thing which He knows you could not do. "For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). Therefore, perhaps the best practical way to express our Christian stewardship is by doing whatever we can do to the best of our ability. I am

naive enough to believe that if you really want to serve, if you really want to manage for God's glory the affairs of your life, the Lord will show you the responsibility that should have your greatest attention. Now He will not indicate that responsibility by a "still small voice," but by giving you opportunities to serve Him as you serve others. In John 7:17, Jesus says "If anyone is willing to do his will he shall know .'..'" If the will is there the service will be made known. Now mark you, it may not be the service or the responsibility you had in mind. But if you really want to serve the Lord, the opportunity will present itself as to when and where and what you can do to best serve Him. I believe that with all of my heart. You may not be the best at anything you do, but you can be your best at everything you do. However, the will to do must come first.

Somewhere I read a little story that will help to suggest the thought of serving the Lord in the area where we are most capable. The story was about a group of animals who decided to improve their general welfare by starting a school. The courses included such things as swimming, running, climbing, and flying. Now the duck was a superb swimmer, but he was less than adequate in other areas. Therefore, the duck majored in climbing and running and in so doing his swimming suffered. The rabbit was a superior runner, but was forced to spend so much time in other classes that he lost a great deal of his speed. The squirrel was rated excellent in climbing, but dropped to average because his instructors spent hours trying to teach him to swim and fly. The eagle was put on probation and threatened with dismissal from the school because he soared to the mountain top when he had been told to learn how to climb, even though flying was really his thing. The story illustrates beautifully what often happens among stewards of God. We have our differing

gifts and abilities. There are some things we can do and others we cannot do. Then some people try to do so many things that they leave their most effective and most qualified area of service. As a result, the church and our stewardship suffers. We are instructed in the Word of God that "since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality, he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness" (Romans 12:6-8). The bottom line of that passage is that God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well; therefore, whether you are a teacher or a preacher or an administrator or a leader or a motivator or a moral supporter or a member of a committee or whatever it is, do the best job that you can. It should not distress us that someone may do another thing better than we can. Remember, we may not be the best, but always we can be our best. As the story stated, if God made you a duck saint, you are a duck. Being a duck, God does not expect you to climb and run. Running is not your thing. But you can really swim. So swim on. As a steward, do the best to serve the Master with what you can do. Again, if you do not know what you can best do, and if you want to do your best, ask the Lord to help you to find your best. If you are sincere, your prayer will not fall upon deaf ears. But remember, your motive is that you are looking for your best in order to be a faithful Christian Steward. If you want to serve only yourself and your ego, you will find no help from the Lord. Another thing, if you are an eagle saint, stop expecting squirrel saints to fly like you do, or rabbit saints to build the kind of nests you build. They must use their own gifts to serve the Lord to the best of

their ability. But having said that, no Christian steward can truthfully say that God has not assigned to him or her anything to do. According to Mark 13:34, the Lord has given "everybody his own work." So the important thing in Christian stewardship is not to be frustrated by the many things we are incapable of doing, but to give our best in developing and in doing that something we know we can do.

Perhaps you have heard about the frog who fell into a rut in the road and could not seem to get out. He saw another frog passing by and said "Hey buddy, help me to get out of this rut." The other frog replied, "If I help you, I may fall into the rut with you. Then there would be two of us who are trapped." So he hopped on. Later, to his surprise, he saw the trapped frog hopping down the road. "I thought you couldn't get out of that rut." Came the reply, "I couldn't—but a big truck came along and I had to!" When the Christian steward says, "This is what I have to do," and means that and does that for the glory of God, then faithful stewardship will be the result. It would be good for us all to follow the example given by our Lord in John 9:4: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." Jesus says I **MUST** work, I **HAVE** to be of some service to my Father. Sometime ago I went into one of the business offices on the campus where I teach in Southern California, and I saw a strange-looking machine. I had two questions: (1) What is that? and, (2) What is it for? The second question applies more specifically to the thought under consideration. If we cannot give a reason for our existence in the Kingdom of God in terms of service and usefulness, we are not discharging our responsibility as Christian stewards. A machine which gives no service only takes up space in an office. Let us use the space we have in God's family by

doing what we can do in the best possible way. Until the Lord comes, let us strive to be more serviceable and useful to God and to each other.

4. Then our stewardship should reach out to all people. In Acts 1:8, Jesus told His disciples they would be His “witnesses . . . in Jerusalem, and in Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Begin your stewardship in Jerusalem and in Judaea. We are to begin expressing our service where we live, specifically in our homes with our families, among those who know us best. If we convince our families that we are “for real” in managing as best as we can all the affairs of our lives for God’s glory, we are going to be more effective in convincing others as to the reality of our Christian stewardship. Then the Lord mentions that our service is to extend to the Samaritans. The Samaritans, as you know, were people who were held in contempt by the Jews. The application is this: The religion of Jesus Christ draws no prejudicial lines. It leaves that for us to do. The religion of Jesus Christ makes no distinction between the races. That is our sin. We must keep in mind that until the Lord comes, we are stewards of God, not stewards of social traditions, not stewards of historical developments, not stewards of the social status quo, but stewards of God. Jesus taught the supreme worth of the individual human being and not merely the worth of a certain kind or of a certain race. For example, the man whom Jesus regarded as a good neighbor was a despised Samaritan. Jesus took a publican as one of His friends. Peter stated that “God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean” (Acts 10:28). The Apostle finally saw that God puts up no racial barriers and that Jesus refused to share the individual class and racial prejudices of his fellow Jews. To be a Christian steward means that our service and our lives reach out to

all people, to serve them as the Lord has served.

Until the Lord comes, every person has been given a responsibility. First and foremost, we are responsible for obeying the gospel, becoming members of the Lord's Church, and establishing a personal relationship to the Lord. As we strive to serve the Lord, we manage as best we can for God's glory everything that is in our possession, including our very lives.

Until the Lord comes, let us express our stewardship by what we say, by what we do, by developing that something we can do best and giving it our greatest attention, by making up our minds that with the help of God we are going to lay up treasures in heaven. I commend unto you the words of our Master, "Blessed is that steward whom his master finds so doing when he comes."

THE JUDGMENT

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I beheld till thrones were placed, and one that was ancient of days did sit; his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and the wheels thereof burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him; thousands of thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the judgment was set, and the books were opened.

Dan. 7:9-10

The concept of divine rectification of the contrasts between men's behavior and their fortunes has been held

by most cultures in one form or the other. Some religions have dealt with divine retribution through transmigration of souls, among which were the ancient Green Pythagoreans and Orphic mystics, and the Vedic Hindus. The ancient Egyptians and Persians believed in a judgment after death. In the case of Egyptian mythology, it was held that the departed soul would be judged by forty-two gods, and his heart weighed by the goddess Maat on her scales of truth and justice. Plato argued that there must be a judgment because the supreme intellect of the universe never leaves any loose ends. Since, in the physical universe, violation of natural law always incurs a just retribution, it logically follows that violations of moral law, which apparently go unpunished in this life, will be punished later, and so a judgment must be inferred.

Many years ago I visited a remote village of the Zambezi escarpment, with some other American missionaries, where no foreigners had ever gone before. The inhabitants were primitive pagans of the Gwembi tribe. Their religion was animism, or worship of ancestral spirits. I remember as though it were yesterday sitting around a crackling fire late on a winter night and talking with a grizzled old elder of the tribe. In the distance, hyenas voiced their strange, unearthly shrieks and saddle-back jackals barked at the moon.

"Do you believe in the God who created all things?" I asked him.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "We believe in Him but we don't know how to worship him. We sacrifice to our ancestors in the hope that they will intercede with God for us."

"And do you believe you will ever see this God?"

"We will see him, and he will judge us after we die."

"And what will happen then?"

"That is something we just don't know."

It is a general belief of most of humanity that the Great Spirit, the All-Father or whatever they may call the great arbiter of the universe, will some day judge his people. They differ widely on whether souls will be judged individually as they die or whether there will be universal judgment when all men will appear before him.

There has never been any broad agreement in Bible-related religions on particular, as opposed to, or in addition to, general judgment. In early Judaism, God's judgment of the living, and especially nations, was a far more prominent concept than the judgment of the dead. The Pentateuch does not expressly mention future rewards and punishment, and it is only in later Judaism, in the writing prophets, that the idea is clearly enunciated. In the Maccabean period, the doctrine of future retribution was one of the beliefs which separated Judaism into Sadducees and Pharisees. Among Pharisees particular judgment (that is, of the individual at death) was sublimated to the belief in a general judgment of the Messiah, a view shared also by Essenes and Samaritans. On the other hand, Alexandrian Judaism, represented by Philo, believed in an individual judgment immediately upon death.

Among the patristic writers, Augustine strongly held to a particular judgment, basing his arguments on Luke 16:19-31. His views were due to prevail in Latin Church theology and were strengthened by the developing doctrine of Purgatory. The dogma was finally defined by Pope Eugene IV in 1439. Among early interpreters denying the view of particular judgment were Tatian and Lactantius. Many early groups such as the Nestorians and Copts differed from the Roman view in that they believed that the soul sleeps after death until the general judgment, a belief later held by non-Catholic groups such as the Anabaptists, Socinians and Arminians. In his

Institutes (III, 25) John Calvin states that the final destiny of a soul is not known until the last day.

When we turn to the doctrine of a general judgment there are few teachings that are more clearly expressed in the New Testament, and the belief in a universal world-judgment has prevailed in Christendom from the beginning. Jesus' own description of the Judgment Day is clear and emphatic. In Matt. 25:31-34, 41 he states:

When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats, and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say to them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. . . . Then shall he say also to them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

In Acts 17:31 Paul declares that God "hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained," and in Rom. 2:5, 6 he calls it the "day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his works."

There is no more spine-tingling spectacle in literature than the awesome judgment scene of revelation 20. The clock has run out on all finite things and the universe has imploded into that incredible vortex of energy from which it sprang into being. The interlude of time and space has passed like a brief shadow across the face of

eternity and "the things that cannot be shaken" appear again as they were, and have always been, before they receded behind the mists of the cosmic interval before past and future merged into an everlasting present.

Scripture and science are in remarkable agreement that our material universe is headed inexorably toward a rendezvous with oblivion. Physicists used to argue that matter is eternal, but no longer. Prof. John Wheeler, director for theoretical physics at the University of Texas says: "There is no 'before' before the big bang, and no 'after' after the big crunch."

Peter wrote that "the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are in it shall be burned up"; and Isaiah says, "The heavens shall be rolled up as a scroll."

And there silhouetted against the eternal tomorrow, splendid beyond any dreaming of it, looms a great white throne. Man's history has known some splendid thrones. The most ancient throne still in existence is the seat of the semi-legendary super kings of the ancient Minoan civilization of Crete. It is from the excavations at Knossus and dates from 1800 B.C. Perhaps the most sumptuous throne on earth is the Peacock Throne of the Mongol Khans. The back of this throne represents the tails of two peacocks and is jewel-encrusted with sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and pearls. It was taken from Delhi by the Persians and stands today in the Gulistan Palace in Iran. Another throne of fabulous grandeur is the ivory throne of Maximian in Ravenna. But all of these are the tawdry artifacts of humanity, the symbols of Lilliputian power that flickered for an instant and was gone forever; they are no more comparable to the great white throne which John saw than a toothpick is to a redwood. But the throne is just the setting for the

Majesty of majesties, the ultimate Being who is seated upon it and from whose face the heavens and the earth have fled away and no place is found for them. Since Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise no human being has looked upon the face of the Almighty, but now the eyes of all men of all time are fixed upon Him. And they see a Self-Existent Being who is powerful beyond all imagination. It is He who upholds all things by the word of His power, who spoke in the beginning, and out of the emptiness of space that had never seen a sunbeam or heard a birdsong, a billion worlds sprang into being and wheeled throughout the stretches of space's night; who spoke again and the universe pulsed with light.

Of course, no human language can describe the majesty of God, just as man's intelligence cannot comprehend His essence. Human imagination can only embrace the unknown by analogy to the known, and there is nothing in man's experience to prepare him for a face to face confrontation with the Eternal Being. John's gospel tells us that "no man has seen God at anytime" (1:18). Moses pleaded with God, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." But God replied, "Thou canst not see my face; for there can no man see me and live." God sometimes took the appearance of a man, as to Abraham and Jacob. He appeared to the Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel in visions, and also to John in the Revelation, but these accommodative theophanies do not compromise the essential truth that human eyes have never looked upon the great King in His splendor.

Isaiah simply says, "I saw the Lord upon a throne, high and lifted up," but makes no attempt to describe the Presence on the throne. Ezekiel "saw the likeness as the appearance of a man" upon the throne, but re-emphasizes that it was simply "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord," and to him it appeared

like glowing metal suffused in light. John's description was like burnished bronze. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and his voice was the thunder of a waterfall. These prophets were using the most intense impressions of human experience to project an ultimate reality beyond all human experience.

Gathered before the throne is the greatest audience that ever has been, or ever will be, seen. The Judgment Day is the single occasion upon which every human being, from Adam to the last man who becomes a sinner on the second the clock stops, will convene in a single audience. Tribes lost before history began will be there. The long-eared men who pre-dated the Incas in South America, and Folsom hunter who scoured the American Southwest before the Indians came, will be there. From the depths of the Ituri forest the pygmies will come, and the Polar Eskimo from his frozen wasteland. London bankers and New York lawyers will stand with the blue men from Morocco and cannibals from the Solomon Islands. Rapacious men, who at their zenith struck terror into the hearts of mankind, will be there, transfixed with terror themselves; Genghis Khan and the Golden Horde, Hitler and his SS men reeking from the holocaust, Attila with his Huns. But there will also be Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Moses, and the teenagers from Pine Ridge, Arkansas, and the sailors of the Spanish Armada. In short, we'll all be there — every one. I have stood in the Egyptian room of the British museum and gazed down upon the mummified form of a little man who was dead and forgotten before Abraham was born. Nobody knows who he was, but God knows, and he'll be there on Judgment Day. When I lived in East Africa there was a grave in my back yard in which lay a young man of German descent. He died of malaria and natives brought him there and buried him. They did

not know his name — only that he was a German. His people never knew what had happened to him, but God knows, and he'll be there on Judgment Day.

Many in that vast assembly will not be there willingly. In the last moments of earth's dying gasp there is a frantic scramble to find a place of refuge, for Revelation tells us they "hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; and they say to the mountains and the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come; and who is able to stand?" (6:15-17). But it is a futile gesture of despair, for the Son of Man will send forth his angels and they will winkle every sinner out of his hiding place and bear him away to the judgment of that great and awful day of the Lord.

But to others it is the dream moment when they gaze at long last upon that beloved face which has lived and glowed in their hearts all of their spiritual lives, but never seen until now. It is the homecoming of God's children when the dearest and best of all ages, their earthly labors and sorrows thrown down like a shabby old coat at the door, have gathered for the supper God has prepared to celebrate their coming. Because the limp form of a suffering Saviour hung between heaven and earth against the stark Judean sky, and throughout their earthly pilgrimage their lives confessed Him who has promised that "everyone who shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8), this day holds no terror for them. It is but the turnstile before they walk through gates of Splendor.

"And the books were opened," John continues, "and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works."

Brethren, if that second book had not been written in the blood of Jesus Christ, the song of Moses and the Lamb, the song of redemption, would never be sung. For out of that first book of the works of men, none could ever be saved, even the most meticulous keeper of moral law. "For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). We must never fall into the error that Roman Catholics have made in failing to distinguish between justification and sanctification.

Justification is entirely by God's grace mediated through the shed blood of Him who is the Saviour of all men, but effectively of those that believe. My relationship to justification depends upon my relationship to the saving blood — upon whether I have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine in which the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ are exemplified and thereby been made free from sin. That does not mean that the physical rite of baptism is sacramental. It is the response of faith to God's offer of reconciliation, just as sanctification in my Christian life is a response to the commitment I made in baptism.

Justification removes the guilt of sin, effectively, completely, and, potentially, forever. Sanctification removes the pollution of sin, is increasingly effective, but never complete in the Christian life. As Isaiah says, "All our righteousness is as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6).

Justification is objective. It was done for me by someone else as an act of grace. We walk in white robes of righteousness instead of our own filthy rags because of what Christ has done for us. Sanctification is subjective and depends upon my willingness to remove the earthstains, and commit my life to God, by following in the steps of Jesus, by helping others and being helped by them.

Justification is all or nothing. There is no such thing as being a little bit saved. Sanctification is never more than partial. It's a direction — not a terminus. It is never a final state in a human being.

This is simply to say that all of the works of a lifetime cannot remove a single sin, nor do they as some have taught, bridge the gap between what Jesus has done for us and what God requires. But if sanctification is not the direction of my life, unless I continually strive to overcome sin, my name will be blotted out of the book of life and my justification through Christ's blood is no longer effective. Then I must be judged by the things written in the book of the works of men, subject to a law of sin and death.

As we leave the Judgment scene in Revelation 20, John shows the last terrible, final separation between the redeemed and the lost. "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Since John saw all the dead, both great and small, before the throne, you and I were in that solemn assembly. The question is, upon which side of the throne did he see you in that final division? That is a picture of the future which you are drawing now — right now. What John saw is determined, not by an arbitrary act of God, but what we, right now, are doing with our lives, because only we can determine the relationship of our lives to the saving blood of Christ.

And when that day to end all days comes, "which burneth like an oven" for some, when the physical things which we know and love too much have vanished forever into the mists of yesterday, in that hour when men are crying out to the mountains and rocks to fall on them to hide them from the face of Him before whom all things are naked and open, when the elements melt with fervent heat — then it will not matter how much of this world's

goods you have managed to accrue, what titles and honors you have achieved, whether you have walked with the great of this earth. The only thing that will matter is whether your life was a window upon eternal life for those who passed by you; whether they saw in you the marks of Jesus and the fruits of the Spirit, and whether you lay at the throne of God precious souls claimed from eternal ruin. There is a Great Day coming; are you ready for that day to come?

THE KING IS COMING

Landon B. Saunders

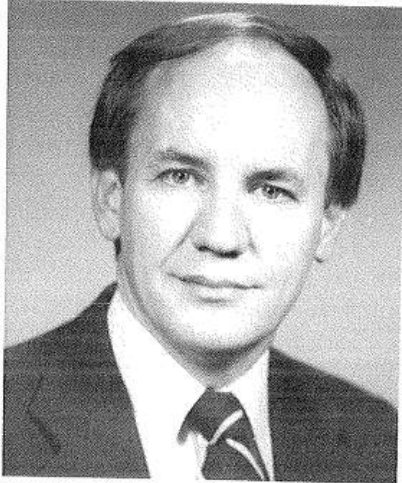
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Work: Director and speaker of HEARTBEAT, an evangelistic effort to reach secular America. In 1975, Landon produced for heartbeat the first evangelistic radio program ever accepted for broadcast as a commercial message for the NBC radio network. In 1979, the CBS radio network donated free public service time for HEARTBEAT to be aired across the nation. HEARTBEAT is heard daily on many independent stations.

Ministry: In 1969-1970, Landon traveled through 60 nations preaching and teaching. Since that time, he has been travelling this country approximately 10 months each year, lecturing and teaching in some 50 cities annually.

Other Fields of Special Interests: Landon was invited to address the convention of National Religious Broadcasters in Fort Worth in 1975. In 1977, he was honored by Abilene Christian University with a plaque for excellence in Christian mass communication.



The nation of Israel was weary. So many battles.
Their dreams had been so great. But all dreams, so

clear and brilliant through the night, vanish with the first piercing rays of sunlight.

The harsh awakening of military defeat at the hands of the Roman army had just that effect upon the dreams of Israel. A once-great hope was now a distant memory. The shocking reality of foreign power left the impression that the old promises were so many myths.

Some of the older people repeated stories of greatness now long past. For most people, the past was not enough. They would sit quietly and listen to the stories. But it was hard to keep believing and hoping.

They had been subjected to so many false expectations, as one leader, then another, would rise and fall, each leaving in his wake disappointment and despair.

The pageantry and power of Rome was evident everywhere. The occupation troops, marching through their streets, patrolling their hills, even overlooking the holy temple, providing a constant, irritating reminder that the promised land was in bondage to pagan rule.

During such a time, when people are left defenseless, they fall easy prey to predators, like a wounded deer among wolves. Leaders arise, competing for attention. Rhetoric becomes shrill, and shallow programs proliferate.

The "very religious" retreat into deeper and deeper isolation. Left largely to themselves, they attack each other. So it was with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who shared in common only their disdain for the people. So it was with the Essenes, who withdrew to the desert to remain pure and unspotted by the less righteous, and to await the King . . . only to miss Him when He came.

A FEW EXPECTANT HEARTS

And yet, remarkably, there were a few hearts in Israel that remained *expectant*.

Such a heart belonged to Simeon. Described as "righteous and devout," this man was "looking for the consolation of Israel." Year after year this flickering flame of hope had continued to burn. For this, it would be his to *see* what millions of others would not see. With baby cradled in his arms, he spoke of what he saw:

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,
according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy
salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence
of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to thy people Israel. Luke 2:29-32

He continued:

Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of
many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against
(and a sword will pierce through your own soul
also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be
revealed. Luke 2:34-35)

The King is coming!

Even in the heart of the Samaritan woman, hope had
been kept alive.

The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is
coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he
will show us all things." (John 4:25)

The King is coming!

John the Baptist appeared suddenly. This strange-
looking prophet raised his voice in the wilderness,
awakening hope in the hearts of his listeners. Like a
lightening bolt piercing the dark sky, his message
penetrated the deepest despair of man. "The King is
coming!" "Prepare!" "Get ready!" "Repent!" "*The King
is coming!*"

Thousands felt something strange stirring in their hearts. They were drawn by the thousands to hear John. Though his words were awesome, even frightening, they had an authentic ring. Unlike other religious leaders, he asked nothing for himself. He became the talk of the country.

THE KING IS COMING: CHANGE DEMANDED

The King is coming!

Things cannot be as they have been. People cannot live as they have. Priorities must be rearranged. Life-styles must be altered. Life must be looked at in a new way.

People were shaken in a way they hadn't been for years. Renewal had been sought along many lines. Teachers had tried in vain to awaken the energies and resourcefulness of the people. Nothing had seemed to work. And then, suddenly, the news flashed across the land — "The King is coming." Nothing would ever be the same.

With the breaking of this news, people sensed a new depth of moral and spiritual responsibility. It aroused within them the need to *do* something (Luke 3: 10-14).

"What then shall we do?" asked the multitudes.

"He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

"What shall we do?" queried the tax-collectors.

"Collect no more than is appointed you."

"What shall we do?" asked the soldiers.

"Rob no one by violence or by false accusations, and be content with your ways."

Each of the replies given had an immediacy to it. It gave the people something to act on at that very moment. No dreaminess. No theories about the future.

No guesswork. When the news was announced, the people sensed they needed to do something — right then. It is one thing to *believe* the King is coming; it is something different for the announcement of His coming to provoke immediate change in the way one lives.

Because it demanded change, it was not easy news to believe; alongside the faith struggled the doubt.

Even John, who had announced His coming, struggled. In his dungeon cell the questions pushed their way into his heart. Had he been mistaken? Was his imprisonment consistent with faith in the coming Messiah? Finally, he could bear it no more; he must be sure. He sent his disciples with the question, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

The question was never far from people's lips. Throughout His ministry, it would be raised — sometimes silently in the heart, sometimes hostilely, sometimes hopefully.

It was important for them to know. The way they lived their lives were hinged on the answer.

A MESSIAH OF SURPRISE

No wonder the people struggled with His identity. Who would have expected the Messiah to come as He did? Especially at that time. They had come to think almost completely in terms of political solutions; hence, their expectations of the Messiah were politically oriented.

But that was not to be. Instead, He rejected political solutions (Matthew 4:8-10). At the same time He refused the sheltered seats of religious power.

He turned His life toward the people. Among the people He would live. Among them He would die. If His mission was to be accomplished, it would happen in the

midst of the people — people without a voice, without power.

He spoke their language, yet His words carried new life. He held their children and challenged the parents to become like them (Matthew 18:1-4). He touched their blind and lame and lepers. He loosed the chains of the prisoners and taught the guilty the new song of forgiveness. In Him a kind and compassionate Father found His way to the poor and downtrodden. He gave them a new way to look at persons.

Not all would accept Him, but none who heard Him could ever be quite the same.

When they tried to make Him king, He refused. He marshalled no armies and stirred no military revolutions. No, He remained true to His original focus: the individual.

Mounted on a colt, He rode into Jerusalem. His work was almost done. His hour had come. Multitudes sang and praised as He rode along. It was a stirring sight.

Falsely tried, He was taken to the Place of the Skull where He was crucified. Finally, He was dead. It was over.

Or was it? Even on the day of His death the hillside was haunted with His insistent words, "I am coming again." "I will be with you." "I am coming soon."

Sure enough, on the third day following His death, Mary and others were told He was alive. Then came His appearances to various groups of people. And finally His ascension, followed by these words:

Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11)

**THE RALLYING CRY OF THE
EARLY CHURCH:
THE KING IS COMING**

To the *Athenians* Paul declared that God had “fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31).

