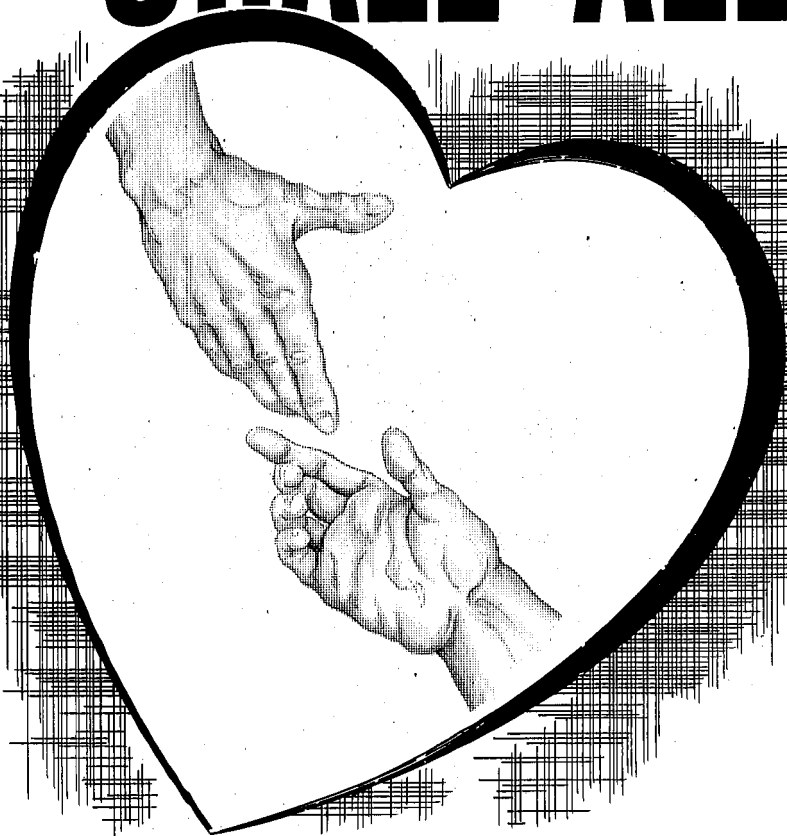


**BY THIS
SHALL ALL**



MEN KNOW

Boyce Mouton

**By This Shall
All Men Know**

By This Shall All Men Know

BY BOYCE MOUTON

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DEDICATION

To Seth Wilson and W. Carl Ketcherside
Brothers in Christ
Diligent in study
Examples of integrity.

Introduction

In 1861 the United States of America was plunged into its most costly war in terms of human lives. The World Almanac places the number of battle deaths at 498,000 while the American People's Encyclopedia places the figure at 618,000. There were from 26,000 to 31,000 Confederate soldiers who died in Union prison camps.

The shocking magnitude of this war is not seen until one realizes that if you added all of the American fatalities in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Spanish American War, World War I, the Korean police action, and the Vietnamese War you would have only 238,620 fatalities, or less than one half the number of people who died when Americans turned their guns upon one another.

There is nothing so devastating as brethren at war!

I am convinced that eternity will reveal the same shocking story with reference to the Church of Jesus Christ. Our greatest problems have not stemmed from pagan persecution or harassment by the communist conspiracy, but rather by our lack of love for one another.

This book is intended to be a sequel to *These Two Commandments* which is also published by College Press. Those who are familiar with the emphasis of that book will be better prepared to understand the thrust of this present volume.

Ignatius of Antioch once said, "With love there are no questions, and without it there are no answers."

In this volume we will seek to apply the principle of love to the very practical problems which perplex the Christian world. We hope to demonstrate the wisdom of Jesus in selecting a standard of conduct which transcends the difficulties inherent in a law. We hope to prove that love is not some irrelevant tangent but rather the very essence of the Christian commitment. The Jewish synagogue had teaching elders and serving deacons. The temples of Aphrodite and Diana had beautiful architecture and sacrificial service. The spirits of demons can work miracles and Balaam's ass could talk in tongues. But only the disciples of Jesus are known because they love one another!

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The Ultimate Command

“The end of the commandment is love . . .” (1 Timothy 1:5)

The cynic has said: “One thing we learn from history is that people do not learn from history.” If this be true the following reference to Martin Luther will be meaningless to you. There is an outside chance, however, that God will intervene. He has promised to grant wisdom to those who ask for it in faith and to open the door for those who keep on knocking.

The point of the story is that honest and intellectual men can sometimes read the Bible and miss its obvious meaning.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Lower Saxony, on November 10, 1483. He was a brilliant individual and was privileged to have access, not only to the Bible, but also to the comments on the Bible by the leading theologians of his day. It is a fact, however, beyond any reasonable doubt or dispute, that for an extended period of time he never understood the Biblical doctrine of “justification by faith.” He may have read about it in the Scriptures, or in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, but he most certainly did not believe it or understand it in his heart.