He urged the people of *Rome* to awaken from their sleep, because “salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand” (Romans 13:11-12).

The *Corinthians* were encouraged to press on in view of family history:

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

(I Corinthians 15:24)

The *Philippians* were challenged with the thought:

But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.

(Philippians 3:20-21)

The *Thessalonians* were urged “to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (I Thessalonians 1:10).

They were to be comforted in view of His return:

For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

(I Thessalonians 4:15-18)

James urged his readers:

Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

(James 5:7-8)

Peter wrote to those he addressed as having "obtained a faith of equal standing."

First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation." . . . But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the

words that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire!

(II Peter 3:3, 4, 10-12)

John comforted his readers:

And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming . . . Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

(I John 2:28; 3:2)

And the *Revelation* closes with the promise, "Surely I am coming soon! Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (*Revelation* 22:20).

The early church drew nourishment from the confidence that the King was coming again. In view of it they were comforted; urged to live a godly life; challenged to practice a lifestyle that was consistent with their faith in His return; and stimulated to stay fresh and alive. To the degree they were faithful to these admonitions, they flourished and thrived as the church of the living God. Only when this confidence faded or died did they slip into lethargy, indifference, and worldliness.

THE KING IS COMING: THE DEAFENING SILENCE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY CHURCH

And now the years have passed. The world has

changed in the way it perceives itself. Space has been explored; we've been to the moon; we've taken pictures of faraway planets. Science and technology have become formidable challenges to the older interpretations of human life and meaning.

The world of religion has made its peace with materialism and carnality. So deeply attached to the "here and now," it has little credibility as a spokesman for things that do not pass away. It lives as though the kingdom now comes by "observation" and is made up of "meat and drink." It has once more constructed its "temples" in which it attempts to imprison its God. Instead of waiting with expectancy for the return of the King, it has become quite satisfied with the world itself. Shunning the heavenly manna, it makes itself fat on the manna of the world.

Expectancy in such a religious situation is rooted in whether the budget will be met or the next fund drive is successful. The drives, programs, and church strategies have so preoccupied the leaders that little time is left for thinking through the meaning of the Lord's return. Vertical supply has given way to horizontal consumption.

Our fellowship has been tragically affected by this general religious trend. All across the land, our eyes are fixed on our projects, our obligations, our mortar and wood. If a project isn't expressed in terms of real estate or inventory, it captures little attention.

And our style of life often stifles our spirituality. *Divorce* is becoming more and more commonplace. *Materialism* escalates our living standard far beyond our corresponding investments in a "kingdom not of this world." Pressures have assumed control of our *time*, dictating their wishes to us as we obey in robot-like fashion. Rarely are we nourished by our constant gaze

on the "things that are unseen." Drawing our nourishment from the "things that are seen," our inner life suffers collapse. Soon our religion is viewed as a ceremony confined to a certain time, place, and people. Paul warned of such a consequence:

For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. (Philippians 3:18-19)

And, as long ago, the predators have sensed our woundedness. False prophets have risen and fallen. Promises have been made and broken. Cynicism has grown. And emptiness.

Once more God's people could lapse into religious sects that seize an opportunity against the helpless, that promote themselves with schemes that devour widows' houses.

Or we could follow the path of the Essenes. Isolated from the people, secure and condescending in our self-righteousness, we could maintain a defensive stronghold.

Or . . . somewhere could be awakened in hearts that wait for the Lord that spark which could become a flame in our world.

Do you wait for the return of the King? Has your lifestyle been determined by your confidence that He is coming? Is your conduct fashioned not by peer groups, but by eyes that yearn for His return?

Does the way you see your talents indicate your watchfulness for His coming? Or, because you've decided your Master has "delayed His coming," have you behaved in a manner unbecoming of the children of the King (Luke 12:41-48)?

Where do we stand today before the cry, "The King is coming!?"

Those who believe the King is coming live with a beautiful vision of life as only He can make it. They dream of things that can be in the midst of things as they are. Free from the bondage of things that bind us to this world, they love and share with others the joy and peace that only the King can give.

The King is coming! And so we lay aside the besetting sin of unbelief, and with new freshness run the race.

The King is coming! And so we know we are pilgrims and strangers here who are free to invest not in things that perish, but in the unending lives of the people around us.

The King is coming! And so we carry the vision of valleys being filled, mountains and hills brought low; crooked ways made straight and rough ways made smooth. We know that strength is in His arm as the proud are scattered, the mighty toppled from their thrones. We rejoice in our participation in the vision that sees the hungry filled with good things and those of low degree exalted.

The King is coming! Let us lift our eyes and see what is important. Let us with joy give our cups of cold water. Let us gather the children once more into our arms and be the hands that touch the poor and downtrodden. Let us speak peace to those divided and torn. Let us bring joy to eyes that run over with tears of despair and heartache.

The King is coming! Let us once again as "living water" find our way over the parched and barren land. Let us herald the cry as we penetrate the wilderness, "The King is coming!"

Let us go to the cities and go to the country. Let us go to the rich and to the poor, to the imprisoned and insti-

tutionalized. Let our words find their way into the high places.

But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him to subject all things to himself. Therefore, my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

(Philippians 3:20-21; 4:1)

Exegesis of Difficult Passages

AN EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 24

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I. The Beautiful Temple and Its Predicted Destruction — Matthew 24:1, 2; Mark 13:1, 2; Luke 21:5, 6.

In the midst of the passion week as Jesus left the temple, his disciples called his attention to the beautiful stones and construction of the temple. Josephus has left us an extensive account of the beauty of the temple as it was during the ministry of Jesus. He describes the extensive beautification project that was begun in the fifteenth year of the reign of Herod the Great and which continued, actually, until the Roman war and the destruction of the temple.¹

Jesus responded to his disciples by saying, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down" (Mark 13:2). This startling prediction by Jesus was very puzzling to the disciples, without doubt. To nearly all Jews, the temple was central in all their concepts concerning the religion and the glory of Israel. It was virtually unthinkable that the temple could be destroyed, yet, Jesus announced just such a destruction.

II. The Questions of the Disciples — Matthew 24:3; Mark 13: 3, 4; Luke 21:7.

Mark informs us that Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him questions seeking further explanation of his startling statement. A composite of the three accounts from Matthew, Mark, and Luke indicates a total of four questions. These are as follows:

1. When shall these things be? (Matthew 24:3; Mark 13:4; Luke 21:7).
2. What will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished? (Mark 13:4).

3. What will be the sign when this is about to take place? (Luke 21:7).
4. What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age? (Matthew 24:3).

An analysis of these questions, as phrased by the disciples and recorded by the evangelists, indicates that the disciples were concerned about three different events: first, the destruction of the temple; second, the parousia or the coming of the Messiah; and third, the end of the age. These matters were not clearly distinguished in the minds of the disciples and evidently they did not have any concept of a time sequence with respect to these events. Even after the crucifixion of Christ and his resurrection, the disciples still did not have a clear concept concerning all of these matters. This is indicated by their questions and the reply that Jesus made to them in Acts 1:6, 7.

However, the key to understanding this discourse by our Lord as recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, is to understand that He is answering the questions of the disciples. Further, it is essential to note that as Jesus answers their questions he makes a clear distinction between what could be known about the destruction of the temple and what could be known about his second coming and the end of the age. Jesus contrasts these two questions, and indicates that there will be signs preceding the destruction of Jerusalem that the disciples can see and know, and signs that will guide them in fleeing Jerusalem so Christians may be saved from the destruction of the rest of the Jews who remained in Jerusalem. Concerning the second coming, however, He makes it clear that this will not be preceded by any discernible signs and that no one can know in advance when this will take place.

III. Jesus Answers and Warns the Disciples — Matthew 24:4-14; Mark 13:5-13; Luke 21: 8-19.

Jesus cautioned his disciples, "Take heed that no one leads you astray" (Matthew 24:4). Jesus alerts them to the fact that "Many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ" (Matthew 24:5). Jesus notes a number of other signs and warns the disciples that many events must occur even before the destruction of Jerusalem, and attempts to prepare them for these events so they will not be led astray, but will endure all persecution. It is important to take note of some of his warnings and their meanings.

False Christs: In verse 5 and again in verses 23 and 24, Jesus prepares the disciples for the coming of a number of people claiming to be the Messiah and He warns them not to believe it. While Josephus does not use the terms, Christ or Messiah, to describe them, he mentions a number of leaders who arose and led a faction after them. He describes them as "deceivers and imposters, under the pretense of divine inspiration fostering revolutionary changes, they persuaded the multitude to act like madmen, and led them out into the desert under the belief that God would there give them tokens of deliverance."² Josephus receives support from the Rabbi Gamaliel as his speech is recorded in Acts 5:34-39. Josephus and Gamaliel mention Theudas in common. Both mention a Judas, though there is some question of chronology or sequence.³ In Acts 21:38, the chief captain asked Paul if he were the Egyptian who had stirred up a sedition. Josephus, likewise, mentions a false prophet from Egypt.⁴ It is thus accurate to understand that the times in the middle of the first century were right for many to claim to be the Messiah and attempt to get people to follow them. Bar-Cochba definitely claimed to

be the Messiah and led the Jews into another war with Rome from A.D. 132 to 135.⁵ In the succeeding centuries, many other false Christs and false Messiahs have confused and led many astray. However, it is best to understand Jesus' warning as having primary application to his disciples and to false Christs that would arise during their lifetime and before the destruction of Jerusalem.

Wars and Rumors of Wars: Jesus warned that the hearing of wars and rumors of wars would also be a premature sign. He specifically said, "The end is not yet" (Matthew 24:6). Numerous sources such as Tacitus, Suetonius, Josephus and others give information about various wars and conflicts between nations.⁶ Jesus said these were not adequate signs to herald the destruction of the temple. It seems strange indeed that one false interpretation after another has focused on various series of wars in many different centuries in order to attempt to fix a date for the coming of Christ and the end of the world. However, in the actual exegesis of the context here, Christ is saying these are not the positive sign and the disciples should not be led astray by hearing of wars and rumors of wars and thinking that the end has come.

Famines, Earthquakes, Natural Calamities: Jesus says that there would be famine,⁷ earthquakes,⁸ and pestilences. There would also be terrors and great signs from heaven, but He further warns the disciples that "All this is but the beginning of the sufferings" (Matthew 24:8).⁹ He attempts in this way to prepare the disciples for many difficult times and situations that they must endure during their lifetime. To be forewarned is to be forearmed, thus the disciples could have their guard up against expecting the future to be smooth and easy, when in reality it was going to be difficult.

Persecutions: Jesus now warns the disciples most

specifically of the difficulties that would come against them because they were his disciples.

Then shall they deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name's sake. And then shall many stumble, and shall deliver up one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray. And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. (Matthew 24:9-13)

The account in Mark and Luke mentioned that they would be delivered up to councils, they would be beaten in the synagogues, they would be brought before governors and kings.¹⁰ These more complete accounts record Jesus' exhortation not to be anxious concerning how they would defend themselves, for they would be given the wisdom to speak, and it would not be they who spoke but the Holy Spirit. The fulfillment of these persecutions is documented on many different occasions in the book of Acts. Also, Acts relates how Paul appeared before governors and kings and how the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit as they spoke to councils (Acts 4:5-31; 5:17-42; 6:12; 22; 23; 24; 25; 26; 27; 28). Tacitus describes the cruel persecution of the Christians in A.D. 64 and afterward by Nero.¹¹

This Gospel Shall Be Preached: Jesus concluded this section of warning by indicating that the end of the temple would not come until the gospel had been preached in the whole world. Most commentators are agreed that the term world as used here is a reference to the then known world or Roman Empire.¹² This would be equivalent to Paul's statement in Colossians 1:23.

Thus, Jesus tells the disciples that they have much work to do and much suffering to endure before the time will come when one stone will not be left upon the other of the temple.

IV. The Sign to Flee Jerusalem and Other Warnings — Matthew 24:15-28; Mark 13:14-23; Luke 21:20-24.

Jesus cited at least eleven different kinds of events which would happen and which would serve as general signs pointing toward the end of the temple. These eleven were:

1. Numerous False Messianic Claims
2. Wars and Rumors of Wars with Nation Rising Against Nation
3. Famines
4. Earthquakes
5. Pestilence (Luke 21:11)
6. Terrors (Luke 21:11)
7. Great Signs from Heaven (Luke 21:11)
8. Persecutions
9. False Prophets and Teachers
10. Apostasy
11. The Gospel Preached to the Whole World

However, Jesus cautioned that these were only generic and that as one after another of these developed, the disciples still were to be aware that the end was not yet and that these were only the beginnings of tribulation and suffering. As He mentions the twelfth factors, however, He indicates that this is to be a specific warning to his disciples to flee Judea. He states, "When therefore you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the Prophet, standing in the

holy place (let him who reads understand), then let them who are in Judea flee unto the mountains" (Matthew 24:15, 16). He specifically warns them to flee hastily and not to go back to the house to get any goods or clothing. He further indicates that because great haste will be needed to get away safely, there will be a special hardship on mothers with children or on all the people if the need to flee should come on a Sabbath day or in the winter.

Abomination of Desolation: This twelfth sign has been the source of extensive discussion by students of this passage and also the source of much abuse.¹³ Actually, the statement is clearly explained by the parallel account in Luke 21:20. Here the inspired account indicates that Jesus said, "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near." The statement "see Jerusalem surrounded by armies" is directly parallel to the statement "see the abomination of desolation." This phrase originated in Daniel 9: 26, 27 and 11:31. The Jews had long understood at least a part of Daniel's prophecy to have been fulfilled in the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes as recorded in I Maccabees 1:54 and II Maccabees 6:4,5.¹⁴ Thus, it would be an easy transition for Jesus' disciples to understand this phrase, during their lifetime, to be a reference to the ruling and dominating power, the Roman Empire and its armies. Evidently in Jesus' original full statement, He used both the phrase "abomination of desolation" and "surrounded by armies."

Specifically, the Jews looked upon the engraved emblems carried by the Roman soldiers as idols and had conflicts with the Romans from time to time concerning their use, as Josephus indicates. The Jews asked the Legate Vitellius not to march his army through the land

because of the insignia.¹⁵ Josephus relates how Pilate created a problem by bringing one standard into Jerusalem.¹⁶ He specifically describes that after the burning of the temple, the Romans brought their ensigns and erected them over the eastern gate of the temple and offered sacrifices to them.¹⁷

Jesus clearly tells his disciples that when they see the Roman armies with their idolatrous ensigns marching toward the city and preparing to besiege it, they must flee the city in order to be delivered. This is clearly how the early Christians understood this passage, because it is precisely what the Christians in Jerusalem in A.D. 70 did.¹⁸ Eusebius describes their action.

On the other hand, the people of the church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. To it those who believed on Christ migrated from Jerusalem, that when holy men had altogether deserted the royal capitol of the Jews and the whole land of Judea, the judgment of God might at last overtake them for all their crimes against the Christ and his Apostles, and all that generation of the wicked be utterly blotted out from among men.¹⁹

Great Tribulation: This phrase has been taken by some groups and used in a technical sense to describe a period yet future that is specifically designated "The tribulation."²⁰ This is certainly an abuse of this phrase from this context in Matthew 24. The phrase here simply refers to the tremendous suffering, agony, and destruction of the Jewish race and the city of Jerusalem. Extensive descriptions are found in Josephus,²¹

Eusebius, and others of the sufferings and atrocities which occurred at this time. Eusebius observes:

Those who wish can retrace accurately from the history written by Josephus how many evils at that time overwhelmed the whole nation in every place and especially how the inhabitants of Judea were driven to the last point of suffering, how many thousands of youths, women, and children perished by the sword, by famine, and by countless other forms of death; they can read how many and what famous Jewish cities were besieged, and finally how terrors and worse than terrors were seen by those who fled to Jerusalem as if to a mighty capitol; they can study the nature of the whole war, all the details of what happened in it, and how at the end the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophets was set up in the very temple of God, for all its ancient fame, and it perished utterly and passed away in flames. But it is necessary to point out how the same writer estimates at three million the number of those who in the days of the Feast of the Passover thronged Jerusalem from all Judea and, to use his own words, were shut up as if in prison. It was indeed right that on the same day on which they had perpetrated the passion of the Saviour and benefactor of all men and the Christ of God they should be, as it were, shut up in prison and receive the destruction which pursued them from the sentence of God.²²

Believe It Not: Jesus again strongly warns his disciples against believing the false Christs and the false prophets even if they show signs and wonders. He specifically indicates that the destruction and fall of

Jerusalem will not be the same as the coming of the Son of Man. The destruction of Jerusalem would be a localized, historic event, and the news of it would have to travel in normal fashion and it would be many days and weeks before many in the empire would know about it. But as for the coming of the Son of Man, it will be as the lightning which is seen throughout the heavens by people in many places at one instant.

V. The Aftermath of the Destruction of Jerusalem
Until the Coming of the Son of Man — Matthew
24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-28.

Immediately: The word “immediately”²³ is used to introduce the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem, especially as it would appear to Jewish people and to many Christians who had Jewish backgrounds. The affects of the destruction of Jerusalem are described in highly figurative terms, such as “sun shall be darkened,” “moon shall not give her light,” and other expressions of catastrophe concerning the stars and the heavens. Such terminology is common in the Old Testament to describe the fall of kingdoms such as Babylon (Isaiah 13:10, 19), Edom (Isaiah 34:4), Egypt (Ezekiel 32:7, 8), and in other places. The cataclysmic terminology is also to be found in some of the apocrypha and Pseudepigraphical literature. All verse 29 is saying is that all matters will be very dismal, bleak, and full of sorrow for those who had a love for Jerusalem.²⁴

Then: This adverb is used to introduce the concept of the ultimate return of the Son of Man. However, this adverb “then” simply indicates that in point of sequence and in the context of the discussion, which is answering the questions of the disciples, that at a point subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem and all of its aftermath,

the Son of Man will come. It remains for the rest of Jesus' answer to the question to state more clearly when "then" is to be, and it becomes clear from his added explanation on further down that neither He, the angels, nor any man knew when the "then" would be.

The Sign of the Son of Man: Jesus said, "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven." This phrase likewise has given many commentators considerable difficulty.²⁵ However, this is unjustifiably so. When the phrase is understood in the total context of Matthew chapters 24 and 25, again the meaning is very clear. The disciples had asked Jesus concerning "signs" when not one stone would be left upon another and the "signs" for his coming. He has in the preceding verses discussed the "signs" for the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the temple. His chief discussion of the "signs" for the coming of the Son of Man began in verse 36. While he uses the phrase, "the sign of the Son of Man" here, it becomes clear from the totality of his explanation in the latter part of chapter 24 and throughout chapter 25 that in reality there is no "sign." The disciples had asked for "signs," but Jesus makes clear in the contrast in verses 32-36 that while there are "signs" preceding the destruction of Jerusalem, there are no "signs" preceding the coming of the Son of Man. The only sign that there will be is the sudden appearance of Christ coming on the clouds seen by every eye at once. At that time, He will send forth his angels and gather his elect. When these verses are studied in conjunction with Matthew 13, I Thessalonians 4, and other passages concerning the second coming, the entire matter is clearly understood.

VI. The Lesson of the Fig Tree — Matthew 24:32-36;
Mark 13:28-32; Luke 21:29-33.

The Parable of the Fig Tree: A parable is that which is cast beside or laid beside something else in order that the clear may make plain the new or unclear. Jesus now says to his disciples that this parable of the fig tree will make clear the things he is trying to say about "signs." When a fig tree puts forth tender branches and leaves, anyone with any experience and observation at all knows that summer is just about here. Even so, his disciples, also, when they would see the twelve signs mentioned above, would know that it, that is, the destruction of Jerusalem, is near. The Greek at this point has no stated subject, but is a third person singular present active indicative form of the verb, to be. In a given context this could be either he, she, or it. In this context, it must be understood as referring to it or the destruction of Jerusalem.²⁶ If one translates this as he and has it referring to the second coming of Christ, then it stands in contradiction to a number of other plain scriptures and does not make clear this passage at all, but only adds to its confusion.

This Generation: Jesus says, "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished" (Matthew 24:34). The term "this generation" has been the focus of much discussion and speculation. Again, this is needlessly so. The Greek word which is translated generation is used thirteen times in the gospel of Matthew: four times in Matthew 1:17 and one time each in Matthew 11:16; 12:39, 41, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36; 24:34. Each time in Matthew, the word has the sense of the life span of a person. When the demonstrative adjective, "this," is used with the word, "generation," as it is in Matthew 11:16 and 12:41, 42, it is clearly referring to the people contemporary with the speaker who is addressing them. The word occurs at least forty-three times in the New Testament and in all of the other incidences it has

the meaning of the life span of a people, or people who live at a contemporary time.²⁷ Thus, there is no justification for some strained interpretation and translation such as "race."²⁸ Jesus is simply saying this group of people living, working, and worshipping here in Jerusalem and at the temple will not completely pass away. Many of them will still be alive when the city of Jerusalem is destroyed and when the temple is so destroyed that one stone is not left upon the other.

But of That Day: Here Christ clearly contrasts his answers to the questions asked by the disciples. In verses 4-28, He had principally answered the question as to when one stone would not be left upon another. Within those verses, He had in a negative way emphasized that though many will try to make you think the Christ has come and claim that the Christ has come, do not believe it. He will not come in this fashion. Though Christ had made reference to "the sign of the Son of Man" in verse 30, He had not stated any matters that would serve as a sign except simply that He would be seen coming on the clouds. Now beginning at this point, Christ makes clear to the disciples that He was not capable of giving an answer to their questions concerning the signs of his coming and the sign of the end of the world. The reason He was not capable of giving an answer to their question is that He did not know, the angels did not know, no one knew except the Father only. It is indeed strange that so many people have had so much difficulty in understanding Matthew 24 and have constantly tried to interpret parts of it as having reference to signs for the coming of Christ, when Christ himself so emphatically states that He did not know when He would come. If He did not know, how could He give any signs? In paraphrase fashion, Christ is saying to his disciples, "Yes, there are some signs that

point toward the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. There are eleven general ones that I will mention to you but only one, the twelfth, is specific and it is the one for which you must diligently watch. For when the Romans begin to head toward Jerusalem to surround it and besiege it, you, my disciples, get out and flee to safety. As for signs concerning my second coming, all I know is that I will come on the clouds with power and great glory and when I come, I will send forth angels and gather the elect. I cannot give you any specific signs because I do not know any. I do not know when I will come again; only the Father does." Christ proceeds then to describe the second coming and to make comparisons.

VII. The Nature of the Coming of the Son of Man is Compared and Illustrated — Matthew 24:37-25:46.

- A. It is like the coming of the flood in the days of Noah — 24:37-42.
- B. It is like the coming of the thief — 24:43-45.
- C. It is like the coming of the lord to his faithful and wise servant versus coming to his evil servant — 24:45-51.
- D. It is like the coming of the bridegroom to the ten virgins — 25:1-13.
- E. It is like the coming of the man to make a reckoning with his servants concerning their talents — 25:14-30.
- F. It will be the coming of the Son of Man to sit in judgment of all men — 25:31-46.

Repeatedly, as Jesus describes the nature of the second coming, He emphasizes the sudden and unexpected nature of it. It will be as in the days of Noah, when "they knew not until the flood came and took them all away." One must "watch therefore: for you know not on what day your Lord comes." The master did not know when the thief would come, the servants did not know when the master would return, the virgins did not know when the bridegroom would come.

Matthew 24 (and its parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21), when exegeted by the grammatico-historical method, is shown to be clearly an answer that Jesus gives to his disciples in reply to their questions. He knows the answer to their questions concerning signs for the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, and he relates what these signs are, and warns his disciples against four great spiritual dangers. First, they are warned not to rely on outward material beauty and aspects of religion such as the temple, for the temple itself will be destroyed. Secondly, they are warned against listening to the false claims of many false Messiahs that would arise in the years just ahead. Thirdly, He warns them not to be distracted by all of the wars and turmoil of the world. They must be about the more important business of the spiritual kingdom. Fourthly, He warns them about persecution and prepares them in hopes that they will not be made to stumble or apostatize, even though many of the disciples will.

On the other hand, Jesus does not know the answer to the disciples' other question concerning the signs of his coming and the end of the world. He just knows he will come back on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He will send forth his angels. He will have a reckoning with each servant in justice and righteousness. He thus warns the disciples repeatedly to watch, to

be ready, to be prepared and to have so lived, to have so acted, to have so served, that they may receive the reward of a faithful and good servant and hear his invitation, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

FOOTNOTES

¹Josephus, *War* I. xxi. 1 (401); *War* V. v. 6 (222-226); *Antiquities* XV. xi. 1-3 (380-402).

²Josephus, *War* II. xiii. 4, 5 (258, 259).

³Josephus, *Antiquities* XX. v. 1, 2 (97-102); Acts 5:36. See also F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles — The Greek Text With Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2nd edition, 1952), pp. 146, 147.

⁴Josephus, *Antiquities* XX. viii. 6 (168-172); Acts 21:38.

⁵"Bar-Cochba" in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, edited by F. L. Cross (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 130.

⁶Tacitus, *History* i. 2. See also Philo, *de Legatione* 120-151; Josephus, *Antiquities* XVIII. ix. 8, 9; *Wars* II. xviii. 1.

⁷Acts 11:28; Josephus, *Antiquities* III. xv. 3 (320); Tacitus, *Annals* xii. 43; Suetonius, *Claudius* xviii.; Josephus, *Antiquities* XX. ii. 5.

⁸Josephus, *Wars* IV. iv. 5; Tacitus, *Annals* xii. 27, 43; Suetonius, *Life of Galba* xviii. See also D. H. Kallner-Amiran, "A Revised Earthquake-Catalogue of Palestine," *Israel Exploration Journal*, I (1950-51), p. 225.

⁹Much discussion is found in the commentaries concerning the parallel of Jesus' outline with the classical threefold division of Jewish Apocalyptic. The Parallel three phrases are "the birth pangs," "the tribulation," and "the end." For further discussion and reference see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *A Commentary on Mark 13* (London: Macmillan and Company Ltd., 1957), p. 1f.

¹⁰Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-19.

¹¹Tacitus, *Annals* xv. 44.; See also Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), Vol. 1, pp. 391, 392.

¹²Luke 2:1; Josephus, *Antiquities* XV. xi. 1 (387); XIX. ii. 4 (193); See also Jack P. Lewis, *The Gospel According to Matthew* in the Living Word Commentary Series edited by Everett Ferguson (Austin: Sweet Publishing Company, 1976), Vol 2, p. 123; J. W. McGarvey, *The Fourfold Gospel (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, n. d.)*, p. 624.

¹³Cecil May, Jr., *Matthew 24* A thesis presented to the faculty of Harding Graduate School of Religion in June, 1967, pp. 25-34. See also R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Matthew's Gospel* (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartsburg Press, 1943), p. 938; A. H. McNeile, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1957), p. 347; J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew Twenty-Four*

(Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reform Publishing Company, 1948), pp. 40-53.

¹⁴Cecil May, Jr., *Matthew 24*, *op. cit.*, pp. 27, 28; Josephus, *Antiquities* XII. v. 4 (253); Jack P. Lewis, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, *op. cit.* Vol. 2, p. 124.

¹⁵Josephus, *Antiquities* XVIII. v. 3 (121).

¹⁶Josephus, *Antiquities* XVIII. iii. 1 (55-59).

¹⁷Josephus, *Wars* VI. vi. 1 (316).

¹⁸Cecil May, Jr., *Matthew 24*, *op. cit.*, p. 35; See also J. W. McGarvey, "The Jerusalem Church," *Sermons* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing Company, 1894), pp. 266, 267; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 402-404.

¹⁹Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* III. 5.

²⁰C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 1033.

²¹Josephus, *War* V. x. 5 (442); VI. ix. 4 (429); V. xiii. 3 (512); V. xiii. 7 (567); VI. iii. 3 (193).

²²Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* III. 5.

²³George V. Wigram, *Englishman's Greek Concordance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970 edition), pp. 322, 323; See also standard lexicons and word study books.

²⁴R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* in the Tyndale Bible Commentaries New Testament Series (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), pp. 225-227; May, *op. cit.*, pp. 47, 48; Kik, *op. cit.*, p. 59; Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *God's Prophetic Word* (Houston: Roy E. Cogdell, Publisher, 1946), p. 254.

²⁵May, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-56; Beasley-Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 92; M'Neile, *op. cit.*, p. 352; T. Francis Glasson, "The Ensign of the Son of Man," *Journal of Theological Studies*, XV. (October, 1964), pp. 299-300; A. J. B. Higgins, "The Sign of the Son of Man," *New Testament Studies*, IX. (July, 1963), pp. 380-382; Carl Armerding, *Signs of Christ's Coming as Son of Man* (Chicago: Moody Press, Revised Edition, 1971), pp. 27-35.

²⁶Jack P. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 129; Tasker, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

²⁷Wigram, *Englishman's Greek Concordance*, *op. cit.*, pp. 113, 114; See other standard lexicons and Greek word study sources.

²⁸Jerome, *Commentar, In Evangelium Matthais*, J. P. Migne, editor., *Patrologiae Latinae*, Vol. XXVI., p. 188; Scofield, *op. cit.*, p. 1034.

The Man of Lawlessness: II Thessalonians 2:3-12

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Introduction

When the hostility of the Jewish mob forced Paul to abandon his fruitful work among the Thessalonians and flee to Beroea and then to Athens (Acts 17), he was

burdened with a great concern for the welfare of his Thessalonian converts (I Thess. 3:1ff). Upon hearing the report of Timothy's personal visit to Thessalonica (I Thess. 3:6-7), Paul (now in Corinth—Acts 18) was greatly relieved and wrote his first letter to them expressing his relief and great affection. But Timothy's report also made Paul aware of some problems which required additional teaching, especially the new Christians' concern over the Second Coming of Christ and related questions (I Thess. 4:13ff). But the first letter apparently did not resolve all of the questions, and the problem of disturbance over the Second Coming seems to have worsened by the time Paul heard from the Thessalonian brethren again. And so he penned his second letter to them, this time to deal specifically with the Second Coming problem. From the first three verses of II Thess. 2, we learn that someone (apparently even Paul was not sure of the culprit's identity) had shaken the Thessalonians' faith by teaching that the "day of the Lord" had already come, and they had somehow missed out on it, or else it was not as Paul had told them it would be.

In order to combat this error and reassure his troubled converts, Paul in vs. 3-12 of chapter 2 gives proof that the day of the Lord cannot possibly have occurred yet, for certain other events must transpire first, and at the time of his writing, they had obviously not done so. Thus has come down to us Paul's striking teaching on the appearing of the "Man of Lawlessness."

Seldom in the course of exegetical study does one encounter a passage which has been subject to so great a variety of interpretations as has II Thessalonians 2:3-12, and which so many commentators have confessed to be not understandable. But because of its great theme and the importance which the inspired writer attaches to it (it

is indeed the core of his second letter), it is a passage which we cannot ignore, and we must seek to understand what we can of it. It is not the purpose of this study to present any new or definitive interpretation of the text under consideration, or even a thorough exposition of it. Time, space, and ability will not allow it. Rather, our goal will be to understand why the passage is so difficult to interpret, then to survey the major interpretations which have been proposed by others (including a discussion of their strengths and weaknesses), and finally — and perhaps most important — to make some practical observations concerning II Thessalonians 2:3-12 in relation to the life and faith of the church today.

I. Interpretative Problems

Of course, the primary question raised by our text is, "Who or what is the man of lawlessness?" But before this question can be resolved or even seriously approached, there are some other problems which must be taken into consideration. Not all of the problems discussed below are major ones, but they do require careful consideration as we approach the question of the identity of the "Man of Lawlessness."

A. "*Man of Lawlessness*" or "*Man of Sin*"? On the basis of a large number of early manuscripts, the figure in v. 3 is designated the "man of sin" (*ho anthropos tes hamartias*) in the King James and American Standard versions. However, most later translations (R.S.V., N.A.S.B., N.I.V., etc.) prefer the reading "man of lawlessness" (*ho anthropos tes anomias*). Although slightly fewer in number the manuscripts supporting the latter reading are generally earlier and more reliable. Also, the expressions "mystery of lawlessness" in v. 7 and "the lawless one" in v. 8 suggest that "man of lawlessness"

was likely the original reading. However, the difference in meaning between the two expressions is not great, especially since I John 3:4 tells us that "sin is lawlessness." By either reading, then, the "man" in v. 3 is described as one who is characterized by rebellion against God and His will.

B. *Ellipses in the Text.* The incomplete structure of two of Paul's sentences in the Greek suggests that this passage was written with great intensity, as if he were pressing home a teaching whose importance far outweighs the niceties of grammar. In v. 3, where we are first introduced to the "man of lawlessness," the phrase "that day will not come" (R.S.V.) is absent from the Greek and must be supplied to complete the sentence. Likewise, in v. 7, the words "will do so" are not in the text. Occasionally someone will suggest that other words be supplied and thereby change the sense of the verses, but none have been proposed that are more satisfactory than those of the R.S.V. (see also N.A.S.B., N.I.V., K.J.V., A.S.V.).

C. *The Nature of "The Rebellion."* Paul emphasizes that before the day of the Lord comes, a "rebellion" must first occur. The Greek word is *apostasia* (apostasy, abandonment, rebellion), a term used in the non-Biblical papyrus documents to describe the activities of political rebels, but in the New Testament to designate religious apostasy (e.g., Acts 21:21 — literally, "You teach apostasy from Moses"). It is often assumed that "the rebellion" and the coming of the "man of lawlessness" are two separate events that must both occur before the Lord comes. But the sense of the passage is against this view. Rather, the "rebellion" occurs when the "man of lawlessness" appears and precipitates it. Notice that Paul mentions them together in v. 3 and then does not refer to the rebellion again by name, but rather speaks of its

author and leader. They are not two events, but one. The "rebellion" is often characterized as a complete social, political, and moral upheaval, but the text itself does not suggest this. Rather, as vs. 4, 9, and 10 suggest, the apostasy is primarily religious in nature — i.e., it is a defection from "the truth" in the direction of one whose sole objective is to lead astray. Supporting this interpretation is the fact that the "man of lawlessness" is portrayed not as a social or political rebel, but as an anti-God, anti-Christ figure. His appearing is a type of pseudo-incarnation, having the very opposite goal of our Lord's incarnation. His coming is described as a *parousia* (v. 9), the usual N.T. term for the coming of Jesus. He will have "power" and will perform "signs and wonders" in imitation of Jesus' miracles (v. 9). It will clearly be his intention to draw worship to himself and away from Christ and God (v. 5). Such is the nature of the "rebellion" or "apostasy" which Paul predicts. Recognizing it as inaugurated by, and not different from, the coming of the "man of lawlessness," and as a primarily religious apostasy should help keep us from some serious misconceptions in our attempts to identify the "man of lawlessness."

D. *The Identity of the Restraining Power.* Almost as great an enigma as the identity of the "man of lawlessness" is that of the restraining power/or individual mentioned in vs. 6 and 7. Paul speaks as if the "man of lawlessness" were already in existence at the time of his writing, yet he is (or was) being restrained by some unnamed power until "his time" has come. Then the restraining power will be removed and the lawless one will be revealed. Part of the problem is the fact that Paul speaks of the restraining power in both impersonal (*to katechon* — neuter accusative singular participle) and personal (*ho katechon* — masculine nominative singular

participle) terms. There are at least three possibilities for this double terminology: (1) The restraining power is both personal and impersonal; i.e., there is an impersonal restraining force led by or directed by a restraining individual. (2) The restraining power is strictly impersonal, and "he who restrains" is simply a personification of that power. (3) The restraining power is strictly personal, and the "what is restraining" of v. 6 is simply an impersonal reference to him. The text itself would argue for the first interpretation, with the second posing a strong possibility, and the third hardly likely.

Adding to the mystique of this puzzling reference is Paul's statement in v. 6 that the Thessalonians knew to what or whom Paul was referring without his being more specific. The statement concerning this restraining power was not to them some strange cryptic reference as it appears to be to us. There was no need for further identification; they knew. We do not.

So closely tied to the identity of the "man of lawlessness" is that of the restraining power that we will reserve further comment on it for the survey of interpretations below.

E. *The Location of the "The Temple of God."* Whatever interpretation of the "man of lawlessness" one accepts, he must reconcile it with the statement in v. 4 that the "man of lawlessness" will "take his seat in the temple of God" as a part of his self-exaltation "against every so-called god or object of worship." If by "the temple" Paul means the Jerusalem Temple, then the "man of lawlessness" must have appeared prior to 70 A.D. This seems highly unlikely, although some see v. 4 as a reference to Caligula's attempt in A.D. 40 to erect his statue in the Temple. This explanation does not square at all with v. 4, since the man is said to be seated in the temple personally — not vicariously in a statue.

Besides, Paul is predicting the future; Caligula's attempt had long passed. Other explanations for the "temple" reference include the "temple" in heaven, the church, the apostate church, and some material building which will serve as the setting for the man of lawlessness' claim to deity. These interpretations are, of course, bound up with the various indentifications of the "man of lawlessness." However, there is no necessity for taking "the temple" literally at all or for identifying it with a specific place or institution. It may be nothing more than a figure of speech for seeking the glory that belongs to God alone. It is even possible that the phrase "proclaiming himself to be God" at the end of v.4 is not in addition to seating himself in the temple, but rather an explanation of it — i.e., he "takes his seat in the temple" (so to speak) by "proclaiming himself to be God."

F. *Apocalyptic Imagery*. One probable reason for the difficulty in interpreting II Thess. 2:3-12 is that it contains elements of apocalyptic literature which defy exact interpretation, and perhaps were never meant to be exactly interpreted. The term "apocalyptic" (from Greek *apokalupsis* — "revelation," "disclosure") describes a genre of Jewish and Christian literature which arose out of times when God's people were suffering persecution and needed assurance that eventually God would intervene and set everything aright. There are apocalyptic sections in the Old Testament books of Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Joel. Many Jewish apocalypses come from the inter-testamental and early Christian periods (200 B.C.-100 A.D.), such as First Enoch, Assumption of Moses, Fourth Ezra (Second Esdras), and The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. The book of Revelation (Greek title *Apokalupsis*) is the only apocalyptic N.T. book, although scattered passages elsewhere may contain apocalyptic elements.

Some of the characteristics of this literature include visions, pseudonymity (purportedly written by a great figure from the past), symbolism, cosmic dualism, and pessimism. Not all of these characteristics will be found in every apocalyptic work. For example, none of the biblical apocalypses is pseudonymous. Also, a book or passage may be marked by some apocalyptic characteristics without being a thoroughly apocalyptic work.

In the case of our text, it is likely that Paul employs some apocalyptic elements, especially symbols, without writing a truly apocalyptic passage (see below under III.A.). But it is impossible to tell what is strictly symbolic and what is to be taken literally. It is even possible that the "man of lawlessness" himself is an apocalyptic symbol. Likewise, the "temple," the "rebellion," and the confrontation between Christ and the "man of lawlessness" all have their parallels in apocalyptic eschatology. Some biblical passages upon which Paul may have drawn for some of his imagery include Dan. 8:23ff, 11:36ff, Is. 14:13-14, and Ezek. 28:2. (Similar passages occur in the N.T., but were later than Paul's letter — Matt. 24:3-14, Mark 13:1-27, Luke 21:5-28, and several passages in Revelation.) We must keep in mind that one passage may employ the same or similar imagery as another without actually being parallel to it, and what occurs as a symbol in one passage might conceivably be literal in another.

One passage which the majority of scholars do regard as parallel to II Thess. 2 is I John 2:18-23. John's "anti-christ" of 2:18 is apparently the same as Paul's "man of lawlessness." Both are in opposition to the work of Christ, both seek to lead astray, and both are yet to come, although their forerunners (John's "many anti-christs have come already" and Paul's "the mystery of lawlessness is already at work") are already present at

the time of writing. If this is a case of parallelism, it should help us in evaluating various interpretations of II Thess. 2.

At any rate, the apocalyptic element, to whatever extent it is present, adds to our difficulties in interpreting II Thess. 2. It is impossible for us to determine exactly what is and is not symbolic, and even where we might feel fairly certain in identifying a symbol, we cannot say for sure what it symbolizes. In the next section we will see how necessary it is to be extremely cautious in the handling of apocalyptic elements and literature.

II. Review of Major Interpretations

We will now survey some of the major interpretations which have been espoused as to the identity of the "man of lawlessness." Keep in mind that there are many variations of these views, which we will not attempt to mention because of their number and complexity.

A. *A Typical Jewish Apocalyptic Myth.* On the basis of the apocalyptic element present in II Thess. 2, many liberal scholars prefer to classify it as a typical example of Jewish apocalyptic literature rather than as a genuine prophecy of events to come. Of course, the Bible-believer cannot accept the idea that Paul was in error or was simply spinning yarns that could not possibly be of any real help to his readers. But besides this, Paul's "man of lawlessness" passage is a long way from fitting the mold of typical Jewish apocalypticism. A careful comparison of II Thes. 2, with the apocalyptic characteristics listed above, will reveal that beyond the use of symbols, there is little in our text that is "typically" apocalyptic. As noted earlier, Paul's passage is not pseudonymous, but written in his own name, along with those of Silvanus

and Timothy. Also, it is not truly dualistic in nature, for although there are opposing powers named in the passage, there is no struggle between them. Jesus merely slays the "man of lawlessness" with "the breath of his mouth." The "man of lawlessness" is not a truly cosmic figure and certainly not portrayed as a god; he is merely a man empowered by Satan. Another apocalyptic feature absent from II Thess. 2 is pessimism concerning the present age. While Paul frankly acknowledges that "the mystery of lawlessness is already at work," his emphasis is on Christ's victory over the lawless one, a fact which gives hope and assurance for the present age. Likewise, Paul's "man of lawlessness" passage contains at least one feature that has no parallel in Jewish apocalyptic — the restraining power. So although Paul's prophecy follows the general pattern of Jewish eschatology (a rebellion and a Satanic figure just before the coming of the Messiah), it is not at all a "typical" Jewish apocalypse.

B. *The Papacy*. Of the many attempts to identify the "man of lawlessness" with a historical figure, by far the most widespread has been that which identifies him as the personification of the succession of popes in Roman Catholicism. According to this view the "temple" in which the "man of lawlessness" takes his seat is the church (or, the apostate church), and the restraining power is the Roman Empire and "he who now restrains" is the emperor. Support for this interpretation is seen in the fact that the popes claim for themselves divine prerogatives, as the "man of lawlessness" is said to do in v. 4. However, the parallel between the papacy and the "man of lawlessness" is far from complete. While the popes undoubtedly claim divine prerogatives, it is not quite fair to say that they claim to be God. Likewise, there is a serious problem with this

interpretation in light of I John 2:22 — “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.” The papacy has been guilty of many serious doctrinal errors, but surely this is not one of them. Another problem is the identification of the restraining power with the Roman *imperium* (a view that goes back as far as Tertullian). Although it is true that Paul speaks favorably of the role of government — even Rome’s — in such passages as Romans 13 and I Timothy 2, it is still true that the Empire fostered a great deal of persecution upon the church. In fact, some of the emperors themselves (e.g., Nero, Caligula) were far more guilty of calling themselves “god” than have been the popes. Besides, exactly how the Empire restrained Catholicism is not adequately explained. From the time of Constantine on, the Roman church and the Empire were more often friends than enemies. And we should remember that the “man of lawlessness” is a religious seducer rather than a political usurper of any threat to the existing governing powers.

C. *Other Historical Figures.* From time to time in the history of the world, men have arisen whose power and evil influence were so great as to cause believers to see in them the very characteristics described in II Thess. 2. Among these have been Nero, Caligula, Hitler, Stalin, etc., depending upon the historical period during which the particular interpreter lived. But such identifications are usually politically motivated, and their popularity wanes as the world scene changes. Although many such evil rulers have come and gone, the other elements of Paul’s prophecy have remained unfulfilled, especially the personal confrontation between Christ and the lawless one. The great weakness of this approach to identifying the “man of lawlessness” is that it ignores the

fact noted above, that the "rebellion" is religious, not political, and the "man of lawlessness" is a false prophet, a pseudo-Christ, and not a political figure. This is not to say that such wicked men do not display anti-Christian characteristics. They may well be manifestations of the "mystery of lawlessness," the "spirit of antichrist," which is already at work, but the passage of time proves that no one of them is indeed the "man of lawlessness."

D. *The Personification of Lawlessness.* One very popular line of interpretation which avoids the problem of identifying the "man of lawlessness" with any individual of either the past or future is that which sees him as lawlessness personified. According to this view, the lawless one may represent a movement or a system, referred to in the abstract as neuter ("what is restraining him now") and personified as masculine ("he who now restrains it"). One strong point of this view is that it provides a first-century reference for Paul's original readers (i.e., law and order embodied in the Roman Empire) while at the same time being relevant to any historical period. Another attractive feature of this interpretation is that it makes full allowance for the apocalyptic imagery of the passage so that it need not be historically interpreted at all. With the "man of lawlessness" himself reduced to a symbol, it is unnecessary to be concerned about interpreting the details of the passage (e.g., the "temple" in v. 4). But this possible strong point may also be viewed as a serious weakness, for if there is no prophecy of any specific point in time, what reassurance would this have given to the Thessalonians? Paul's point is that the day of the Lord has not come *yet*; the time reference is important. However, this objection is removed if the "man of lawlessness" is viewed as the personification, not of lawlessness *per se*, but of one final period of lawlessness just before the end.

E. *An Eschatological Man*. When all of the interpretations are weighed and the symbolism taken into account, we are still left with the obvious fact that II Thess. 2:3-12 speaks in terms of a "man" of lawlessness. Taken at face value, Paul's words predict the rise of a Satan-empowered individual just before the return of Christ. The passage is replete with references to a masculine individual — "*man* of lawlessness," "*son* of perdition," "*exalts himself*," takes *his* seat," "*proclaiming himself* to be God," "what is restraining *him* now so that *he* may be revealed in *his* time," "the lawless *one*" (*anomos* with the masculine article), and "the Lord Jesus will slay *him* . . . and destroy *him*." And if we are correct in seeing a parallel between the revelation of the lawless one and the incarnation of Jesus, does that not demand a human personality? True, we may eliminate an eschatological figure by falling back on the symbolism of the passage, but we must first ask if we have sufficient warrant for doing so. Those who follow this line of interpretation have come up with numerous suggestions as to the identity of the restraining power, including the Holy Spirit, angels, God himself, or even Satan. However, there are serious problems with the view that God and the Holy Spirit will some day be "out of the way." A suggestion that has gained in popularity in recent years is that "what is restraining" the lawless one is the continual proclamation of the gospel, and "he who now restrains him" is Paul himself. This view finds support in Jesus' statement that "the gospel must first be preached to all nations" (Mark 13:10). It is difficult to see why Paul would so cryptically refer to himself, however, and there is little scriptural warrant for believing that he saw himself as so important.

III. Do We Need to Understand It Completely?

No one has yet proposed an interpretation of II Thess. 2: 3-12 that answers all of the questions and is acknowledged as "the" interpretation by even a slight majority of Bible students. It is unlikely that anyone ever will. But perhaps this is as it should be, and we should be satisfied with it. The Thessalonians understood Paul and received the help they needed with the question of whether or not they had missed out on the Second Coming. We should keep in mind that this — and not the identity of the "man of lawlessness" — was the original question. With the fuller revelation of the New Testament, we do not face their problem, and if we listen to the voice of God's inspired writers, we will not face it. Besides, if we could interpret II Thess. 2 with pin-point accuracy, we might know too much. Jesus has told us that no man knows the day nor the hour of his coming (Mark 13:32), and Paul had already told the Thessalonians and us that as to the times and seasons we need no additional instruction, but must remember that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (I Thess. 5:1ff). So it is not for us to know when he will come. It is our part, as "sons of light," to be alert and ready, no matter when he comes.

IV. Conclusion and Practical Observations

Regardless of what interpretation we accept of II Thess. 2:3-12, if indeed we must identify ourselves with any, there are some valuable lessons to be learned and proclaimed from this passage:

A. The church today needs a higher eschatological consciousness. Paul had spent only a short time at Thessalonica, yet he had already taught his converts

extensively concerning the last things. We who teach and preach must examine our teaching to see if we are truly leading those who hear us to love the appearing of our Lord (II Tim. 4:8). Most Christians seldom think of it. Many needlessly dread it. We must teach them all to *love* it.

B. The only safeguard against deception and destruction by evil forces is a *love* of the truth (v. 10). Even the "man of lawlessness" cannot exploit the saint who values God's truth above popularity, conformity, comfort, and the unrighteousness of a confused, benighted world. As the cults, "isms," and false messiahs press hard about us, let us more than ever exalt the standard of God's Word as the truth which alone can make men free.

C. We should not be frightened by the "man of lawlessness." He is indeed an ominous figure, but regardless of who or what he is, the Lord Jesus will "slay him with the breath of his mouth." We are not to tremble and quake before *any* evil power, no matter how awesome. Rather, a passage such as II Thess. 2:3-12 should cause us to shout with Paul, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

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Exegesis of Revelation 20:1-6

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No book in the Bible has been more misused and neglected than the Book of Revelation. Religious speculators spinning theories have frightened many students away from its message and contributed to its neglect. Because its literary form is unique in the New Testament, confronting the reader with symbols, numbers and visions not easily understood, it has mystified many readers. Yet it is the only book in the New Testament to which a blessing is attached for each one who reads its message (Rev. 1:3). Written in a time of persecution for the church, it speaks to Christians in their periods of crisis and world turmoil. It describes itself as a "prophecy" (1:3, 22:10). It is written in form as a letter embracing seven shorter letters (1:4-6, 11). Yet it is a "revelation" (Apocalypse 1:1), sharing in its material literary kinship with books in the Old Testament such as Daniel, Ezekiel, and portions of Zechariah.

The Idea of a Millennium

Against this background, the passage we are considering is most controversial because it deals in the only place in the Bible with a period of time known as "a thousand years" reign, or the millennium. Because various positions have been taken toward the millennium, it is necessary for us briefly to consider the major approaches that have been taken to this passage. The Book of Revelation itself is so intricately put together and interrelated in its sections that the position one adopts toward this affects his interpretation throughout the book.

The idea of a millennium is unique to the first seven verses of Revelation 20 in the New Testament. The Epistle of Barnabas 15, shows the belief in a millennium arose from connecting Psalm 90:4 with Genesis 2:2 to

make each of the seven days of creation equal to a thousand years of history, with the seventh a sabbath of rest for a thousand years, followed by an eighth day of eternal bliss. Other Christian writings adopted this idea (e.g. Papias, according to Eusebius, *Church History* III. 39. 12; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V. 28.3; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 80, 81; Augustine, *City of God* XII. 30.5). However, Jewish writings of this period evidence a wide divergence of opinion concerning the extent of any period before the end of the world. *II Baruch* 39-40 follows Daniel in having five ages or kingdoms of world history with the last to endure "until the world of corruption is at an end." *II Esdras* 7:28-30 expected the Messiah to reign for 400 years before dying, while the *Apocalypse of Elijah* has the age of the Messiah lasting only 40 years, and the *Similitudes of Enoch* (*I Enoch* 37-71) has no intervening earthly reign. Leon Morris points out, "As far as is known, no one before John speaks of a Messianic reign of one thousand years" (Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969, p. 234). He makes the further point that John was not repeating a body of accepted Jewish ideas in these verses. Justin Martyr makes it clear that not all Christians in his time agreed about an earthly reign of Christ for a thousand years. In both Jewish and Christian circles there were varying ideas about the Messianic reign and its length.

Basic Modern Approaches

The basic modern approaches to the millennium have roots that go back into the distant past. Some are more recent than others but none of them is of recent origin. While the details of these approaches will vary among their advocates, there are four basic approaches to the interpretation of this passage which need to be

understood as a background for our exegesis. Historic premillennialism, sometimes called chiliasm, is so named because it was held as early as the second and third centuries A.D. by Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian and others, although not held universally by Christians at the time. It teaches that Christ on his return will come to earth and establish his earthly reign over all the world, using Jerusalem as his capital, and have the risen martyrs and Christians as assistants in his rule over all the earth. His coming is to be preceded by a period known as the "great tribulation," but during the millennium there will be universal peace and righteousness on the earth. The millennial reign of Christ is to be the visible earthly manifestation of his kingship. Only at the end of the millennium is the Devil finally cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. It does not hold to a special place for Israel in God's plan of salvation, and it does not think of the church as a parenthesis.

Dispensationalism is connected with the names of J.N. Darby, founder of the Plymouth Brethren, and C.I. Scofield of Scofield Reference Bible fame, and actually represents the majority of modern premillennialism today. It holds that Jesus' original purpose in coming was to establish the promised earthly kingdom of Israel and rule over the Jews as their Messianic king. But they rejected him and caused his plans to be changed in the midst of his earthly ministry. This also caused the "prophetic clock" of Daniel to stop, forcing a postponement of God's plan and the introduction of a "parenthesis" to fill the gap in history, known as the "church." The church is not in God's plan and is not foretold in the Old Testament. The church is to fill in history until such a time as the Jews shall accept Christ as their Messiah and then he will return and rule over Israel and Jerusalem and through fleshly Israel now

converted over all the world. The last seven years of the church age is called "the rapture," at the beginning of which Christ will come and raise the faithful dead and catch up the living faithful to meet him in the air, where they will be invisible to the inhabitants of the earth. During this period of seven years the rest of the dead will be in their graves. The last three and one-half years of this period will be the great tribulation and the majority of the Book of Revelation is about this rapture period (chapters 6-19). At the end of this period Christ comes visibly to earth, overcomes the beast and the false prophet and sets up his earthly millennial reign on David's throne. The believers who have died during the rapture period will be raised at the beginning of the millennium in a "gleanings" resurrection so that they can share in the millennium. Also, at the beginning of the millennium Christ will hold his "sheep and goat" judgment of Matthew 25 over the nations. It is during this period that Satan will be bound and Christ will rule in righteousness over all the nations of the earth in a worldwide kingdom. Despite changes which occur in the world there will be death, and sickness will not be banished from the earth. Literally at the end of this period, Satan will be loosed for a little while to deceive all the nations and they will revolt against Christ and Jerusalem and the Lord will overthrow them and cast Satan into the lake of fire and brimstone, and establish the new heavens and the new earth after the judgment of the wicked. According to this view, fleshly Israel is central in the millennium and Jesus is not really king now. The church is not foretold in the Old Testament, and Israel and the church are clearly distinguished in the New Testament. This is the view popularized by Hal Lindsey in his book and advocated by the Dallas Theological Seminary.

The third position on the millennium arose primarily in the eighteenth century and was popular until World War I. Loraine Boettner recently defined this viewpoint, "Postmillennialism is that view of the last things which holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, that the world eventually is to be Christianized and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the millennium." (Robert G. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977, p. 117) Clearly this view does not look for a visible earthly reign of Christ and does not think of the millennium as a literal thousand years, and obviously it puts Christ's return after the millennium. Following the second coming of Christ is the resurrection and final judgment and heaven and hell. According to this approach the world will gradually become better as the gospel is accepted throughout the world. It expressed the nineteenth century idea of progress which was brought rudely to an end by the World Wars of the twentieth century. This view does not mean an abolishing of sin or complete perfection in this world. Boettner and others believe the great tribulation of Matthew 24 and the apostasy of II Thessalonians 2 have already passed, even though there may be a brief revival of evil at the end of the millennium, just before the Lord's return. This view involves, however, no reconstruction of the entire teaching of the Bible as does dispensationalism.

The fourth position is commonly called "amillennialism," an inaccurate term, but adopted through usage. Amillennialists do not hold that there is no millennium as the term might indicate, but that there

is no distinctive age in church history on earth that is to be termed the millennium as distinct from the rest of the history of the church. It looks on the thousand years as symbolic and teaches that the binding of Satan was accomplished in the mission, death, and glorification of Christ. This means that Satan's power was limited during the entire period between the first and second comings except only at the very end. Amillenialists hold that the kingdom is now present in the world, and Christ is now king over his kingdom, ruling through His Word and by the Holy Spirit. The millennial reign points to the triumph of the martyrs and faithful dead with Christ in glory. Holding that the last days began at Pentecost, Christians now taste of "the powers of the age to come" and look forward to the second coming, the general resurrection, the final judgment of all men, and the new heaven and the new earth. There are obviously variations in the interpretations of different scholars in this general position. One group associated with preterist approach to the book can be classified here as holding that the millennium is the triumph of Christianity over the persecuting Roman empire, which took place when under Constantine Christianity was given a status of toleration and later a privileged place. The martyrs are thus triumphant in the cause they represented and the millennium symbolizes the period of Christianity's ascendancy until the little season just before Christ's return.

It may be of interest to those in the Restoration Movement that there have been advocates of each of these positions among its followers. Alexander Campbell was profoundly convinced of postmillennialism in the early nineteenth century and called his second paper the *Millennial Harbinger* because he believed that through the spread of the

gospel, particularly in its New Testament simplicity, throughout the whole world the millennial age was about to dawn. In this hope he was followed by a number of early leaders, although there were those who disagreed with his millennial views. Campbell felt that no theory of the millennium was an essential part of the gospel. Dan G. Danner in a master's thesis submitted to Abilene Christian College in 1963 pointed out that the period following the Civil War saw historic premillennialism being advocated by many of the leading brethren, such as Moses Lard, T.W. Brents, James A. Harding, and Philip Y. Pendleton (Dan G. Danner, "A History of Interpretation of Revelation 20:1-10 in the Restoration Movement" M.A. thesis Abilene Christian College, August, 1963). The bloody civil strife may have served to dampen faith in the progress of man on earth which postmillennialism advocates. The rising influence of dispensationalism in the late nineteenth century through the influence of Dwight L. Moody and C.I. Scofield found acceptance in the early twentieth century in the movement through R.H. Boll and his followers. In the conflict with this position, a rising emphasis on the amillennial position and the preterist interpretation of the book has occurred. This accords with the increasing number of scholars now advocating this position. One might say that in interpretation of the millennium those in the Restoration Movement have followed generally the predominant views advocated in the Protestant world on the millennium at various stages of its history. It should be pointed out that with the exception of dispensationalism, all the other views of the millennium are quite old in the history of the church.

The Binding of Satan, 20:1-3

In understanding this passage we must see its context in the book. Chapters 12-20 focus on the great contest between the dragon and his agents, the beast and false prophet and Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots, and the radiant woman, her man child, and the saints of God. Chapter 18 has described in graphic detail the overthrow of Babylon the Great. The closing part of chapter 19 has depicted the overthrow of the beast and false prophet and all "who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image" (19:20 RSV). Chapter 19 concludes with their slaughter. Chapter 20 concentrates on the overthrow of the dragon, Satan himself, after his agents have been overthrown. One by one the forces of evil and opposition to God and to His Son and His people are overcome in these interrelated chapters. H. B. Swete says, "It must not, therefore, be assumed that the events now to be described chronologically follow the destruction of the Beast and the False Prophet and their army" (*The Apocalypse of St. John*, London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1907, p. 259). If 19:17-21 describes the slaughter of those who worshipped the beast and had his mark upon them, who would make up the "nations" mentioned in chapter 20:1-9 if these passages follow one another chronologically? It should also be seen that the final judgment is pictured as occurring after the millennial reign in chapter 20, and that this judgment is elsewhere in the New Testament connected with the second coming of Christ. Thus the millennial reign occurs before the second coming.

Our passage has two parts: the binding of Satan, vv. 1-3 and the thousand year reign, vv. 4-6. "And I saw" introduces this chapter with a formula repeatedly used especially in these last chapters (18:1; 19:11, 17, 19; 20:4,

11, 12; 21: 1, 2, 22). An unidentified angel coming down from heaven has the key of the abyss or bottomless pit and also a great chain upon his hand. While some have interpreted the angel as a symbol of Christ, Revelation sharply distinguishes between Christ and the angels who are messengers carrying out the divine will. Chapter 9:1 has previously introduced the abyss as the abode of demonic spirits. This must not be confused with "the lake of fire and brimstone" which is the place of final punishment of the Devil and his agents (19:20; 20:10, 14). With the chain the angel binds Satan, identified here by his four names in 12:9, 19, where he is also called "the accuser of our brethren" and "the deceiver of the whole world" through having brought about man's fall and his being deceived in sin.

What is meant by the binding of Satan? The Greek word *edesen* ("bound") is used in the Bible not only for binding physical loads on an animal or person, but also figuratively, in the sense of placing limitations upon a person in certain ways while leaving one free in other ways. For example, Paul speaks of a wife being "bound to her husband" as long as he lives (Rom. 7:2). Only one instance of Satan being bound is recorded elsewhere in the New Testament, where Jesus spoke of Satan's being like a strong man bound by a stronger man, shown in Jesus' casting out of demons (Matt. 12:29; Mark 3:27; Luke 11:21, 22). Through Christ's ministry and death (John 12:31-33) Satan would be "cast out" and through the uplifted Christ on the cross all men would be drawn to him. In his death he "despoiled the principalities and powers" (Col. 2:15) and fulfilled the purpose of his coming into the world to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). In providing for the salvation of all men, he made it possible that Satan "should deceive the nations no more," but that the gospel of Christ should carry the

story of God's love and saving power to all men. This does not mean that Satan is not active (cf. I Pet. 5:8), but he can no longer keep men in darkness about God's love and His provision for them in the gospel. Some have limited this binding to the idea that Satan cannot persecute the church so greatly as to destroy it through this period. While this is included in the binding, it seems to include more than simply freedom from a destroying persecution. The Lord, through the gospel, is reaching out to the nations, "making disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19), and giving hope to all men.

What does "the thousand years" mean? I. T. Beckwith says, "A thousand, as in common usage everywhere, is a typical unit of enumeration where large numbers are meant, e.g. 'the cattle on a thousand hills,' Ps. 50:10; 'one of a thousand,' Job 9:3. So in our book the 1000 years of the millennium (20:4) denote a long but limited period; and so a multiple of 1000 is used where large measures or large numbers of persons are spoken of." (*The Apocalypse of John*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1922, p. 255.) This number occurs six times in Rev. 20:2-7, and only here as a period of time in the entire Bible. As we have already seen, two approaches are taken to this figure, one insisting it must be taken literally among the other symbols of the passage, and the other seeing it as a symbol for a long period of time.

Why it is necessary for Satan to be loosed for a "little time" after the thousand years is not explained in this passage. That it must happen is stated in verse 3. Verse 8 indicates that he will make one final effort to deceive the nations and lead them to destroy "the camp of the saints about and the beloved city."

“The Thousand Years” Reign, 20:4-6

In verses 2 and 3 above we have noted the mention of a period of “a thousand years.” In each of the verses in this section there is also mention of a period of a thousand years. There seems no good reason for taking these references as two separate periods of time, since the same expression, “the thousand years” (Gr. *ta chilia ete*), is used in verse 3 and again in verse 5. Since we have seen that the binding of Satan begins during the first coming of Christ and his loosing is just “for a little time” before his final destruction and the final judgment (20:10-15), the reign of a thousand years described in verses 4-6 must take place concurrently with Satan’s binding and thus before the Lord’s coming.

In verse 4 we are shown “thrones” and those seated on them have judgment committed to them. The last part of verse 4 tells us who are sitting on these thrones. These are “the souls of them that have been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand.” Out of the 47 instances in the Book of Revelation of the word “thrones” all are located in heaven except three (2:13; 13:2, 16:10). While no mention is made of where these are reigning, the usage of the word “thrones” would point us to heaven. The souls include those who have been beheaded (literally “beheaded by the axe”, *pepelekismenon*). This term calls to our mind another scene earlier in Revelation 6:9 of the souls under the altar, who have been slain “for the word of God and for the testimony which they held,” to whom white robes of victory were given, and they were told to rest “for a little time.” They are in the spirit world. As chapter 20:1-3 is primarily concerned with events that

affect the earth, so verses 4-6 describe what is happening in heaven during the same period.

Some scholars would limit those on the thrones to martyrs alone. But this overlooks the fact that the ones who conquer earlier in the book are not only the martyrs, but also the faithful who remain committed through the difficulties and trials even though they are not killed (2:26-28; 3:21). In fact, the same words that describe the reason for these souls being martyred are used to describe the reason for John's being in exile on the Isle of Patmos (1:9). These are the victorious Christian dead who are reigning with Christ. Thus John sees two groups in this company, the martyrs and the faithful Christian dead, those who refused to worship the beast or wear his mark (13:15; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20). In addition it should be pointed out that while the word "souls" (*psuchas*) is in the accusative case as the object of the verb "saw," the phrase "such as" (*kai hoitines*) translates a nominative plural which describes those who did not worship the beast nor wear his mark. This serves to point out the two groups. Lenski comments on this grammatical construction, "The nominative *kai hoitines* with its finite verbs is not an 'irregular' construction. By dropping the governance of *eidon* the *hoitines* clause becomes deictic and practically independent, the very thing intended. John saw many, many more souls than those of the martyrs, namely all the departed saints (C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Revelation*, Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1943, p. 581).

One aspect of their reign with Christ is that judgment is committed to them. Those Christians who had suffered under persecution and had been judged worthy of exile, prison, and even death had been victims of the world's injustice as had their Lord. But now their roles are reversed and they are sharing the judgment of their

Lord, in being associated with God's judgments against the injustices of unbelieving men. We may not understand fully this aspect, but passages elsewhere in the New Testament point to this same fact. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world? . . . Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things pertaining to this life?" (I Cor. 6:2, 3). Perhaps also to be included here is Jesus' statement, "Truly I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28 RSV). Perhaps also to be included here is Jesus' statement, "Truly I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28 RSV). These are reigning with Christ and involved in his activity of administering justice against evil. Following Augustine, many scholars have interpreted these reigning with Christ as those living on earth during the Christian age. This view confronts the difficulty which also the view making this an earthly reign confronts, namely, that one sees here "souls" of those martyred and of those who have faithfully come through to victory after death, and these are contrasted in verse 5 with "the rest of the dead." Paul concluded that his departing in death from this world was "to be with Christ, which is very far better" (Phil. 1:23).

The most controversial portion of this section are the words, "they came to life" (*ezesan*), because this is used by both classical and dispensational premillennialists as their main argument for a resurrection of the righteous and thus an earthly reign with Christ for a thousand years before the final judgment. The Greek word is used

of a bodily resurrection in several passages of the New Testament, to be sure (Matt. 9:18; Mark 5:23; Rom. 14:9; II Cor. 13:4; Rev. 2:8). But is this its meaning in this passage? This living and reigning with Christ as "souls" is called in verse 5 "the First resurrection." That this is not a physical resurrection seems evident not only from the immediate context, but also from the description of the resurrecting of "the dead, great and the small" from the sea, Death and Hades, and all were judged by what they had done (20:11-13). Premillennialists, in order to make this "first resurrection" a physical resurrection, then must hold to two resurrections separated from one another by a thousand years and a little season, but Jesus' words locate the resurrection of life for those who have done good and the resurrection of judgment for those who have done evil in the same "hour" (John 5:28-29). Note also Acts 24:15. The meaning of "they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" is their sharing the fellowship with Christ "at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8), or as Paul expressed it in Phil. 1:23, it is their being with Christ, "which is very far better" than life in Christ in this world.

Our understanding of "the thousand years" reign is that it refers to the triumph of the martyrs and the faithful Christian dead in Christ now. "The rest of the dead" is contrasted with those who lived and reigned a thousand years. This expression refers to those who have died outside of Christ, or who have been unfaithful, having worshipped the image of the beast and having his mark upon them, and thus have not overcome. They do not share in the triumph of the faithful with their Lord. They will not live until the final resurrection of all men to be judged. A special blessing is pronounced in verse 6 upon the individual who shares in the first resurrection.

"The second death" will have no power over those in the first resurrection, for they shall be priests of God and Christ and shall rule a thousand years. Verse 14 defines "the second death" as being cast into "the lake of fire" where all whose names are not written in the book of life will be cast. The first death in contrast is one's physical death. It is obvious that there is a difference between the first death and the second death in this passage. There also seems no compelling reason why the first resurrection and the second resurrection must describe the same kind of event any more than the first and second death.

There are no evidences in this passage of the description of an earthly thousand year reign of Christ from earthly Jerusalem in Palestine. Nothing is said about the earth in verses 4-6, no mention of Palestine, or earthly Jerusalem, no mention of the Jews, and no mention of David's throne. Also, nothing in this passage refers to the second coming of Christ. All of these things must be read into this passage along with many other elements to make it teach an earthly reign of Christ for a thousand years.

In conclusion, I believe that we as Christians are enjoying the blessings and benefits of our Lord's binding of Satan and along with the redeemed in glory we are the recipients of God's grace constantly. Revelation 20 assures us of the fact that Satan cannot prevent the spreading of the glorious gospel of Christ nor can he prevent the victory of God's people. It assures us also of the triumph of those who have overcome the trials and tests of this world and "sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in his throne" (Rev. 3:21).

Featured Classes

Christian Happiness

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The following lessons on Christian happiness comprise one of the topics taught in the seven adult classes at the Westbury Church of Christ, Houston, Texas. The lessons have been edited for presentation in three lectures as a part of the 1980 ACU lectureship program.

The purpose of these lessons is to bring about a change in the life of the student by discovering the source of happiness and how happiness can be achieved. The following aspects were considered during the preparation of the lessons:

1. What constitutes happiness?
2. Can happiness be achieved?
3. The anatomy of happiness.
4. Experiencing happiness during adversity.
5. Changing one's image.
6. The joy of giving.
7. The worth of a smile.
8. Goal setting (Philippians 3:14).
9. Maintaining the proper attitude.
10. Coping with setbacks.
11. Keeping a good conscience.
12. Seeking peace and pursuing it.

The thesis of these lessons is that Christians must learn to outlive and outdie those who are not Christians. Thus, Christians will learn to achieve a degree of happiness that "passes all understanding." We must read our Bible to learn how to do it.

Acknowledgment is made to several great teachers of the Word:

Batsell Barrett Baxter
Leroy Brownlow
Alan Bryan
Max Leach
Ron Willingham

There are twelve lessons presented on a "quarterly" schedule. A consistent format was used which includes these five items:

1. A list of scripture references.
2. A key verse.
3. The lesson theme.
4. Major points.
5. Points for thought (questions for consideration by the student).

It is the prayer of this compiler that these twelve lessons will benefit teachers and pupils who are concerned with attaining Christian happiness.

LECTURE I

Lesson 1: "THE ANATOMY OF HAPPINESS"

Scripture Reference: Psalm 146:5, Proverbs 19:11, Mark 11:25, Matt. 22:39, III John 2, Eccles. 9:10, I Peter 1:3-4, 8-9, Luke 12:15, Heb. 13:5, I Tim. 6:6, 10, Phil. 4:10-13, Matt. 5:10-11, II Cor. 12:7-9.

Key Verse: "I have learned in whatever state I am, therein to be content" (Phil. 4:11).

Lesson Theme: Happiness is available to each of us who conscientiously wants to be happy.

Major Points:

1. Happiness can be achieved by self-discipline, having a worthy goal, forgiving, forgetting self, being content, and rejoicing in the right things.
2. The ingredients for joy and well-being consist of cultivating love for others, cultivating cheerfulness, learning that one must work, optimism, and a religious approach to matters.
3. We can become happy if we want to be happy and if we recognize that it takes a while.

4. We must accept ourselves and make the most of what we have.

Points for Thought:

1. Can a person be cheerful in the midst of trying circumstances? (See Acts 5:41).
2. What does love (of thy neighbor) do to a personality? (See I Cor. 13:4-8).

Lesson number 1 concerns itself with a consideration of the major elements of happiness. One important verse is found in Psalm 146:5 "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God."

This scripture offsets those prophets of doom who seem to be everywhere. Far too many people suffer from the "Chicken Little" syndrome. The world is filled with unrest. Readers are shocked after reading Alvin Toffler's book, *Future Shock*. One lesson to be learned is that things don't really cease to change merely because people refuse to see it and hear it. Jesus said in Matthew 13:15, "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

We must be aware that happiness can be had. We don't live in a world of 100% sackcloth and ashes.

1. There are at least seven ways to achieve happiness:

A. Practice self-discipline (self-control). This requires the kind of discipline necessary for athletics. It demands exercise, muscle building, proper foods and a stern regimen to control one's life, accompanied by a rejoicing attitude. The apostle Paul used sports as an example in I Corinthians 9:25.

B. A happy person is one who keeps a *worthy* goal. This is opposed to society's goal of more leisure time for staring at television or playing pinball machines. Worthy goals are opposed to indulgence in lust, or financial gain, or the pride of success. The Christian's ultimate goal is and must be heaven.

C. We must develop the ability to forgive. Though it is difficult to forget harsh deeds and the judgments of others, we must remember Proverbs 19:11. We must not carry a grudge. Where there is no forgiveness there can be no acceptable prayer. (See Mark 11:25).

D. Develop ability to forget self. Happiness comes from showing concern for our neighbor as expressed in Matthew 22:39. This means getting totally involved in service to others in accordance with Ecclesiastes 9:10.

E. Happiness comes from realizing how great and how small one is. We are a speck in the universe and yet we are so important that a man died for us and specifically died for our souls.

F. Happiness is learning to be content with what one has. This means that we must not always be wanting something (Luke 12:15 and Hebrews 13:5). We need to read I Timothy 6:6-10 and be reminded that "we can't take it with us."

G. Finally, we must learn to rejoice even through suffering (Matthew 5:10-13).

The Philippian letter was written by Paul while he was in prison. Paul had been harassed, pursued, jailed, beaten, stoned, and falsely accused, and yet this radiantly happy man exhorted others to rejoice in hope and to be patient in tribulation. God did not promise to keep us from physical suffering. The Holy Spirit had Paul write, "We are more than conquerors" and in II Corinthians 12:9 the Lord states "My grace is sufficient for thee."

2. The ingredients for joy and well-being include:

A. Love for others. The way to have a friend is to be one.

B. The cultivation of cheerfulness. There must be toil coupled with play.

C. Learning that one must work to live. We should teach our children what the Holy Spirit dictated in II Thessalonians 3:10: “. . . we commanded you,” Paul wrote, “that if any would not work, neither should he eat.” Work is worthwhile because rest is so pleasant, and sleep comes naturally. In Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem, *The Village Blacksmith*, he wrote:

Each morning sees some task begun
Each evening sees it close
Something attempted, something done
Has earned a night’s repose.

D. Optimism — Every project ought to be a work of hope. Hope should be the doorkeeper of our hearts, and fear should not be permitted to enter.

E. A religious approach to matters — it means being religious during the week. It protects us against the slings and arrows of irreligious forces. It means becoming rich in faith.

3. We can be happy if we want to be happy. No recipe will work unless we try it. It takes a while. Happiness doesn’t come overnight. We must start trying to be happy and be determined not to go back. We can expect a few problems, difficulties, and troubles. Therefore, it may be good to find a happiness partner.

4. We must accept ourselves and make the most of what we have. For a woman it may mean realizing she’s not likely to win a beauty contest. For men, it means he’s not likely to become a Chief Executive Officer. In the

stage play *Green Pastures*, do you remember old Noah's philosophy, "I ain't very much, but I'se all I got"?

The lesson to be learned concerning happiness is to make the most of what we have and not worry about the person who seems to have a dozen talents.

May God help us in our search for happiness.

Lesson 2: "HAPPINESS IS BETTER THAN MEDICINE"

Scripture References: Prov. 17:22, Matt. 5:3-12, Isa. 55:8-9, Heb. 12:1-2, Psalm 51:12, Isa. 29:19, Isa. 35:1-10, Luke 2:10-11, Luke 24:52, John 14:1-2, John 16:20, 24, Acts 15:3, Gal. 5:22, Isa. 6:4, Prov. 15:15.

Key Verse: "A cheerful heart is good medicine" (Prov. 17:22).

Lesson Theme: The true Christian achieves happiness even under the most adverse circumstances.

Major Points:

1. Happiness is a state of mind.
2. The secret of happiness seems to be the ability to handle the "ups" and the "downs."
3. Happiness is really a fringe benefit.
4. Happiness is a matter of attitude.
5. Being happy means learning to cooperate with God's laws.
6. Happiness comes to those who submit their own will to the will of God.
7. The *tune* in one's heart helps to determine the *tone* of one's health.
8. A cheerful disposition protects health.

Points for Thought:

1. Is a cheerful disposition within the attainment of every person?
2. Why don't some of us have the merry, contented disposition taught in the Bible?

Lesson number 2 concerns itself with the thesis that happiness is a state of mind. The key verse is translated as "a cheerful heart is good medicine," or "a merry heart doeth good like a medicine."

It has been observed that all people of all races and all nationalities want to be happy, yet happiness is little understood and seldom achieved.

The eight major points of this lesson are:

1. Happiness is a state of mind. It does not depend on wealth, health, or freedom from responsibilities. Happiness does not necessarily follow a series of pleasant experiences. Someone has said, "All sunshine makes a desert."

2. The secret of happiness seems to be the ability to handle the "ups" and "downs." It seems that we need the contrast of the ordinary or the difficult. Consider these contrasts —

A warm fire on a cold day.

A cool rain on a hot afternoon.

Snow viewed from a desert.

The flowers of spring after a bleak winter.

After pain and sorrow, happiness sometimes arrives by means of a kind word or a smile or a warm hand-clasp. Happiness and hardship are sometimes compatible. This can be established when we consider boot camp or our days on the farm.

3. Happiness is really a fringe benefit.

It should be so regarded. For proof of this point turn to the beatitudes; read Matthew 5:3-12, and substitute the word "happy" for the word, "blessed." I particularly like the J. B. Phillips translation of these verses. The characteristics Jesus applied to the blessed or happy person seem to describe an unhappy individual who was poor in spirit, mournful, persecuted, and reproached. Perhaps that is why some find it hard to believe the beatitudes. Jesus' teachings differs completely from some people's ideas about happiness. It causes us to think of Isaiah 55:8-9. Isaiah prophesied that the disappointments, problems, and limitations of people would turn into joy when Christ came (Isaiah 35:5-6). The point is that happiness can be achieved even under the most adverse circumstances. We read in Galatians 5:22 that joy is a fruit of the Spirit. The person who claims to be a Christian and is unhappy should know there is something vitally wrong.

4. Happiness is a matter of attitude.

I like the attitude of my own father. In his final years when he was in poor health, he was heard to say that he wasn't ready to die because he wanted to see what the Dow-Jones averages would do. We need to have a state of mind that is not self-centered. Benjamin Franklin stated, "He that falls in love with himself will have no rivals." No one can be permanently happy while remaining self-centered.

5. Being happy means learning to cooperate with God's laws. We must learn the importance of obeying spiritual laws. It means a life of honesty, integrity, truthfulness, purity of morals, and a love of one's fellow man.

6. Happiness comes to those who submit their own will to the will of God. The happy Christian has said, "I do not belong to myself; I belong to God. Where he wants me to go, I will go. What he wants me to do, I will

do. What he wants me to say, I will say." Our prayers should include the yielding declaration of Isaiah 6:8.

7. The *tune* in one's heart helps to determine the *tone* of one's health. One doctor prescribed cheerfulness for his patients. He said, "cheerfulness is better than anything one could get at the drug store." Mirth is God's medicine and everyone should bathe in it.

8. A cheerful disposition protects health.

I like Proverbs 15:15, "He that is of a merry heart has a continual feast." A cheerful disposition protects health, prolongs life, adds warmth and vibrance to personality, increases success, stimulates life, and multiplies pleasantness.

I pray that the succeeding lessons will help us find that which is better than medicine — a merry heart!

Lesson 3: "HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR OWN OPINION OF YOURSELF"

Scripture References: Prov. 23:7, Luke 6:45, Mark 12:28-31.

Key Verse: "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7).

Lesson Theme: With God's help we can change our image to become what HE wants us to be.

Major Points:

1. We each have two images.
2. We can change a bad image to a good image.
3. We influence others.
4. We can start a new life.
5. We need to take inventory of ourselves.
6. We need to determine how our self opinion was formed.

7. Our self opinion isn't always right.
8. We can develop a healthy opinion of self.
9. With God's help we can become what HE wants us to become.

Points for Thought:

1. What sort of person would you like to be?
2. What do you plan to do to improve your self-image?

Lesson number 3 is designed to help us live a happier and a better life. The intent is to help us improve our self-image and thereby enjoy a happier life. Consider the following points:

1. We each have two images of ourselves. One is the image that we perceive others make us out to be. The second image is the image deep within that is seen by oneself. This lesson is designed to show us how to change our image. An important verse to consider is Proverbs 23:7. This proverb (truth) is substantiated by Luke 6:45. The point is that a person's speech and action accords with what is within the very core of his being, and since this image motivates a person, it is within that person's power to change it.

2. We can change a bad image to a good image. With God's help we can change what appears to be the unchangeable. Ugly can be turned to pretty. With God's help we can become beautiful people. Young girls who have been brain-washed by magazines and television can be made to see the Christian idea of beauty is that of inner self and not what movies suggest as beauty. I Peter 3:4 speaks of beauty as being "the hidden man of the heart."

3. We can influence others. I believe we can influence people for good and also for bad. I truly believe this

about influencing our children. I believe we can influence a child's self-image toward that of being dishonest, mean, sinful, cruel, ruthless, slow, unworthy and so forth. I also believe that if we suffer from this influence, we do not have to keep that self-image. We can start saying and believing "I am worthwhile."

4. We can start a new life. Each of us can say, "My direction is toward that of good, not bad. My life's energy and emotion and intellect will be pointed toward doing what is right. I cannot be a failure so long as I am following the Christian Way. God gives me not the spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

5. We need to take an inventory of ourselves. In order to start a new life or change our self-image, there is the need to answer this question — What is your opinion of yourself? Have you ever taken an inventory? Try some of these questions:

- Did you have a happy childhood?
- Do you feel equal or inferior to others?
- Did your parents love you?
- Did they compliment you or show appreciation?
- Do you find it easy to compliment or encourage others?
- Are you critical of others? Why?
- Do you sometimes say, "I can't do that"?
- Do you have physical features you'd like to change?
- Are you ashamed of your personal possessions?
- Do you have habits you'd like to break?
- Can you look people in the eyes?
- Can you relax?

No one is ever too old or too young to change his self-image. A person who thinks he's worth \$15,000 will

probably make \$15,000. If he thinks he's worth \$50,000 he'll usually find a way to make that much.

6. We need to determine how our self opinion was formed. It is probably true that some one either made you feel pretty special or someone made you feel rejected. Whichever, you'll carry this opinion throughout life *unless* you consciously attempt to change it.

7. Our self opinion isn't always right. We have a tendency to place limitations on ourselves. There are exceptions worthy of note. For example, Desmosthenes overcame his speech defect. We should never say "I can't," or "I can't teach," or "I can't visit," or "I can't lead prayer." The response to these statements is "Oh, yes you can"!

8. We can develop a healthy opinion of self. There are four suggestions:

- Have a worthy goal or project that arouses your enthusiasm.
- Love God.
- Love others.
- Like yourself — Read Mark 12:30-31.

In order to change your self-opinion you must want to change. Following this there are three positive things to do:

- Relive past successes. (Don't relive failures).
- Have a mental picture of what you'd like to be.
- Enjoy a series of successful experiences. For example, set a goal to write one letter, not 100 letters. Write one letter and then next time it will be easier if you are one of those who say, "I just can't get around to writing letters."

9. With God's help we can become what HE wants us to become. Remember Proverbs 23:7, "For as a person thinketh in his heart so is he." Let's resolve to think great thoughts!

Lesson 4: "THE ROOT OF HAPPINESS"

Scripture References: Prov. 23:7, Matt. 5:3-11, I Tim. 6:6-10, Eccles. 5:10, Luke 12:15, I Peter 3:4, I Peter 3:21, Prov. 8:36, Eccles. 12:13, Isa. 55:2

Key Verse: "Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (I Peter 3:4).

Lesson Theme: Happiness comes from within.

Major Points:

1. A person acts like himself.
2. What we tell ourselves may be different from what we think about ourselves.
3. Christianity as a way of life insures good mental health.
4. Real beauty is a much deeper thing than physical appearance.
5. Recognize that age, time and deterioration are inevitable.
6. The root of happiness comes from a set of values.
7. A feeling of security is basic to happiness.

Points for Thought:

1. Where have you been seeking happiness?

Lesson number 4 concerns itself with determining the source of happiness and whether happiness comes from within or without. The answer, of course, is that happi-

ness comes from within and I hope to develop this thesis.

There are seven points to be discussed:

1. A person acts like himself. That's why we sometimes hear a person say, "That's just like him"! The source of our Christian happiness is mental health. There are some simple fundamentals. First, the way one *feels* about any circumstance, situation, or person is the thing that matters. Secondly, one's action will be the outgrowth of the way one feels. When we quote, "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he," we refer to his mental and emotional activity.

2. What we tell ourselves may be different from what we think about ourselves. Psychologists call it the conscious and the unconscious. It concerns the subliminal and the supraliminal. Proof of the unconscious is verified by such actions as sleepwalking or talking in our sleep. I read of a lady who was given a truth serum before her operation and, therefore, didn't want her husband with her in the operating room. We should recognize that one barrier to good mental health is our own low opinion of ourselves.

3. Christianity as a way of life insures good mental health. It is the perfect panacea, the perfect cure for such feelings as having a low opinion of ourselves. There is no need to feel inadequate. Something's wrong with anyone who feels inadequate and lacking in strength and wisdom necessary to meet problems. The answer is to have faith in God and a belief in prayer. Christianity teaches us that it is not good for man to walk alone. It is in Christianity that we can find an eternal friend and confidant. Inner happiness really comes when we can sing,

My God and I go in the fields together
We walk and talk as good friends should and do

We clasp our hands, our voices ring with laughter
My God and I walk through the meadow's hue.

4. Real beauty is a much deeper thing than physical appearance. Real beauty is made up of the hidden person of the heart. Beautiful people believe in themselves and recover from setbacks. They encourage those who become discouraged by failures.

5. Recognize that age, time, and deterioration are inevitable. We need to recognize that physical beauty is born to die. Women in middle age need to recognize it is futile to try to be young. Men need to be told once again that there is no fool like an old fool. Ponce de Leon did not succeed in his quest for youthfulness. Real happiness comes when we put our value on contentment and inner peace and maintain a valid Christian relationship with both men and women.

6. The root of happiness comes from a set of values. It involves gentleness, not force; right, not might; sensitivity, not sensuality; security within, not security without.

7. A feeling of security is basic to happiness and good mental health. It is a belief that God is on one side that makes us secure. It is not the security advertised on TV and stressed in every area of life. God knows what makes the happy life and he doesn't refer his cases to social workers. We are happy if we can truly say, "God is my psychiatrist."

Listed below are some concluding thoughts concerning the root of happiness:

- True joy comes from a good conscience (within) toward God (I Peter 3:21).
- Shakespeare put it this way, "to thine own self be true."

- Pilate lost what he needed; the inward knowledge that he had been a man.
- Judas saw a chance for high wages, short hours, a fast buck; but he learned that the love of money is the root of all evil.
- The secret of happiness is found in I Timothy 6:6, "Godliness with contentment is great gain."
- The good life is an internal condition which extends itself in outward behavior.
- It gives us the joy of becoming and being, of living and loving, of believing and hoping.
- It gives us something to live with and die for.
- It gives us something to live for and die with.

That's the root of happiness — It comes from within!

LECTURE II

Lesson 5: "AS YOU SOW SO SHALL YOU REAP"

Scripture References: Gal. 6:7, Prov. 11:2-25, Prov. 16:3, Gal. 6:10, Matt. 7:21, Prov. 18:24, Prov. 10:3:24, Prov. 15:1, Luke 6:38, Luke 17:33, Gal. 6:7.

Key Verse: "A man that has friends must shew himself friendly" (Prov. 18:24).

Lesson Theme: We reap what we sow.

Major Points:

1. Good deeds are rewarded in this life; bad deeds are punished in this life.
2. The cause and effect principle extends to our actions and traits.

3. The matter of losing oneself in others begins at home.
4. Happiness comes from losing oneself.
5. It involves thinking of others, helping and esteeming others.
6. The way to have a friend is to be one.

Points for Thought:

1. What does praying for others signify?
2. How is it that outgoing, unselfish traits or deeds add to one's happiness?

One of the most touching stories concerning giving I've heard is about the couple who were devotedly in love with each other. The wife had long beautiful hair but no combs. The husband had a gold pocket watch but no chain. One Christmas when neither had any money whatsoever, she sold her hair to buy him a gold chain. He sold his watch to buy her some beautiful combs.

Lesson number 5 is intended to explore Christ's statement "As you sow so shall you reap" (Galatians 6:7). Let us consider these observations:

1. Good deeds are rewarded in this life; bad deeds are punished in this life. We need to learn that good begets good and bad begets bad. It seems to be a fixed law of nature — you always get back what you give out. It works in every area of our lives. It works in our spiritual lives, our physical functions, our human relations, our personal feelings. One of the greatest of all essays was written by Ralph Waldo Emerson. It is entitled *Compensation*. One statement he made is that "every act rewards itself." Another statement is, "one cannot do wrong without suffering wrong." We can conclude that when we take more than we give we're soon repaid by fear. This is true in human relations, in business, in

spiritual matters, and in marriage. Most of these statements come from the Proverbs. The Holy Spirit said it first. Consider Proverbs 10:3, "The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry." The Proverbs deal with compensation. They deal with cause and effect. They involve sowing and reaping. These laws work as surely as the laws of gravity or mathematics.

2. The cause and effect principle extends to our actions and traits. This includes our critical remarks, sarcasm, and cynicism, but it also covers our kindness, our forgiveness, our benevolence. The greatest scripture on this subject is found in Luke 6:38. Be sure to listen to Jesus as he speaks in this verse.

3. The matter of losing oneself in others begins at home. We must first attempt to be perfect in our relations with our nearest and dearest. This home base must spread, as it has opportunity, to all men. This losing oneself in others is called "love" in the New Testament. Our love of God begins to show when we become benevolent, caring compassionate Christians. Jesus stated in Luke 17:33, "whosoever loses his life will preserve it."

4. Happiness comes from losing oneself. This is taught repeatedly in the greatest of all psychology books, the BIBLE!

Edward Everett Hale once wrote:

Look up — not down
Out and not in
Forward and not back
And lend a hand!

5. It involves thinking of others, helping and esteeming others. There are some helps to getting out of

self. When we consider the negative approach we think of the following traits of maladjusted and unhappy persons:

- They think the world revolves around them
- They are self-conscious
- Spiteful
- Unforgiving
- Envious
- Shirk duties
- Gossipy
- Divisive
- Hateful
- Critical
- Want to be loved without loving.

6. The way to have a friend is to be one.

POEM

Give love, and love to your heart will flow
A strength in your utmost need;
Have faith and a score of hearts will show
Their faith in your word and deed.
For life is a mirror of king and slave,
'Tis just what you are and do;
Then give to the world the best you have,
And the best will come back to you.

In conclusion, consider these practical suggestions so that you can get back what you give out:

- Think of others
- Do good to others
- Praise others
- Pray for others
- Be hospitable

- Learn to laugh at self (it shows that you are no longer childish and that you can see yourself as others see you).

Remember Proverbs 18:24, "The way to have a friend is to be one"!

Lesson 6: "HAPPINESS COMES FROM SERVING"

Scripture References: Matt. 23:11-12, Matt. 18:1-2, Luke 8:44-48, John 10:11, Matt. 26:7-13, John 8:10-12, Matt. 22:39, Matt. 7:12, James 1:27, Phil. 2:1-11, II Cor. 12:15, Matt. 20:28.

Key Verse: "But he that is greatest among you should be your servant" (Matt. 23:11).

Lesson Theme: Happiness comes to those who, without selfish motives, contribute to the well-being of others.

Major points:

1. Happiness comes from serving others.
2. Happiness comes from noticing the unnoticed.
3. Happiness comes from serving with humility.
4. Happiness comes when you give part of yourself to others.
5. Happy people serve without expecting reward.

Points for Thought:

1. What is your concept of happiness?
2. Have you ever given to others without expecting a reward?
3. Is it happier for you to give than to receive?

The purpose of this lesson (number 6) is to bring about a change in the life of the student by studying the

examples of Jesus. It is intended to point out to the student that happiness is a state of mind. It has been stated that the fountain of content must spring up in the mind; and, he who has so little knowledge of human nature as to seek happiness by changing anything but his own disposition will waste his life in fruitless efforts, and multiply the griefs which he purposes to remove.

One of my favorite quotes is this, "Success is getting what you want; happiness is wanting what you get."

There are five important points which will help us live a happy life:

1. Happiness comes from serving others. Ron Willingham tells how one man became a leading insurance salesman, not by his attempt to sell insurance, but by his service to others. It was his genuineness, honest friendliness, and enthusiasm that caused people to want to buy insurance. In his book *Personal Power Through Creative Selling*, Elmer Letterman wrote, "There is a world of difference between starting out in the morning to sell something, and starting out to serve somebody."

There is a certain joy in serving others. The older we get the more we realize that service to others is the only way to stay happy. If we do nothing to benefit others, we will do nothing to benefit ourselves.

2. Happiness comes from noticing the unnoticed. When we notice and serve the unnoticed it proves that our motives are real. It is easy to notice or serve someone who is well-known or famous because our own need for recognition may be the reason for our motivation. Serving the unnoticed is one way we can resemble the little child mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 18:1-2. It is interesting to note that most happy people come from the main stream of life. They are neither famous nor well-known. It is their service which makes them happy.

3. Happiness comes from serving with humility. One

great writing expressed it thusly: "I believe the first test of a truly great person is humility. Really great persons have a curious feeling that the greatness is not in them but through them. And they see something divine in every other person, and are endlessly, incredibly merciful."

4. Happiness comes when you give yourself to others. The example of all examples is how Christ gave himself to others. He gave us the example of (1) compassion, (2) encouragement, (3) graceful receiving, and (4) forgiveness. His compassion is evidenced in Luke 8:43-48. His statement in John 10:11 is a scripture of great encouragement.

A particularly touching account concerning graceful receiving is related in Matthew 26:7-13 when Christ explained that the expensive ointment was not a waste. One of the great examples of forgiveness is recorded in John 8:10-12. The happiness which comes from giving part of yourself to others will be realized by making someone's day brighter. It is the happiness experienced by a poor widow who sacrifices her needs and saves her meager earnings to buy her son a bicycle for his birthday. Her happiness is the joy of seeing joy in her son's eyes when she surprises him with the gift. It is the joy of someone who becomes a nurse to a neighboring family when they are near death from ravaging flu. I knew the man who did the nursing. He was asked if he didn't fear the danger of contracting influenza. His reply of faith was "The Lord wouldn't let a man catch flu while trying to help his neighbor." The remarkable fact is that the man experienced the joy of serving and did not contract influenza.

5. Happy people serve without expecting reward. They have learned to become unselfish. They have learned that it is more blessed to give than to receive

(Acts 20:35). It is the case of a nurse who shows her concern for a sick child by serving more than 2 shifts each day because it is her child. She is happy to serve and expects no reward. In my home town there was a wealthy man who provided for needy children through a third party who was a grade school teacher. The teacher kept him informed of any school child who needed clothes, shoes, coats or Christmas presents. These children never learned the identity of their happy benefactor and the man gave generously with no expectation of reward.

Listed below are several traits of happy people who serve others. They are:

1. Humble
2. Unselfish
3. Forgiving
4. Merciful
5. Sincere
6. Hospitable
7. Charitable
8. Tolerant
9. Friendly
10. Joyful

Happiness really comes from helping others.

Lesson 7: "SMILE — KEEP THE CHURCH BEAUTIFUL"

Scripture References: Prov. 15:13, Prov. 17:22, Matt. 7:3, I Thess. 4:13, Heb. 12:2, Gal. 6:7, Rom. 12:15, Prov. 15:15, Matt. 23:24, Matt. 14:27, Acts 5:41, Eccles. 11:1, Matt. 7:2.

Key Verse: "A happy heart makes the face cheerful"
(Prov. 15:13 NIV).

Lesson Theme: A cheerful smile lifts our spirits and the spirit of others.

Major Points:

1. Persons who succeed best are usually smiling, cheerful and hopeful.
2. Smiling will produce happiness.
3. A smile is a tonic which protects against infirmities.
4. The scriptures heartily recommend a smiling, cheerful outlook.
5. An engaging smile pays dividends.
6. Smiles are contagious.

Points for Thought:

1. Can you recall any Bible characters who laughed?
2. Do you agree that humor helps us preserve a proper perspective of ourselves?

Back in the "old days," there was a popular form of speaking contest in our schools called declamation. The declaimer would quote the title of a poem, take one step forward, and quote the poem. One sure winner was a poem entitled, "The Value of a Smile." It was an Edgar A. Guest type poem that closed with the ringing declaration, "It's worth a million dollars and it doesn't cost a cent"! (The other winner was, "Let Me Live by the Side of the Road and Be a Friend to Man.")

This lesson (number 7) centers on the matter of a smile and the Christian happiness which comes from smiling. This lesson is intended to convince the student of the value of a smile; to bring about a desire by the student to live a happier life and thereafter display happiness by smiling.

Quite often I see this motto in offices; on people's desks; in plants and warehouses: The "SMILE" sign seems to be everywhere. A smile is an interesting action or reaction. No person is rich who cannot smile. (Perhaps you've heard the story of the banker with one glass-eye.) No person is poor who can bestow a smile. Following is a discussion of a half dozen areas in which a smile is effective:

1. Persons who succeed best are smiling, cheerful, and hopeful. For example, in business, a smile always pays dividends. All merchants know the value of a smile. All merchants know that even if your goods are better than your competitors, if he smiles and you frown, he'll beat you.

2. Smiling will produce happiness. Psychology raises its voice and says, "Smile." Don't wait until your joy bubbles over to smile. Go ahead and smile now and a joyful disposition will start developing. Try smiling and you will be happy.

3. A smile is a tonic which protects against infirmities. Medical doctors exhort their patients to smile. Doctors often say, "Keep your chin up" and "Keep smiling!" They know that a smile is a powerful element; that it is a good tonic. It protects against many infirmities. A smile can add a little to life. Poets have written of the force of a smile. One poem reads like this:

Guns and swords and piles of gold
Though mighty in their sphere
Are sometimes feebler than a smile
And poorer than a tear.

4. The scriptures heartily recommend a smiling cheerful outlook. Though important in business, psychology, medicine, and poetry, the important thing is to

note Bible comments which establish the effectiveness of a smile and its ability to lift our spirits. Consider these verses:

Proverbs 15:13; Proverbs 15:15; Proverbs 17:22.

There are several kinds of smiles mentioned in the Bible:

A smile of *humor*. It is good to see the comedy of life. A good story and a hearty laugh helps oil our life's machinery. Jesus seems to have appealed to a sense of humor in at least two instances. Read Matthew 7:3 (NIV). Jesus in paraphrase is asking, "Why do you say, 'He thinks me detects sawdust in thine eye,' while there is a '2 x 4' sticking out the side of your head?" Another humorous case that surely must have been delivered with a smile is recorded in Matthew 23:24. Can you imagine what a good cartoonist could do with these thoughts?

A smile of *friendliness*. It's great to meet someone who smiles and says, "I'm mighty glad (proud) to know you! It may include the tip of a hat or the wave of a hand, but a smile is a key that unlocks hearts.

A smile of *pleasantness*. This indicates a cheerful disposition. Jesus said, "Be of good cheer" (Matthew 14:27). Unhappy people are sources of trouble. They sometimes want to fight others because there is a battle raging within themselves. A pleasant smile injects peace, calms tempers, and soothes nerves.

A smile of *courage*. It is not the size of a man's physique, but the size of his courage, that determines his strength. Being able to smile in the face of danger is a tremendous asset. I believe David may have smiled when Goliath cursed him. I can almost hear him say, "Big boy, the bigger they are the harder they fall." I can almost see him smile as he tells himself, "I see a spot not covered by armor. I'm going to hit him between the eyes." Each of us battles giants. So long as we can smile there's a chance for us.

A smile of *mixed emotions*. It is hoped that lets us smile through tears. One wonderful verse is I Thessalonians 4:13. No smile is so beautiful as the one which struggles through tears.

A smile of *perseverance*. Great persons are able to smile in spite of hardships, disappointments, and temporary defeats. They smile and keep going. It reminds us of the early Christians who, though persecuted, left the Sanhedrin rejoicing. Read Acts 4:41.

5. An engaging smile pays dividends. Consider these verses:

Ecclesiastes 11:1; Matthew 7:2; Galatians 6:7.

After reading Romans 12:15 (rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep), remember to smile with those who smile.

6. Smiles are contagious. When you smile, another smiles; so why not start every day with a smile? A poet said it this way:

Smile, brother, smile
When you smile, another smiles
And soon there's miles and miles
Of smiles, and life's worthwhile
Because you smile
so smile, brother, smile.

The following conclusions are important to your Christian happiness:

- If you are happy, notify your face.
- Learn to laugh and learn to cry.
- Many ailments can be overcome or at least tolerated if we learn to laugh and smile.
- Jesus was happy and joyful (Re-read Hebrews 12:2).

- Many times we take ourselves too seriously.
- Practice being happy.
- Humor helps us preserve a proper perspective.
- We need to learn to smile, that is, roll with the punch, because life really is a mixture of sunshine and storm, encouragements and discouragements, joys and sorrow.
- Learning to smile can influence our moods, our health, our happiness, our security and our success.

Remember to smile. It's worth a million dollars and it doesn't cost a cent!

Lesson 8: "YOU WILL PROBABLY MISS THE TARGET IF YOU DON'T TAKE AIM"

Scripture References: Phil. 3:12-15, Joshua 24:15, Luke 19:10, Prov. 3:24, Gen. 3:19, Prov. 4:25-27, Heb. 11:10, Heb. 11:24-25, Eccles. 12:13, Gal. 6:10, Matt. 7:24, James 2:17.

Key Verse: "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14).

Lesson Theme: It is important that we have aims, goals, plans, and purpose.

Major Points:

1. Have God as your only God.
2. Aim to be a man/woman.
3. Be a friend to man.
4. Be self-reliant.
5. Be constructive.
6. Pursue goals looking straight ahead.
7. Seek a balance of faith and works.

Points for Thought:

1. Is the basic aim to be a man/ woman essential to all other accomplishments?
2. Can there be success in aiming though we do not reach our goals?
3. What does goal-setting mean?

Do any of you remember reading *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*? These are great books with tremendous humor. The depth of the humor is appreciated by adults because of Lewis Carroll's ingenious mixture of fantasy and realism; irony and absurdity. Characters such as the March Hare, the Mad Hatter, and the Cheshire Cat are familiar to us. If you want a good laugh, re-read *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll.

Somewhere I read of an *Alice in Wonderland* story. The dialogue went something like this:

Alice to Hare: Which road should I take?

Hare to Alice: Where are you going?

Alice to Hare: I don't know!

Hare to Alice: Any path will do!

Does this point out someone who is not goal-oriented and who has no direction or aims? I suppose the reverse of this is the case of the rich Texan — boots, big hat, long cigar. He got aboard a plane and the hostess asked, "Where are you going"? His reply was, "Where is the plane going? I've got business all over."

This lesson (number 8) is designed to point the student toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. It is hoped that each student will be convinced of the importance of having goals. Included in this lesson are some goals to help achieve Christian Happiness.

A life can be aimless and without commendable goals. Leroy Brownlow tells of an accomplished marksman who passed through a community and saw evidence of amazing shooting. Everywhere on barns, trees, and wooden fences there were targets with bullet holes in the exact center of the bullseye. When the marksman inquired about this remarkable and astounding feat, there was a country lad who replied, "No trouble at all. I shot first and then drew the circles around the holes." Some men often aim at nothing and then try to draw the lines of life around their marks. They go in circles and never aim. They never make the most of life.

About the most uncomplimentary remark that can be made of someone is to say, "He lives an aimless life." It indicates a weak person with no definite pursuits. We'll have the proper incentive, experience achievements, and enjoy lofty living if we have noble objectives. It has been said that we can't drop very low if we are reaching for a star. I believe that's what Paul said in Philippians 3:13-14.

The crime in life is not that we fail to reach our goals. The real crime is the failure to have lofty goals.

Listed below are some great people who had high and honorable aims in life:

Joshua — Read Joshua 24:15.

Jesus — Read Luke 19:10.

Abraham — Read Hebrews 11:10.

Moses — Read Hebrews 11:24-25.

Also listed are some suggested personal aims. Try to make a picture in your mind of the kind of person you want to be. This will become a power to mold you into the image you visualize.

1. Have God as your only God. I like Solomon's

reason for serving God (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

2. Aim to be a man/woman. Be an adult with an open face, a big heart, and a strong backbone. President Garfield said, "I mean to make myself a man. If I succeed at that, I will succeed at everything else."

3. Be a friend to man. Read Galatians 6:10. We need to recall the poem which reads, "Let me live in a house by the side of the road and be a friend to man."

4. Be self-reliant. This involves industry, thrift, invention, courage, and doggedness. It means making a living for myself, standing on my own feet, and carrying my own weight. This happens to be the law of God (Gen. 3:19).

5. Be constructive. Remember, the wise man is a builder (Matt. 7:24). Anyone can tear down.

There is a poem for all Christians to learn:

It's a good thing to remember
A better thing to do
To work with the construction gang
And not the wrecking crew.

6. Pursue goals looking straight ahead (Proverbs 4:25-27).

We were designed to be goal-setting people. God intended that we grow, develop, and overcome limitations. The secrets of goal-setting (and ultimate success) are these:

Know what you want.
Know when you want it.
Know why you want it.
Define it and commit it to writing
Visualize yourself possessing it.
Be persistent.

Goal-setting is important because it releases powers within you and lets you develop your talents. It helps us:

- Concentrate our efforts.
- Become excited and enthusiastic.
- Gain self-confidence.
- Overcome problems and difficulties.
- Learn from defeats.
- Make decisions easily.

7. Seek a balance of faith and works (James 2:17).
Conclusion: We need to make sure that our goals are consistent and don't conflict with our values, religious beliefs, our spouse's goals, or other goals. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "The world makes way for the man who knows where he's going."

Most important is the Goal of Goals, the greatest of goals which must always be first on all of our lists: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you."

LECTURE III

Lesson 9: "ATTITUDE — THE GREAT EQUALIZER"

Scripture References: Phil. 4:13, II Cor. 5:7, Eph. 5:16, Psalm 116:12, Rom. 8:28, Neh. 4:6, Psalm 27:13, Eccles. 11:1, Luke 2:52.

Key Verse: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Lesson Theme: Since one's attitude sets the stage for all

of life's encounters, it is important to have the right mental attitude.

Major Points:

1. Have a disposition to look on the bright side of life.
 2. Be enthusiastic in what we are doing.
 3. The right mental attitude produces drive and accomplishment.
 4. Strive to achieve a balanced optimism.
- Faith in God generates optimism.
 - As long as there is life, there is hope.
 - Giving your best makes for optimism.
 - Knowing that every good deed returns to bless the doer invites optimism.
 - One reason for optimism is that setbacks are often blessings in disguise.
5. Ten keys to a good attitude:
- Maintain good physical health.
 - Develop morally acceptable habits.
 - Live a balanced life (Luke 2:52).
 - Face up to reality.
 - Walk by faith not by sight (II Cor 5:7).
 - Change what you can change, adjust to what you cannot change.
 - Cast every worry into the lap of God.
 - Find someone you can confide in.
 - Always be a Christian's Christian.
 - Avoid doing wrong.

Points for Thought:

1. List and think about your blessings.
2. How can a thankful spirit be developed?
3. Can certain weaknesses be developed into strengths?

This lesson (number 9) is designed to bring about a change in the life of each student by emphasizing the importance of having the right mental attitude. We need to underscore Philippians 4:13 in our Bibles, memorize it, and believe it. Somehow don't you sense that most people seem to have the feeling that they are all alone or "going it alone"? Is it possible that some Christians have not read Philippians 4:13?

One's attitude sets the stage for all of life's encounters. I love the story of the lady who grabbed a pitchfork when an army of Communists came over the hill. "Don't you know," she was asked, "that you can't stop an army with a pitchfork"? "Yes," she said, "I know it, but at least I can let 'em know whose side I'm on"!

Following are five suggestions concerning the right mental attitude:

1. Have a disposition to look on the bright side of life. Maintain the attitude that the joy of life overbalances the pain of it. My Dad said that he had no interest in dying because he wanted to see the next day's Dow-Jones averages. He optimistically believed that the market was going up. Interpret actions and happenings in the light of favorable expectations. It causes us to recall Romans 8:28.

2. Be enthusiastic in what we are doing. Make it a point to generate enthusiasm. Our zest affects those around us. We probably would have become a pessimist if we had associated with the one talent man mentioned in Matthew 25:25.

The problem with a pessimist's reaction (attitude) is that it causes fear, reason flees, panic develops, and down we come!

3. The right mental attitude produces drive and accomplishment. Let's read Nehemiah 4:6. It puts us in the mind to do things which is the force which built the

wall and which will build congregations, church buildings, and schools. The secret is, never give up. I like this poem:

Never give up! for quitting will destroy you —
Providence kindly, wisely mingled the cup:
Taste the victories and defeats, many and few;
When the cup's refilled, drink it! Never give up!

You may recall that one of Sir Winston Churchill's greatest orations was a repetition of the admonition to never give up.

4. Strive to achieve a balanced optimism. I read of a violinist giving a concert and one of his key strings snapped. He didn't snap. Instead he rearranged the composition and finished on 4 strings. Optimism is the spirit of youth and adventure. It abounds with enthusiasm and resolves. It knows no defeat. It is the spirit of Philippians 4:13. Optimism is a combination of self help and the Lord's help. Optimism is being able to quote this poem:

Whichever way the wind doth blow
My heart is glad to have it so
Then blow it east or blow it west
The wind that blows, that wind is best!

Of course, one must be aware of balance optimism. *Under-optimism* will not let you send your ship out. It may cause a farmer to state, "There's no use to plant." It is certain that seed won't sprout in the barn. *Over-optimism* will cause you to expect a ship you haven't sent out. Some people are totally unrealistic!! Balanced optimism sends your ship out and expects it to come in.

Listed below are some reasons for optimism (a good attitude):

Our faith in God will generate optimism. We are not permitted to view life's road from beginning to end; we travel by faith (II Corinthians 5:7) We live by faith, not by sight.

As long as there's life, there's hope. The fact that we have today heartens us. It gives us a chance to redeem yesterday's failures. (Ephesians 5:16).

Giving the best you have to the world makes for optimism. What you give to the world, good or bad, has a way of coming back to you. (Galatians 6:7).

Judge Sam Davis Tatum said that his most fervent prayer to the Lord was, "I tried."

Knowing that every good deed will return to bless its doer invites optimism. This poem expresses it clearly:

For life is the mirror of king and slave
'Tis what you are and do.
Then give the world the best you have
And the best will come back to you.

One reason for optimism is that setbacks are often blessings in disguise. Winston Churchill had a lisp and as a child he stuttered. It was after he developed mental toughness and discipline that he became the greatest speaker and leader of this century. It was he who said to a free world:

We shall not flag or fail — We shall go on to the
end,
We shall fight on the seas and oceans,
We shall fight with growing confidence and
growing strength in the air,
We shall defend our island, whatever the cost
may be,

We shall fight on the beaches,
We shall fight on the landing grounds,
We shall fight in the fields and the streets,
We shall fight in the hills
We shall never surrender!

5. Finally there are 10 keys to a good attitude:

1. Maintain good physical health.
2. Develop morally acceptable habits.
3. Live a balanced life (Luke 2:52).
4. Face up to reality.
5. Walk by faith not by sight (II Cor. 5:7).
6. Change what you can change, adjust to what you cannot change.
7. Cast every worry into the lap of God.
8. Find someone you can confide in.
9. Always be a Christian's Christian.
10. Avoid doing wrong.

What is the conclusion of the whole matter? How do you obtain and maintain a good attitude? The answer is to read, study, pray, and believe the words of Philipians 4:13. The answer is to read, study and pray, and believe the words of Romans 8:28.

This will guarantee a change in any life.

By the way, how's your attitude?

Lesson 10: "THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FAILURE AND DEFEAT"

Scripture References: Rom. 15:13, Matt. 25:21, II Cor. 12:10, Matt. 20:26-28, John 15:11.

Key Verse: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may

overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13 NIV).

Lesson Theme: Success can be achieved only on the spiritual level, which means that one must have a right relationship with God.

Major Points:

1. Success does not accompany wealth, power or knowledge.
2. Success is often found in the love of simple things.
3. Success comes from doing worthwhile work.
4. Everyone suffers defeats and makes mistakes.
5. Defeats and mistakes can be creative.
6. The fear of failure is a big enemy.
7. Seven pure steps to success are:

- Dream
- Desire
- Decision
- Dare
- Dedication
- Direction
- Devotion

Points for Thought:

1. How do you react to defeats, problems, or reversals?
2. Have you ever felt that you had more problems than anyone else?
3. What have you learned from the defeats in your life?

This lesson (number 10) concerns the Christian happiness which comes from seeking success by overcoming defeats. Everyone who is normal wants to be

successful. Each of us wants to achieve a measure of happiness. No one loves the stigma of defeat. There is no room for happiness in a defeated heart which suffers from envy, hate or prejudice.

A successful person is usually a happy person. There is a state of mind or habit where there are pleasant thoughts. Success and failure stand at everyone's gate. Each can choose which to invite in. The basic question is whether you have failed or just been defeated. The man or woman who seeks success should consider these six observations:

1. Success does not accompany wealth, power, or knowledge. It is a mistake to think so. There may be some enjoyment in these things, but those who make these goals their chief aim are destined for disappointment and disillusionment.

2. Success is often found in the love of simple things. It comes from seeking the beauties and joys of everyday living.

3. Success comes from doing worthwhile work. It comes from doing it well. Sir Christopher Wren was the architect of the magnificent St. Paul's cathedral in London. He told the story of visiting the construction site. The first worker he questioned replied that he was stacking brick. The second worker explained that he was working on a building. The third worker declared to Sir Christopher Wren, "I am building a cathedral to the glory of God"!

Sometimes success comes from pursuing an objective even though there is no actual attainment. We speak of someone being successful when in actuality they are only working toward a goal. Success is realized in being concerned about others. It is the fulfillment of Matthew 20:26-28.

4. Success can be achieved only on the spiritual level.

There may be joy and satisfaction in the physical realm; but true success comes from having a right relationship with God. We all know about unhappiness. It results from the failure or lack of success in maintaining a right relationship with family and friends, or worse, having a wrong relationship with God. One preacher stated of God, "Our souls are never at rest until they find rest in Thee." I'm told that the best translation of Ecclesiastes 12:13 reads, "This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole of man." Remember — success can be achieved only on the spiritual level. The ultimate in success is expressed in Matthew 25:21.

5. Everyone suffers defeats and makes mistakes. We are all human. None of us is divine. We're in the same boat when it comes to being perfect. No one has achieved it. The purpose of this lesson is to discuss failure versus defeat. Failure is permanent. Defeat is temporary. Everyone suffers defeat. The thing that separates failure from defeat is attitude. We are never defeated until we think we are and believe we are. The real key word in the pursuit of success is faith. Faith helps us keep going. Those who keep the faith are never failures.

Defeats and mistakes can be creative. For instance, did you know that good judgment can come from bad judgment? It's an exercise in logic which goes like this:

Good judgment comes from experience
And experience comes from bad judgment.

Paul was defeated in his efforts to rid himself of a "thorn in the flesh." Yet, it seems that to keep Paul's pride from being puffed up that God allowed the physical infirmity to remain. This situation allowed Paul

to state in II Corinthians 12:10, "For the sake of Christ, then I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Paul is saying, "the less I have, the more I depend on Him." That's a great lesson in faith, isn't it? The fear of failure is a big enemy. We recall Franklin Roosevelt's great statement, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Some are guilty of not trying anything because they are afraid they will fail. They are afraid of criticism, rejection, humiliation, financial loss, or that something will go wrong. The answer to defeat is to grit our teeth and go back into the game. It means building faith in God. It means believing that when we take God at his word everything that happens to us, happens for our good. This fact will build our self-confidence, our courage, and our belief, and enable us to overcome any fear.

6. Seven sure steps to success are:

Dream — dream a specific, definite dream.

Desire — don't just want, wish or think it. Desire it!

Decision — make a decision. Start now.

Dare — have you heard of a dare devil? We need dare angels.

Dedication — pay the price. One wishful thinker said, "I'd give my life to play a piano like that." An accomplished pianist replied, "That's exactly what I've done."

Direction — Each of us should read a success book which is also a motivational book. It is called the BIBLE.

Devotion — this means devotion to God. If you are devoted to God's work and God's will, you will achieve success.

The conclusion of this lesson is that there is a difference between failure and defeat. Instead of feeling that we have more problems than anyone else, we need to learn to expect reversals and to cope with defeats. After all, there is much to be learned from the defeats of life.

Lesson 11: "KEEP A GOOD CONSCIENCE"

Scripture References: Phil. 4:8, Psalm 51:3, Psalm 86:5, Isa. 43:25, Isa. 1:18, II Cor. 1:12, Psalm 139:2-8, Psalm 103:12, Heb. 8:12.

Key Verse: "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things" (Phil. 4:8 NIV).

Lesson Theme: Christian happiness can only be achieved by having an untroubled conscience.

Major Points:

1. A good conscience brings satisfaction to our hearts.
2. Our conscience has the power to make us happy or unhappy.
3. A guilty conscience causes illnesses — both psychosomatic and physical.
4. A good conscience helps us become even better.
5. Christians need to develop a sense of guilt.
6. Then we can learn the teaching of repentance.
7. A good conscience is better than medicine.

Points for Thought:

1. Does God *really* forget our forgiven sins?
2. Is it possible to achieve a good conscience?

This lesson (number 11) is intended to convince the student of the importance of a good conscience. In order to be happy, we must have an untroubled conscience. Happiness comes through the feeling of peace in three ways. (1) Peace with self; (2) peace with one's record, and (3) peace with one's God. I particularly like II Corinthians 1:12.

There are seven key points in this lesson:

1. A good conscience brings satisfaction to our hearts. It provides peaceful experiences for today and pleasant anticipation for tomorrow. Someone wrote, "There is no rest like the peace in the house of one's own conscience." A French proverb states, "There is no pillow so soft as a clear conscience." The opposite of this is found in David's Psalm 51:3, "My sin is always before me." It has been suggested that his troubled conscience was causing David to have nightmares. We need to realize there is something within us which either tranquilizes us or disturbs us. We call it a good or bad conscience. If we do right, our conscience approves and we have a feeling of self-respect and peace. If we do wrong, we have an internal witness which blames and tortures us. A guilty conscience brings unrest and turbulence.

2. Our conscience has the power to make us happy or unhappy. With the insistence on having a good conscience, let's consider some ills which result from sins and a bad conscience. I recall a novel and the description of a murder. The murderer cleaned the floor, but his guilty conscience had him imagining that the wooden floor was oozing blood and he kept scrubbing the stain. It was an imaginary stain. It was the novelist's way of saying that our evil deeds, unforgiven and uncleansed, continue to stain the fiber and substance of our soul. There is another point. Have you observed that a guilty

conscience makes cowards and defeatists of persons? A fearful conscience causes one to see stalking shadows and enemies behind every tree.

3. A guilty conscience causes illnesses — both psychosomatic and physical. There is no rest for the soul disturbed with horror of guilt. A nagging conscience has influences which cause disintegration. In Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth*, someone asked the physician about Lady Macbeth's illness. The physician replied, "She's not so sick, my lord, as she is troubled with thickcoming fancies that keep her from her rest."

4. A good conscience helps us become even better. It allows us to become a better spouse. We are more pleasant, helpful, enjoyable, cooperative, efficient, and satisfying. The beauty is that we can blot out past mistakes and start all over with a clear conscience. Consider these promises:

Psalm 86:5, Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 1:18,
Isaiah 43:25, Hebrews 8:12.

In Act V of *Macbeth*, when the physician was asked how to treat Lady Macbeth's ailment, the physician's opinion is still the correct remedy for people whose conscience hurts. He said, "More needs she the Divine, than the physician. God, God forgive us all."

5. A Christian needs to develop a sense of guilt. It's difficult to define conscience. It is somewhat similar to the statement the Supreme Court Justice made about pornography. He said he couldn't define it, but that he could recognize it when he saw it. Those of us who are trying to live the Christian life must have a highly developed sense of what is right and wrong. I'm familiar with a university president who announced the following campus regulation:

"Boys' hair will not be *longish*, and girls' skirts will not be short." When he was challenged to define what he

meant by “longish” the president replied, “Everyone knows what longish means.”

6. Having arrived at the point of being able to discern right from wrong, *we will then be mature enough to learn the teaching of repentance.*

7. A good conscience is better than medicine. There are at least six virtues which indicate a good conscience:

- Respect for the rights of others.
- Respect for property.
- Respect for the laws of the land.
- Respect for life.
- Respect for parents.
- Respect for God’s law.

Each of us must work toward having a good conscience. Achieving a restful conscience is a God-given quality that really is better than medicine.

Lesson 12: “SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT”

Scripture References: I Peter 3:10-11, Matt. 5:41, Prov. 19:11, Matt. 6:27, Matt. 7:3, I Tim. 6:6-8, Romans 8:28, Psalm 55:22, Eph. 4:3, Eph. 4:2, Psalm 37:11, Matt. 6:12, Matt. 6:15, Phil. 4:11, Phil. 4:6-7, I Cor. 13:11, Luke 12:22.

Key Verse: “For he that will love life, and see good days . . . let him seek peace and pursue it” (I Peter 3:10-11).

Lesson Theme: Peace is achieved by having a good-natured disposition toward a set of ideals and principles; and learning to accept (1) self, (2) others, and (3) circumstances.

Major Points:

1. Be forbearing.
2. Go the second mile.
3. Pass over another's transgression.
4. Be forgiving.
5. Handle life's little annoyances.
6. Be considerate.
7. Try meditation.

Some other major points in the pursuit of peace:

- Have a goal.
- Be outgoing.
- Have positive feelings toward fellow man.
- Avoid anxiety and fear.
- Keep a clean conscience.
- Maintain good health.

Points for Thought:

1. What are your greatest fears?
2. Do you understand that the more you try to achieve, the more problems you will likely face?

The purpose of this lesson (number 12) is to bring happiness into the lives of all Christians by having them experience the peace that comes from loving life. The enjoyment of good days is not an accident. It is an achievement. A pleasant life is conditional. One of the conditions is the pursuit of peace. The good life of peace is found in the good-natured disposition which pursues the following ideals and principles:

1. Be forebearing (Ephesians 4:2). It shows a beautiful and merciful Christian spirit. It causes us to be charitable, and to remember that temperaments are not the same and that circumstances are not always the same. Beware of the curt tongue which says, "If I were so and

so, etc., I'd do thus and thus, etc." Forebearance makes allowances. I believe that it is a greater quality than forgiveness.

2. Go the second mile (Matthew 5:41). Doing so requires meekness and this is the first requisite of peace. Listen to what David said in Psalm 37:11, "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." What is meekness? It is the gentle, long-suffering, humble approach. It is the opposite of being domineering, blustering, and arrogant.

3. Pass over another's transgression. There is a certain glory in passing over such infractions as a lack of tact or being irritated. Life is sweeter if we let bitter experiences rest. Solomon wrote, "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense" (Proverbs 19:11 NIV).

4. Be forgiving. Some of us wouldn't dare pray the prayer of Matthew 6:12 each night. If we are to have peace we must become familiar with Matthew 6:15. There can be no peace unless we forgive. When we forgive, this ends the quarrel and then we find calmness, pleasantness, and peace. There are people who will never be healthy unless they learn to forgive. Some people have enough hate to make them sick.

5. Handle life's little annoyances. There are always little worries and potential miseries. We can bear life's vexations by expecting them and being flexible.

6. Be considerate.

With friends — never annoy them.

And useful to others but not over-anxious.

And occupied with our own business and little with our friend's business.

Be obliging — remember, blessed are the peacemakers.

7. Try meditation. If we are to find peace we must learn the value of meditation; a time to contemplate, ponder, plan, think, muse, reflect, and consider. It is through meditation that we learn the peace that comes from acceptance of (1) self (Matthew 6:27), (2) others (Matthew 7:3), and (3) circumstances (Philippians 4:11 NIV). We ought to underscore and memorize the verses recorded in I Timothy 6:6-8. These verses will help us find peace.

There are several other suggestions which will help us enjoy a peaceful life:

Have a goal.

Be outgoing — this is the opposite of being self-centered.

Have positive feelings toward fellow man (Matthew 5:44).

Avoid anxiety and fear (Philippians 4:6-7, Romans 8:28).

Keep a clear conscience. Be able to say "I'm not guilty."

Maintain good health. Read Dr. S. I. McMillen's excellent book, *None of These Diseases*.

There is an amazing amount of evidence to show that the Christian way of life is the healthiest way of life.

Another thought to consider is that if we are to attain peace we must avoid being neurotic. In I Corinthians 13:11 Paul said, "When I became a man I gave up childish things." The neurotic is forever reverting to childish behavior. Here are some patterns:

Dependence on another person.

Chronic illness.

Demand to be mothered or fathered.

Never assuming responsibility.
Being self-centered (my aches, my pains).

It is almost an amusing thing about neurotics:

They "suffer" more than anyone else.
Physical pain hurts them "more."
Their grief is more "intense."
Their work (or job) is more "demanding."
Injustice to them is "more" unjust.
They seem to deal with only "callous" humans.
Their life is more "hopeless" than to others.

The neurotic is an extremist. These types have in actuality departed from the Christian way.

The final prescription for a peaceful mind and peaceful life is:

Take action to fight fear with work.
Try physical and mental activity.
Then learn to relax, to laugh and live a little.
Talk about positive things.

Say, "I feel great." Say, "I appreciate your friendship."

In conclusion, it is my prayer that this series on Christian Happiness might bring about a change in your life and that it will cause you to seek a closer relationship with God.

CHURCH GROWTH

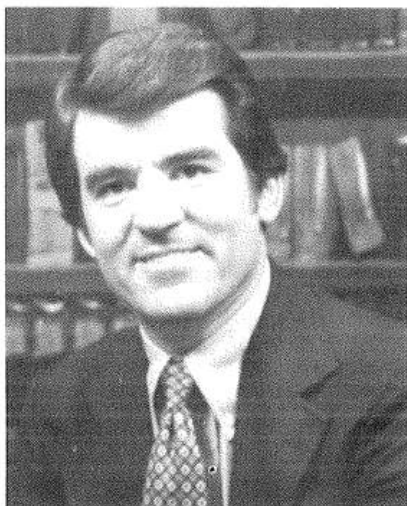
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In Matthew 16:13, Jesus came to the coast of Caesarea Philippi and asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I,

the Son of Man, am?" They said, "Some say thou art John the Baptist, and some say Elijah, and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

"He said to them, 'But whom say ye that I am?'" Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." And Jesus replied, 'Blessed art thou Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.'

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build MY CHURCH and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Christ's Church is the most glorious institution in all the world. What the sun is to the Solar System, the Church of Christ is to the world. All organizations of men will one day be dust, unable to span the chasm of eternity; but the Church of our Lord will erect Her banner on the other side and on this side proclaim in letters of gold, "Cross Over."

We live in a day of cults, social upheaval, and rabid atheistic propaganda which have thrust themselves upon the religious scene until men have despaired of knowing the truth; so they have turned to indifference, and filled their lives with worldly pleasures. People generally are unaware that there is a simple, beautiful God-given way of life that leads to absolute assurance and guidance. People endure the darkness because they have never seen the light. If ever the plain, simple teachings of the New Testament were needed, that time is now. The Church is a great fact. It was wonderful in its conception and is still more wonderful in its realization. Moses, before he laid down his staff, pointed to the coming Messiah, the one like himself, a prophet, lawgiver and mediator. Daniel, in the midst of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, as if he had a horoscope of coming ages in his hand, said, (Dan. 2:44) "In the days of these kings shall the God of Heaven set

up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and shall stand for evermore."

John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. The young carpenter of Nazareth had divine conception of this Kingdom and no thought of man ever equalled the sublimity of that thought. A Kingdom, not of this world, yet having dominion over the hearts and the lives of men and women. A Kingdom of truth and love. A Kingdom universal and eternal. A Kingdom that would be purchased with His own blood.

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from Heaven as of a rushing of a mighty wind, and filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there was dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under Heaven" (Acts 2:1-5).

This was the day when the Kingdom of God was inaugurated. The prophetic utterances had been fulfilled. The human cry for grace and mercy had been heard and **THREE THOUSAND PEOPLE** obeyed the gospel on this occasion when they heard the gospel preached for the first time.

This same Jesus Christ rules today and is the head of the Church for which He died. This Church is not in the world to entertain the world, but to save the world. Our mission is not to amuse people, but to enlighten people. The mission of the Church is not to mock people, but to reclaim people through the blood of the Lord Jesus

Christ. The gospel we are to preach is so simple a child can understand it; yet so deep that philosophers cannot grasp its depths. Even the most destitute can have it for the asking, yet it is so priceless that all the money in the world cannot buy it. It is so individual that no one can accept it for another, yet so universal that none is outside of the scope.

Surely, this great institution would demand men's zealous, fervent hearts, and exciting, dynamic service. Yet I read of a congregation, some seventy years later in Laodicea (Rev. 3:15-19), which abounded so much in prosperity that it must have been the envy of other churches. No one in this Church brought disgrace on the Christian name. They were just simply nonchalant, indifferent, content, aiming at nothing and doing nothing. They could be described as those that take an interest in religion as a form in good taste, but zeal and enthusiasm would be very disturbing. They never put themselves to any inconvenience for the cause of Christ that the Church might grow. They would never make any sacrifice that the gospel might be preached throughout the whole world, but knock in the head any program for advancement of the Kingdom.

The people in Laodicea were not cold, but they were not hot. They were not infidels, but not ardent believers; did not ridicule the gospel, nor defend it; not working in iniquity, nor doing any great good. They were neither puritans nor bigots. They were decent and respectable and all things were carried on in decency and in order. No doubt they had prayer meeting, but in all probability very few were present and liked the quietness.

Sound familiar? We have Laodicean churches by the droves and I receive calls from them daily asking, "Gary, what on earth are you doing at Garland Road — we're dying over here." The purpose of this class is to stop

churches from dying — and give the Body of Christ LIFE AGAIN.

RELATIONSHIP OF JESUS AND THE CHURCH

One cannot fully appreciate the nature of the Church until he knows of the life of Jesus and the relationship of His life with the Church. For the next few minutes go with me to the last few hours of His life. I want you to see what the Church meant to Jesus Christ and I want you to think all the time, "WHAT DOES THE CHURCH MEAN TO ME?"

The Inspired Word tells us that the Lord's supper was instituted on the night His suffering began. After the supper, Jesus left the upper room and took with Him Peter, James, and John, and went to a place to pray where he often went. As he entered He said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death." Why so sorrowful? Because the sins of the ages, living and dead were piled up in His heart and in His head. He was about to suffer the most excruciating death ever recorded in history, about to be charged with the blackest of crime. He was about to go through this experience on which the spiritual welfare of billions of people depended. No wonder He cried out, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death."

He goes a little farther and falls on His face — three times He prayed. With our finite minds I'm sure we can never fully grasp it, but He cried from the bottom of His heart, "O God, let this cup pass — not my will, but Thine be done."

After this the sound of the soldiers . . . those men led by one of His apostles. It must have broken His heart to see one of His own walking up, embracing Him, kissing Him. That angry mob took Jesus on that night and led

Him from one mock trial to another. And in every mock trial that angry, howling mob is shouting, "Crucify Him!"

I have often wondered why some disciple didn't cry out that night and say, "O, God destroy this nest of rebels. O God unleash the thunderbolts of Heaven in Thy power and destroy these people from the face of the earth. These people have always opposed righteousness. Their fathers and grandfathers have killed your prophets, in all the ages of the world. Destroy them, not Him." But the voice would come back from God, "If I deliver my son, the whole world will be lost forever."

Then they led my Lord from one mock trial to another and beat His back until His shoulder blades looked like "Whitecaps in a sea of blood". Finally they took Him to Golgotha, fastened Him to a cross, dropped the cross into a hole prepared for it. This was about 9:00 in the morning. If you had come back about high-noon you would have seen the Son of God hanging there. If you had gone away and came back at 3:00, you would cry out, "The Lord of glory is dying. O God, He's really dying." The cup of anguish is almost full and filled to the brim. The Son of God is actually dying.

Then the Son of God drops His head on His chest and says, "It is finished." But it was not finished. It had just begun.

This is something we must never forget. The Son of God died that day so that you and I could belong to the Church, the Church of the Lord — the most glorious institution in all of the world.

CONFIDENCE IN THE CHURCH

In Ezekiel 40 to 47 we read a passage with startling implications to the children of God. In the twenty-fifth

Kingdom has been victorious. There is not a business on earth that could survive using our methods.

Can you imagine a merchant saying, "Our business has fallen off, our clothes are out of style, our merchandise is stale, but if you need anything, I hope you will come by. We need the business." Or a doctor: "I've lost nearly all my patients lately, I've been slipping for many years, I'm in debt, no young people come to me anymore, but if you get sick, come and see me. I'll do the best I can." No Thanks! No business or profession could admit to the failures we freely admit about the Church and stay in business. If ever there was a great witness to the imperishable nature of the Church, this is it.

Those who become discouraged always point to the mistakes of the Church. Yes, we've had our share and need to be corrected occasionally; but we can't be guilty of throwing out the baby with the water.

A few years ago Gilbert Keith Chesterton had a great debate with an atheist, Mr. Blanchford. Mr. Blanchford expressed bitterness toward mistakes of "The Church" (using the broad term), and with pride pointed to the cleaner record of atheism. Chesterton was angered by this and answered:

"Yes, there are dark pages in the history of the Church. For centuries it was the supreme power in the world, it tamed the barbarians, it created modern Europe, it gave powers to the wheels of civilization. Of course, working on so broad a scale it made mistakes. On the other hand, Atheism has no history. It has never built an institution, never created a culture, never sat upon a throne from which it has mastered the forces which have made an epoch. It has never really done anything; and because it has no history, it has no record of mistakes.

In spite of mistakes, human error, and foes who would destroy it, the Kingdom remains, grows, deepens, and continues to give eternal life. God promised and He fulfills.

The Kingdom Has A Triumphant King.

When Jesus asked Peter who he thought Jesus was and Peter replied, "Thou art Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God," Jesus told of the coming Kingdom and stated, "The powers of death and Hell shall not prevail against it." On the mount with Jesus, the closest apostles saw descending from a cloud Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, but when the apostles lifted their eyes, "they saw only Jesus."

Whenever the apostles had moments of doubting, they were constantly assured that this Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. We today need to establish that confidence in our King of the Kingdom. He is the Head of an eternal Kingdom full of power to keep us from placing our confidence in our own puny plans and building our little tabernacles. Ours will be defeated, but His shall stand.

Occasionally in the Church one man will show such leadership and unusual zeal and ability that much confidence is placed in him. It often happens then that he becomes discouraged or misled, and with his failure dies the hopes and faith of his followers and friends. The problem is, we focus on the wrong person.

We, like the people on the mountain, need to raise our heads again and see only Jesus. He is our King, the triumphant King of an eternal and perfect Kingdom. Let us rebuild confidence in this glorious institution.

YOU'VE GOT TO DREAM

Conrad Hilton, probably the most successful multi-million dollar hotel entrepreneur, gave credit for his

year of the Israelite's exile, after the great destruction by the hands of the Babylonians, Ezekiel receives a vision from God. It is an unbelievable message, considering the difficult times of its writing. The land had been overthrown, walls broken down, the temple lay in ruins, people reported to distant lands. God took Ezekiel to the top of the mountain and showed him a restored people, a rebuilt city, a glorious temple built again and standing on the heights, with a life-giving stream flowing from the temple growing deeper and deeper and giving life everywhere. What an optimistic message in a depressed time!

I think that Ezekiel's kind of optimism is needed at this time of Church history. Now the Church needs to rise to the occasion when there is so much criticism of the Church, much moral decay within and without, and gloom over the face of the earth, but many in the Church have lost confidence in the power of the Kingdom. We dare not do that.

I am not saying there are not problems in the Church; our publications are full of them, problems of leadership in the Church, decline in conversions, attendance, lack of interest in spiritual things, loss of preachers, many of whom leave because of disillusionment in the Church as an effective institution. These problems need to make us reevaluate our structure, reset our sails perhaps, but not to panic and cast aside a God-given map for some man-made plan.

In the midst of a depressed age God gave Ezekiel a vision of the Kingdom, the Church, as a flowing, growing, deepening, life-giving stream. Let us look at that vision and let it reset our confidence in the Church as God's triumphant Kingdom.

WE CAN HAVE CONFIDENCE BECAUSE . . .*God Said That The Kingdom Would Be Triumphant.*

Some self-appointed prophets say the Church is out-of-date, irrelevant today. But God established a Kingdom and said it would be eternal; that gives me confidence that it will last with me or without me — with you or without you — because it is in stronger hands.

Daniel 2:44 — “And in the days of those kings the God of Heaven will set up a Kingdom that will never be destroyed.”

7:14 — “His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and His Kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”

Luke 1:33 — “of His Kingdom there will be no end.”

Hebrews 12:28 — “Let us be grateful for receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken.”

We need to hear voices of optimism like Nehemiah: “The God of Heaven will make us prosper and we, his servants, will **ARISE AND BUILD.**” “Remember the Lord Who is Great. **FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION ON HIM.**” “I am doing a great work and I **CANNOT COME DOWN.**” “This work has been accomplished with the **HELP OF OUR GOD.**” Or the voice of Joshua: “Not one of all the good promises which the Lord had made of the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.” That’s how it is with God — He promises and He fulfills. The question is Do you believe it?

Look at how the Kingdom has triumphed. Over 2,000 years of foes and critics without and within and still the

success to his father for teaching him the value of WORK, and his mother for teaching him the value of PRAYER. His son, however, questioned his reasoning, "I know plenty of fellows who work hard and pray faithfully, and nothing happens. There must be some other ingredient that goes in, but I can't put my finger on it." Ample lives are built on hard work, and inspiring lives are built on prayer, but one extra ingredient goes into the extraordinary. It was Ezekiel's "vision," Mr. Hilton discovered — "You had to dream!"

Nothing great is ever built without first living in the heart as a dream. The Taj Mahal in India, one of the wonders of the world, was built because a king had a dream of a beautiful memorial for his favorite wife. The temple in Jerusalem was first a dream in the heart of David, passed to his son, Solomon.

I have always been a dreamer. As a boy I dreamed of great riches, rooms full of money; of power, being king or President of the U.S.; of love, marriage, and a home; of being a success in the business world. But Christ called me into another life and changed all my dreams. Now I have the high honor of being the minister of one of the fastest growing churches in the country, and all my dreams are for this Church of Jesus Christ.

Often I sit quietly or lie in bed at night and dream of what this church could be. Oh, if all these dreams could come true the world would look at us and say, "There is the greatest Church on earth." God would continually light our candlestick with joy at the work and example our Church exudes.

Great churches are built on dreams: God's vision and men's dreams. First comes the dream and then comes the hard work which makes the dream come true. I challenge you today to have a dream, dream of making your Church of Christ the greatest Church in the world, and

with God's help work together as one to build a great Body for the glory of God. Let me tell you about the Church of my dreams:

A SPIRITUAL CHURCH

If the Church is to mean anything to the world, it must be a spiritual organization. It may be wealthy, have thousands of names on the roll, may have a beautiful building, great swelling crowds, strong preaching, and sweet singing; but if it is not a spiritual Church, it is nothing.

The Church is the only organization in the world in which everything lays claim to being spiritual. Everything that is done in a great Church must be done for the glory of God. If we are to be a spiritual Church we must be a:

1. *Bible Reading Church.* On a local radio program "Information Please", experts were asked to give the first sentence of the Declaration of Independence, the American Constitution, and the Bible. Without hesitation they gave the first two, but not one of four learned men could recite the first sentence of the Word of God. The world does not know the Book. We in the Church must have its words imprinted on our hearts, but we will never wear them in our hearts if we do not pick up the book daily and meditate upon them.

2. *Bible Practicing Church.* James 1:22 — "Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only." Many people can quote the Bible, and even teach it in a splendid way, yet live at odds with their neighbor, deal dishonestly with associates, have a negative, faithless existence. We ought not merely encourage our members to read their Bibles, but to live it.

3. *Praying Church.* A great Church goes forward, not

with heads in the air, nor with chests stuck out, but humbly, on our knees. Whatever happened to "Prayer Meetings." How long has it been since your congregation met together for an all-night prayer vigil. The power is in Prayer and great changes occur in Churches who turn to God through this glorious avenue.

Churches are not built of brick and stone: these make buildings only. Churches are made of men and women, boys and girls. Churches are made of human personalities, human brains, hearts and hands, and when these lives are spiritual lives, they will reflect the glory of Christ in them to the world, and then the world will feel the influence and power of the Church.

A LOVING CHURCH

1. *They love each other.* We have everything in the world to love each other for: we have the same Savior, we serve the same Lord, we are part of the same spiritual family, we are living for the same spiritual purpose. Why, then, is there so much competition to the point of distrust, disunity, and dislike for our brothers and sisters? The Bible says, "Do good unto all men, especially those of the household of faith" (Gal. 7:10). This love needs to be expressed from the pulpit, from the leaders, from the teachers, freely and unashamedly. Perhaps our society has dictated that we hold ourselves from one another as a matter of taste, but we have lost part of the Biblical expression of love when we shy from that expression of "Greet one another with a holy kiss," of Romans 16:16, and Peter's recommendation, "Greet one another with the kiss of love." I dream of a Church where members love so deeply that they are not afraid to express that love openly, to hold hands and sing *Bless Be The Tie That Binds*.

The blessing for our Churches is that when we openly express our love and affection for one another, we learn to truly care about each one's personal sorrows and will be there to minister whenever a brother has a need.

2. *They love the lost.* This is the purpose for the Church's existence: to take the place of Jesus. He came from Heaven to touch the lives broken with sin, and bring them to know the tender mercies of a loving heavenly Father. That is our whole reason for being. We cannot reach the lost, however, until we love them. Someone has aptly said the Church should be a hospital for sinners, not a country-club for saints. We must never be so self-serving with our programs that we fail to reach out to the lost wherever they are, whatever state we find them.

I have encountered many questions about our benevolent program at Garland Road. Some of the questions are "How can you know if these people you are helping are DESERVING or not?" What is "DESERVING"? If you mean good, honest, conscientious, hardworking, middle-class pleasant folk — probably very few would qualify. Who did Jesus stop to minister to? Only the good, honest, conscientious, hardworking, middle-class, pleasant folk? Hardly. He associated with — SINNERS. He died for — SINNERS. His Church, like it or not, is made up of SINNERS.

We have a vibrant benevolent program at Garland Road. We believe it is the backbone of our program of outreach. Oh, we may unknowingly err in judgment, and be taken advantage of. But if we err, our policy is to err on the side of mercy. We help those within the Church, but by far the vast majority of our help goes to the unchurched. That must be our mission if we are truly to wear the name of Christ's Body.

3. *They love the fallen.* One of the saddest pictures in

the world is for a Christian to become discouraged and fall away from the Church; or not even fall completely away, but stumble critically, publically. Far too often when that happens, we push them farther out in the cold. If ever there is a time when a man needs sympathy, understanding, and love, it is when he has fallen. Far too often we have seen a brother do wrong, say something wrong, or we hear of something that has shades of suspicion, and we criticize him, ostracize him, and lose him in the Cause. In the beginning of the Singles Work, I heard this statement, "Well, what will we do about the 'Divorced.'" Love him, Brother, love him.

I received a call from a family member who was "wiped out" because of the actions of a church toward a couple who were to be married there. The young lady was a member of the church, her fiance was not, but attended with her regularly. She became pregnant, and went forward asking for forgiveness of the church. Prayers were made for her, but she was told she wouldn't be able to use the church building for her wedding since she was pregnant, due to the influence this would have on other young people of that congregation. Would you be shocked to know that the young man who was studying to become a Christian now has no desire to attend the Lord's Church? The wedding took place in his family's church, where they were received with understanding, sympathy, and *love*. I dream of a church where we lift up the fallen, not kick them when they are down. Sometimes we need to be reminded of Jesus' response, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

"By this shall men know . . . that you have love for one another." The Church of Christ was founded on this love for one another. We will have great Churches when this message is preached from our pulpits, influenced by the example of our leaders, and permeates the lives of our members.

A FRIENDLY CHURCH

Each Church has a personality. That personality is made up of individuals, yet it seems to blend into an attitude that becomes greater than the individual parts that comprise the sum. That personality must be friendly and positive if it is going to attract people. It has been proven over and over again that people will ride many miles (even in a gasoline crunch) and pass many churches in order to go to the church filled with friendly people. Someone said to a little boy one day, "Why do you go so far to church when there are churches very close to your home?" The little boy answered, "I go to that church because they love a fellow over there." He knows that, because the attitude of the Church, the people, is friendly.

Bobby Burns, the great Scotch poet, one day was lonely and dejected. He drifted into a church and sat there through the services. Maybe he could have been won by friendliness, but the members lost their opportunity. Taking a hymn book out of the rack, he wrote these words on the flyleaf:

As cold a wind as ever blew;
A colder church, and in it but few;
As cold a minister as ever spake
Ye'll all be hot ere I come back.

We have a tradition at Garland Road of standing with our visitors at the beginning of every service to give every person a chance to speak to the souls around them, so that not a single visitor can go out of our services without having been greeted and met by a member. In a more informal setting of Sunday evening services, we allow our members to introduce visitors they have

brought with them, or happen to sit beside. People like to be noticed, it is part of our basic human need. This is especially true when people come to a Church — they come out of a need-base. It must be recognized and met if we are to attract them and get them to allow us to share with them Christ's message of salvation.

Someday in glory someone will ask, "What brought about your salvation?" and the answer will be, "I had a friend. He invited me to his Church. They were friendly and spiritual, and loving, I found Jesus there." That will never be said of a Church whose description could read, "As cold a wind as ever blew; a colder church, and in it but few; . . ."

AN ATTENDED CHURCH

God knew the hearts of people, and he knew they needed a place to meet for inspiration, fellowship, and worship. His word tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. People miss so much by not attending church: being with people holding the highest ideals, understanding many Biblical truths, progress made in God's Kingdom, hearing the good news, the Gospel, having a complete life of service in the most satisfying tasks in the world. The church of my dreams is one about which the members say, "I can't wait until Sunday to go to Church, that is the best day of my week."

In China a young woman found Christ as her Savior. Her mother was a cripple and lived eighteen miles from the Church. This young woman took her mother on her back and brought her all the way to the Church. She had a love for the Church and wanted her mother to experience the joy she knew. People will be devoted, when we have Churches which deserve that kind of devotion; then

people will not be looking for the least excuse to keep them from attending worship services. I dream of a church filled with people seeking God, and finding the solutions to life's problems in the right place. That will be a great Church.

A UNITED CHURCH

Jesus said, "If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (Mark 3:25). If we are to present a solid front against the devil and his forces, we must stand together as one.

The Church as a whole needs to be united. There is too much competition, suspicion, and lack of a cooperative spirit among churches in any given community where there are more than one congregation of the Lord's people. The analogy could be drawn of an army, comprised of thousands of men, each comprising a basic smaller unit of the whole, but each unit has just one object and they all work together to overcome the enemy. If our congregations could all unite our hearts in kindred goals of influencing the community for good through a cooperative effort, even while in individual congregational works, great territories could be conquered. United we stand strong, divided we are weak.

In individual congregations there must again be a unity of spirit. I am afraid one of the most weakening of devices in this century has been the "swarm and scatter" concept. This is when a congregation grows to a commanding size: able to do more than pay the building payment and preacher's salary. A few in the congregation who live in a cluster will inevitably decide to swarm together and scatter from the "parent" church and start their own congregation. They are immediately strapped with the need for land, a building, a ministerial

staff, etc., etc., etc., etc. Our strength is in our unity. I will never believe that 100 churches of 200 people each can ever do the good equivalent to 10 churches with 2,000 people each paying for 10 buildings, ministers, and other expenses incurred who can use the balance for mission, benevolence, service programs. My dream and my prayer is for several well-needed merges of efforts and resources, congregations all over the country uniting for a composite good.

A MISSIONARY CHURCH

The works of a great church are not only in our town, they must extend to the ends of the earth. A church whose mission is only to serve its members or the community surrounding the building has missed the charge of the Great Commission — “Go ye into all the world.” We are Christians in America, not because God handed the Bible directly to us, but from the results of Christian missionaries. Thank God for the men with courage and love who brought the gospel to you and your ancestors. Now it is our turn. We must give the Gospel to the world.

Now there are several ways to do missionary work — some are effective and others are dollars wasted. I see churches who answer mission calls with \$50 here and \$100 there, but no follow-up on the investment. My dream church investigates the area and chooses a man who is right for that spot, then supports that work — psychologically, spiritually, as well as financially. Get the people committed to a work in their hearts by going to visit, sending young people there to help with VBS, bringing the people home, children saving for this missionary in Sunday School class — convict them in the heart and they may respond to any need. The dollars

will then be utilized fully, since the elders are aware of the work and in close contact with the Christians there, and a love bond is formed that is worth more than all the money poured into mission works.

A GROWING CHURCH

There is some discussion among preachers in our time as to whether or not the Church is to grow! Whenever I hear one of these debates I learn something about why churches grow and why some decline. I don't mind preachers of static or declining churches honestly seeking out reasons why it is happening, but when they seek to encourage it either by their lethargy or their rationalization, then I confess I get irked. It is simply Biblical and theological nonsense to argue that God is pleased when Churches, year after year and generation after generation, decline. Some seem to rejoice at the emergence of the "faithful remnant" and the loss of numbers.

Need I say that the gospel is to be proclaimed to all nations, and the expected response is repentance and obedience to Christ. If that doesn't mean Church growth, I don't know what does. When Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God, He talked about a tiny mustard seed which would eventually develop into a great tree (Matt. 13:31 ff). Growth again!

Jesus' ministry was a short three years. He began by winning twelve people to Himself. When He finished, the twelve had become a committed group in Jerusalem of not less than 120 disciples, more probably upwards of 500 (I Cor. 15:6). Growth from twelve to 120 in three years represents a decadal rate of 215,343% or an annual growth rate of 115%. The "proof-of-the-puddin'" comes in whether high rates of growth can be sustained after

such a tremendous beginning. Everyone knows when you start with small numbers that the percentages are high. What happened to the Church Jesus planted in Jerusalem? Were they concerned with numbers?

Acts 2:41 — “Then they that gladly received His word were baptized: and the same day there were added to them about 3,000 souls.”

Acts 2:47 — “And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.”

Acts 4:4 — “Howbeit many of them which heard the Word believed and a number of men was about 5,000.”

Acts 11:21 — “And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.”

Could the figure have been something around 100,000? Just for curiosity, if it were 100,000 and the period of time since Pentecost were calculated at thirty years, that Jerusalem Church which started with 3,120 on Pentecost sustained a decadal growth rate of 222%, superb in anyone's book. But, my status-quo brethren would argue, the Gospel is not concerned with numbers.

The Gospel is that Jesus came, lived, and died for *all* men — that's numbers. His last commission was to “Go and make disciples of *all the nations* — that's numbers any way you look at it.

When we dream of a church we must have the vision and desire of Jesus and the Apostles to see the Church grow. The end product will be quantitative as well as qualitative growth and joyous life for all the Kingdom.

We must not be satisfied with mediocre churches, bill-

paying churches, dying churches. The most glorious institution on earth must be alive, vibrant, dynamic — it takes work, prayer, and a dream.

INGREDIENTS FOR A GREAT CONGREGATION

LEADERS: VISIONARIES WITH FEET ON THE GROUND

We have an amazing phenomena in the Church today. There is an ever-brewing conflict between the visionary and the stationary. Imagine that a man who dreams dreams of great activities and innovative processes is held in suspect by some of our brethren who cautiously guard the purity of Christ's Church. The ridiculousness of the situation is not that either side is without merit, because both stand for the Gospel, but that there should ever be room for an either/or situation to exist. Why must there be either a visionary leader, or a sound leader? Each age has had its own peculiar problems with which to contend. Brethren, this is going to be ours! Can we have visionary leaders, leading forward-moving, innovative, stylized preaching, and teaching, and maintain a sound, Gospel-loving, Truth-defending and Truth-teaching church? There are those who say *No* — I say — YES, YES, YES — *we must* if we are to stay alive in a fast-moving world of ingenuity.

We must keep up with the competition around us, for like it or not, the outsider looks at our exterior, our flair, our appeal before he can comprehend the beauty of our simple Bible-centered Gospel. Paul understood our predicament in Corinth when he wrote to the brethren, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Cor. 9:22). This was Paul's vision — did it interfere with his soundness? Roman 1:16 — "For I

am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith."

The history of the restoration movement was the story of men who dared to see the vision of the true Church, and seeing, move to action. Yes, they raised many eyebrows and heavy criticism in the process; but we stand today because of their courage and bravery, their visionary minds coupled with a firm defense of the Truth of the Gospel. They had to be leaders like the kind of men we need today — a sort of modern Paul Bunyan, a man with his head in the mountains, and his feet firmly planted in the valleys. Brethren, it is possible — we can have visionary leaders who are sound in the faith.

Proverbs 29:18 — "Where there is no vision, the people perish." A simple axiom of life is, the people will go no farther than the leaders. I have seen too many churches in our brotherhood today whose leaders have lost vision and faith in the capabilities of the members and are perishing, literally drying up on the vine. We must have churches with visionary leaders.

In every area of life the necessity of reaching beyond our capacity is known. Business is never satisfied with today's income, but they are constantly in the process of expanding their borders, if they are to survive the market place. The fastest-growing city in Texas is Houston, and the reason for that growth is the principle of Growing to Capacity. Huge office complexes are built every day without one single lease being pre-arranged. Housing projects over-build the capacity for population, because this aggressive city has learned that you will always attract industry when you provide quick, available space and housing. A plant, such as a business, city, or a church-plant, studies show, will fill to 80% of that. If you plan and build large, the attraction is comparable. Amazing and true. Ira North tells that the

Madison Church of Christ has seen unbelievable growth and strength because of its basic philosophy: We plan what we know we are capable of doing, then we add to that to allow God to do what He is capable of doing.

I honestly once heard an elder say, "Brethren, we don't need to enter that particular college ministry. Whatever would we do with that many more people, we have all we have room for now." He is unfortunately not the exception. "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

To accomplish a great Church we must have leaders who are opportunity conscious and seize every one of them.

It is embarrassing to my wife, who loves the deaf, to go into a new community and find no work being done with the deaf in our churches, and find other religious groups who have been working with them successfully for years.

Perhaps the one field we have jumped ahead on is in the realm of working with Singles. A vastly-growing body of people in our society, with unlimited talent, enthusiasm for the Lord's work, abundant time and energy ready to leap into action, yet here again, we faced much resistance. Visionary leaders vs/ Stationary leaders again — "Dare we become involved with such controversial people as divorcees, personalities not suited for marriage?" It was not an either/or proposition. It was a do/or die vision.

Not long ago I attended a workshop in another state and was appalled to walk down row after row of booths, all of which were supposed to show what "new" ideas each congregation was using to proclaim the Gospel, and see booth after booth of puppets and busses that the denominations have used for years. Where is our vision, creativity, and initiative?

The responsibility is with our leaders. No organization will grow beyond its leadership. Make that state-

ment personal with you. The last time you as a leader were approached with a new project, did you launch out with faith, or stifle with doubt? Your congregation is a product of your action.

To have a great Church, you as leaders must go home and awaken the people. A preacher once read an ad from a railroad company in which they were wanting a number of "sleepers." The preacher wrote the company and offered his entire congregation. When I'm excited about something, I can't sleep. I become consumed by it, and every waking moment concentrate on that project. Think what we can accomplish when leaders lead out — in front — are awake and alive, and excite the people with the vision of what we can do. "It is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than we believed" (Rom. 13:11).

WITH HIS FEET ON THE GROUND

James Lefan, ten years ago, gave a young and striving preacher these words of admonition: "Gary, in order to lead the people, always stay in front of them, ahead of them, but don't fail to bring them with you. Take three steps forward and two steps backward."

This is a ridiculous picture: imagine a general going to war; leading his troupes into battle, but getting so far ahead of them that they can't see where to follow? Or to attempt to lead them on a victorious mission without ever communicating the mission to the troops, the plan of action, or the way to travel. Obviously this would never happen in a highly polished military maneuver, yet we see it in church work often.

A dynamic new elder comes into the leadership with plans to reorganize the Bible school or the Youth work; is filled with good ideas, and ingenious schemes — and

launches right into them without informing the people properly, leaving a stream of misunderstandings, suspicions, and hard feelings in his wake — wondering why these brethren aren't spiritual enough to appreciate his good ideas.

Or has received a revelation about God's word so revolutionary that it turns off the defenders without a proper hearing by his improper attitude toward every one who hasn't reached his high level of spiritual attainment.

All of these attitudes are present with us today in the Lord's church. It is high time we pull them out of the closet and look at them lest they divide us into camps that are unnecessary. This goes back to our original thesis: The visionaries feel they are being held back by the defenders, and the defenders feel they are being threatened by new ideas in faith. Why does it have to be an either/or situation.

Our plea is for a visionary leadership — one that looks and moves forward, always forward — but Brethren, we must never be ashamed of what we are about. Paul warned Timothy, "Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us" (II Tim. 1:14). It goes without saying, I would think that our movement is a movement of Guardianship — of teaching and preaching the pure Gospel. Perhaps in this one area of the Christian faith we have been most successful, and therefore this lesson will not dwell on this need, except to say that, along with our vision we must remember to bring along the people, not leave them behind in the wake by tolerant, kind leadership. Lest this portion water down the critical nature of the visionary needs of leaders, may I add this editorial. The scripture says, "Guard the truth" not "Sit on it."

“ADMINISTRIVIA” A MAJOR ELDRSHIP DYSFUNCTION

No greater responsibility every rested upon any man than that which rests upon elders of the church. They are commissioned by our Heavenly Father to be pastors and shepherds of the flock in a locality. They watch for our souls. This is the elder's primary reason for being. What does that mean to the church?

It means these men are responsible for shepherding, watching for fallen souls, lifting them, encouraging all the brethren, and setting policies for the congregation which they oversee. They make the major decisions of staff employment, and specifically are accountable for all the programs of the church. That is a heavy burden. I never could understand why a man would want to add to those responsibilities the additional load of deciding how to best pave a parking lot. After a few years I learned that there are two major types of dysfunction among elderships:

1. Abdication of Shepherding Responsibilities. This eldership would rather have its head buried in mundane, trivial organizational issues than deal with problems of a spiritual nature. Men in such elderships hired preachers who couldn't get a governmental job on their past record. The difficult jobs of consequence were happily abdicated or neglected. One sure clue to this kind of eldership is: the congregation has been stagnant or in a state of decline for many years, and their parking lots are in great shape.

2. Administrative Mania. This eldership has its hands in every pie; these elders want to have a representative in every committee meeting to assure the soundness of the decisions thereof. They hire a staff and then monitor their every action. Their meetings are long and arduous,

due to the reams of decisions that must be made, the avalanche of approvals which must be given, the hoards of expenditures which must be signed.

We have a Biblical example of such a leader and the advice which was given to him. It is in the Old Testament, Exodus 18. Moses was trying to lead the people and handle all administrative and counselative problems himself. His father-in-law gave him strong advice:

“The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone . . . Furthermore you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain, and you shall place these over them . . . and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. If you do this thing and *God so commands you*, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace.” Exodus 18:17-23

The New Testament church found the same dilemma and solved the situation by delegating authority to “men of good reputation” (Acts 6).

If the Old Testament and New Testament plans were to be followed today churches would be on target, elders would be free to shepherd souls, deacons would be free to “serve the tables,” and ministers would be loosed to minister the programs.

DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

This issue of delegation of authority is crucial to an efficient church, and a great factor in morale. Many a

good preacher has left a work because his efforts were constantly in question, his hands tied for fear of rebuff or lack of confidence displayed. While it is true that the minister is responsible to an elder on the way he performs his ministry, he is not to function as an employee lorded over by an elder, but rather as a co-laborer in Christ Jesus. The elder should help in setting the goals and objectives of the ministry, establish policies, set the budget, then step back and turn the minister loose to perform. This man has been hired as an expert in his field, or he should not have been chosen for the job.

Conrad Hilton has been quoted before in this class, but another of his administrative policies is admirable. He said he learned early in his career to hire the right man and then give him the freedom to perform. If you don't, he will lose heart and initiative and being thwarted, fail. If he fails in the first place, it is your fault for hiring the wrong man. It is the elder's responsibility to remove from office any minister in whom he does not have confidence; but if the minister is a good sound man — a "visionary with his feet on the ground," give him room. Most elders are experts in some field of business, have great leadership qualities in that field, and would be highly insulted if their superiors treated them the way many elderships treat many ministers.

ACCOUNTABILITY

While we are on the subject of leadership in the church, the ministerial staff stands on a firm pedestal whose foundation is accountability. A minister who is able to accept the kind of freedom we are talking about from an eldership to head up his ministry, his programs, without eyes over his shoulder, has earned that right. He

will not go off “half-cocked” with some immature, extravagant, adventure that would lead the congregation down the path of bankruptcy. Neither does he “use” his freedom as an easy-street of half-day work habits.

To my great shame my fellow ministers are occasionally a lazy lot. I think it is a disgrace. We have been entrusted with the reputation of the congregation, the growth of a movement, the administering of day to day operations paid for by men and women who work long hours at secular jobs. A portion of these earnings come into the church coffer and eventually into our pockets to support us to do the work of the church. I think it is a crime, a travesty of the highest magnitude, when a minister sleeps in morning after morning, leaves half-day to do yard work, play golf, or baby-sit for his wife day after day, organizes his program so that he is virtually out of work and wanders around the office complex visiting, while volunteers do his job. He will never grow a great church. But worse than that as a fellow-minister, he has shirked his responsibilities and does not deserve the trust of the membership. Above all men, we as Christian ministers should proudly live up to the high calling and accountability we owe to the people.

EVANGELISM: MISSION OF THE CHURCH

A few pages back I made an emphatic statement of my belief in numbers. There is an urgent reason for that belief. Every single *number* is a *soul*. A living, eternal, soul that will spend eternity in torment if I do not reach that number, that soul. That is the mission of the church, it is our reason for existing, it is our work on earth — to reach people, souls with the Gospel.

In 1976 Batsell Barrett Baxter wrote a paper and delivered a message at the Herald of Truth Workshop in

Abilene entitled: "The Crisis." This "crisis" of which he dramatically spoke is the ineffectiveness of the mission effort of the church — not in missionary areas, but on the local congregational level. He said:

"The main thrust of the crisis of which I speak today is simply that we Christians are not reaching the people among whom we live and work with the Gospel message. Many congregations send missionaries to far off places, yet are ineffective in reaching their neighbors next door."

One of the most startling statements in this report to me was that "it is generally agreed that we are saving only about half of our own children."

This class is not on evangelism per se, so we will not spend time on personal-work techniques except as to how this is a vital factor in a great and growing church.

JESUS' PLAN STILL WORKS TODAY

S. D. Gordon, in his book *Prayer Changes Things*, tells the story of an imaginary conversation between Christ and the angel Gabriel following the Ascension. Gabriel asks the Lord what plans He has made to let the world know that He has lived, died, and risen from the dead. The Master replies, "I told Peter, James, and John and some others down on earth to make it the business of their lives to tell others. And the others are to tell others and those others yet others, and still others beyond, till the last man in the farthest reach has heard the story and has been caught, thrilled by the power of it." But Gabriel, seeing a weak point in the Master's arrangement, voices his opinion as follows: "Yes, Master, but suppose that after awhile Peter forgets.

Suppose that John loses his enthusiasm, and simply does not tell others. Suppose their successors in the twentieth century get too busy with other things. Suppose they do not tell the others? What then?" In reply came the quiet voice of Jesus with thrilling confidence: "Gabriel, I have made no other plans. I am counting on them."

How fantastic! How amazing! One man emerges on the horizon of Eternity. The divine nature of this man is not seen, not perceived, not fully appreciated by his boyhood friends, or even his own family. How we see Him one man alone walking down the road:

"And as Jesus passed forth he saw a man named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom; and he saith unto him, 'Follow me.' And he arose and followed Him." Matt. 9:9

Before He is finished, there is no longer one man along with a mission, but one Master and twelve followers, each dedicated to His cause. Considering the manpower it takes today to successfully produce an extensive campaign for any cause, how could this small band of men hope to affect even a small portion of a village, much less convert the world. Yet it was told of them some sixty years later, "The gospel, which you heard, has been preached to every creature under heaven . . ." (Col. 1:23). Obviously, Jesus' plan of evangelism worked then, and Brethren, IT CAN STILL WORK TODAY:

EVERY CHRISTIAN A MINISTER

While violently opposing the thought, we in the Church of Christ have become a people who worship and contribute to a clergy-centered church structure. Besides being flagrantly opposed to the scriptural organ-

ization of the church, this concept of modern religious thought has wilted congregations, disenchanted young people, over-worked ministers and produced apathetic members.

For the most part early Christianity was a movement which did not differentiate between ministry and members. There is no example given in the New Testament of separate priesthoods. The members ministered daily, "teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer . . . and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42, 47). Why? Not because they had a few brilliant preachers, but far more because the idea of a non-ministering Christian was rejected unanimously.

One of the most powerful and overlooked passages of the New Testament is I Peter 4:10 — "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies, in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

This short passage sketches sharply the key features of ministry as God intended it to be for a dynamic church. In reality, the work of the ministry — the work of the body — belongs to the man in the pew, not exclusively the man in the pulpit, and it is the holy obligation of every member, wherever he is, whatever he is doing. What takes place inside the sanctuary on Sunday is the measure of what happens from Monday through Saturday, for it is during this period that Church members are infiltrating all of the structures of society. It is here that Christ's mission in the world is either fulfilled or thwarted. We will never hire enough ministers or missionaries to evangelize the whole world, the entire

church is needed for that. Our churches must be taught that no man's gift is too small not to be vital in the work of the Lord. Every man is given his gift by the Spirit that he may use it for the common good.

No man will dedicate his life to something at which he is strictly an observer. He will give his life to something he internalizes as his. The church becomes that when we INVOLVE EVERY MEMBER. At Garland Road we have over forty different ministries. We have a full-time staff member who is an Involvement minister — working to make sure that *every* member has a work to do. That work depends on that member, he is a vital, important part of the total church. We depend on him, we use him, we work him, we involve him — and then the church is his church.

GREAT CHURCHES ARE MADE OF DISCIPLES

People always ask me, "How do you get so many people working? You claim to have 95% of your members involved. How do you do that?" There is no magic formula, no enticements — but we teach and preach a strong message of *discipleship*.

Jesus' followers were in the strictest sense volunteers. They were not forced, coerced, or gainfully employed into service. They willingly and compulsively served every day of their lives even unto death. How did it work? When we grasp that concept, we have at our fingertips the key to success in our involvement programs.

They knew the meaning of discipleship. Their Master had set the guide-rules: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). You see, great churches are not made out of entertainment activities, great churches are made of churches who demand discipleship.

Discipleship meant three things to these men:

- 1) Self-denial — making their own wishes nothing if they were to contradict the Father's will;
- 2) Take up your cross — meant rejection of ease and accepting the certainty of sacrifice;
- 3) "Follow me." It was Jesus' invitation to a *life* of service.

There are no new creative innovations or mechanics which we can improvise to "pump" people into dedicated service over a sustained period of time unless we first help them commit their lives to Jesus as Lord of their life. The disciples had Jesus on their minds 24 hours a day. They talked Jesus, loved Jesus, served side by side with Jesus. This idea must be preached from the pulpit, and laid into the heart of every Christian every day. We may be accused of the "overkill" at Garland Road, but we try to keep the church in front of our people every day of their lives. There is an activity going on at the church every day and night. We likewise teach strongly the idea of "You are a minister on the job, in the store, on the freeway, wherever you are, whatever you do, do all for the glory of God." *Because* when people realize that Jesus is a part of their lives every waking minute, that is where their interest lies, and where their interest lies is where their service will be. You'll never have a problem getting volunteer workers or keeping them if you make them commit their lives to the Lord.

LOVE THE PEOPLE

Jesus used two great methods of drawing men to Him. First, He loved them. "Greater love has no man than that a man lay down his life for his friends." They served him because he loved them and they loved him. Great

churches are those where the people know they are appreciated and loved. This is a principle we all can appreciate. A winning coach doesn't send a team onto the field mad at him; he fills them up with love and encouragement. Our workers in the church today will be motivated greater by love and unity than a momentary catharsis that comes through verbal barrages, bickering, and division. If Peter, James, and John had resentment for one another, they would have stifled the church at its inception.

A message of love must radiate from the pulpit and from the leadership. I like to see an informal atmosphere in the church because it shows that a family worships there. Families who love are not straight, formal, and stiff, but friendly, warm and loving. It must come from the pulpit and leaders, however; the people will never be what we don't lead them to become.

BE ENTHUSIASTIC

When Peter preached on Pentecost, he and eleven men stood in the midst of at least 3,000 Jews who were standing in the shadow of the cross with the blood of Jesus on their hands. These disciples were so excited they couldn't contain themselves; being filled with the spirit, they were fired up with excitement.

We need that kind of excitement in our churches today. There is nothing so contagious as an attitude. We at Garland Road believe we are a family. We want to be a big church and a small family. The closer we are, the more we love, and the more our enthusiasm rubs off on each other. Sometime listen to the singing in many congregations. If the songleader gets up with a sour-puss attitude, and drags a slow song into the ground, you watch the people sink down in their pews. You couldn't

get them up if you lit a fire under their seat. But you put a lively leader, with a smile and a lilt in his song, and some enthusiasm about his melody, and the congregation can't be contained. Enthusiasm is contagious, but you have to be close enough to your people to let them catch it.

PRAISE THE PEOPLE

Jesus constantly praised His followers:

Ye are the salt of the earth; ye are the light of the world, a city set on a hill which cannot be hid. Matt. 5:13

Every person realizes the importance of being appreciated, receiving our "strokes." I will work all night for the guy who appreciates what I am doing and bolsters me in my labor; but the fellow who badgers me into service, nags at my elbow, criticizes my every move, will get very little out of me. I don't think I am any different from any other man. We must express appreciation for our workers, acknowledge them, praise them. You let John Doe, who always sneaks in the back door just before service and slides right out after the last amen, do some small chore around the church, such as take care of the communion trays one Sunday, and brag on him. You won't be able to keep him out of the communion room! In the bulletin, on the bulletin boards, in meetings, in personal notes, from the pulpit, say to your people, "You are the salt of the earth."

PRAISE GOD: CELEBRATION

Our last, but certainly not the least of our ingredients for a great church is CELEBRATION. By "celebrate" I mean what most people mean by "worship", but not

entirely. A person can worship God beside a babbling brook, in a forest, or in his car on the freeway, or with his family around the dinner table. However, none of these situations is conducive to what I mean by celebration. The occasion for that in most churches is on Sunday morning and Sunday night. When a lot of people come together, hungry to meet God, a "special" kind of worship can occur. That experience is what I call "celebration."

God's people have known about celebration for a long time. The fact that the temple was the focal point for the worship of Jehovah helped immensely in keeping the twelve tribes of Israel and their respective clans together as the people of God. The temple was so designed that lots of people would be there at one time seeking God and seeing others doing the same thing. By divine appointment, not only was there a weekly Sabbath, but great yearly festivals such as the Passover, Pentecost, Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles, Purim, and others. Something good happened to God's people during those celebrations that would not have happened without them.

Some Sunday morning worship services in some of our churches are celebrations. Unfortunately, however, in a large number of our churches the Sunday morning service is more like a funeral than a celebration. This is unquestionably one reason why many churches have remained static and small over the years.

Worship must be the top priority in everything that we do — growth and planning wise. Everything, absolutely everything, must be put aside to make sure that this thing that God has called us to do is done right. Worship is lofty business and good worship does not just happen.

The Lake Avenue church in Florida (Interdenominational) is growing by leaps and bounds. They have one

key staff person who does virtually nothing but see that there is a celebration at 8:15, 9:30 and 11:00 every Sunday morning. He has a gift for designing recipes that combine scripture and preaching and announcements and music and offerings and prayer and standing and sitting and noise and silence in such a way that 52 times a year 3,000 people go home to Sunday dinner feeling that they have just had an important meeting and that because of it they are not the same.

If these celebrations bring people closer to God, that's the main great blessing. If they bring people close to God and simultaneously cause them to want to say to their unchurched friend, "Hey, how about coming to church with me — you'll love it!" you've got a great church.

THE CHURCH — A GLORIOUS INSTITUTION

Ours is a grand and glorious task: to serve the Bride of Christ, that for which He died. I have said some strong and difficult things to you, my brothers and sisters, and some of them may have sounded negative. We are still fighting foes that would destroy the Kingdom, but we will be victorious, God promised and you have confidence in it.

Yet we never want the church to have to experience another Dark Age because we have all the ingredients necessary to make the church of our dreams a reality:

1. Leaders: Visionaries with feet on the ground
2. Evangelism: Mission of the church
3. Every Christian a Minister
4. Great churches are made of disciples
5. Love the people
6. Be enthusiastic
7. Praise the people
8. Praise God: Celebration

To God be the glory, great things He hath done.