It is an amazing and almost incredible fact that intelligent men can read the Bible and miss something as basic as "justification by faith." But it happened! And the regrettable process is somehow repeated by every generation. The words of Scripture were always there, but their meaning was obscured by the gloomy shadows of traditional thought. When Luther finally rose above the traditions of his day he was used of God to share his insights with the Christian world and a dramatic "reformation" began to take place.

The World Today

At the present time there are more pagan people alive than there were when Jesus Christ gave the Great Commission. If the present trends continue, our accelerating world population will reach eight billion by the year 2010 and hardly any of those people will be Christian. At the present time for every thirty-five people born in the world only one will come to be associated with Christianity. The religious world is a veritable hotbed of controversy and confusion and new denominations continue to be formed. Instead of solving problems, we seem to be compounding them. Is it remotely possible that people as brilliant and capable as we are could have missed anything?

This book is one meager attempt to prove that we have. In our zealous attempts to please God we have made Christianity into something tedious and technical. Jesus never intended it to be that way. He taught: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:35)

This concept is so utterly simple and basic that it is within the grasp of every human being regardless of intellect or education. It is not just "a" commandment, it is more properly "the" commandment. It is the one unique characteristic of the Christian, but for all intents and purposes it has been lost in a maze of controversy and confusion. The Scriptures explicitly affirm that love is greater than faith and hope and Jesus described it as the basic concept upon which all of God's requirements could be suspended.

A Few Words from the Author of the Bible

Do you remember what Jesus said when He was asked about the greatest commandment in the Bible? He responded:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37-38)

Surely these words from the Author of the Bible ought to have a real impact upon our thinking . . . but don't count on it! The subtle and unscrupulous enemy of our souls has the amazing ability to blind our eyes and stop our ears so that "seeing we see not" and "hearing we hear not."

Do not ever forget that Jesus was crucified by Bible students. They read the Bible, committed it to memory, wrote it on the doorposts of their homes, and stuffed it into their broadened phylacteries. They faithfully counted every word and every letter and diligently preserved each "jot and tittle," but they missed the most basic concept of all . . . love!

The same ridiculous mistake has been repeated in every generation and ours is no exception. This is the message that God has been trying to communicate since the beginning of the world, that we should love one another and not be like Cain. The fact that we have memorized those words does not necessarily imply that we have understood them in our hearts or implemented them in our lives.

The Name of the Game

Many years ago a Junior High School boy challenged me to a game of chess. We were at Christian Service Camp and a number of spectators gathered around to observe the contest. Though I was a novice at the game, I did at least understand how each piece was supposed to move. About four moves later he looked up and grinned, "checkmate!" I was thunderstruck! I hadn't lost a man! My pawns were still neatly arranged and my more powerful men were poised for action . . . but I had lost the game. His queen was slanted across the board through a single hole in my defense and my king was hopelessly trapped. "That's called 'fools checkmate' he beamed," and I withdrew from the confrontation to lick my wounds and recapitulate.

The name of the game was "checkmate." I had become so engrossed in the trivia that I had neglected the most important

thing of all. I could have conceivably given up almost any other man on the board and still had a chance, but when the king is gone all else is insignificant.

In Christianity, the name of the game is "love." It is the ultimate command upon which all others are suspended. The Devil can allow us the privilege of any Bible doctrine but love and still have a chance to win. But when we love as Jesus commanded, he knows that all men will be able to acknowledge our relationship with deity. When we are united as Jesus prayed, he knows that all men will come to believe. Love is the name of the game and the unscrupulous enemy of truth is in an all out campaign to keep it buried in that musty stack called "undiscovered truths of the Holy Bible."

The Example of Ephesus

"... after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you . . ." (Ephesians 1:15-16)

"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love . . ." (Revelation 2:4)

From here unto the end of the lesson we will be reflecting upon the church at Ephesus. Perhaps a review of their problems will give us insight into our own.

First of all let's go back to the basics. Remember that the essence of Christianity is love. By this, all men are to know that we belong to Jesus. It is the springboard to launch us into evangelism so that the world will believe. Since we were incapable of achieving this love upon our own, He determined to transplant His Holy Spirit into our hearts to enable us to display that love through Him. Remember, the fruit of the Spirit is love!

Everywhere this love exists there is evangelism.

This love existed in Jerusalem, and there was evangelism in Jerusalem. The unity of believers in Jerusalem and their generosity to one another was like a city which was set upon a hill and could not be hid. There is undoubtedly some association between this fact and the observation of the high priest that Jerusalem was filled with the doctrine of Jesus. (Acts 5:28)

There was also love among the saints in Ephesus . . . and there was also a tremendous evangelistic outreach there. As a matter of fact, while Paul was there everyone in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 19:10)

I used to believe that the generosity of the Jerusalem Christians was a unique phenomenon which was never seen again. Now I am rather inclined to believe that it was the norm rather than the exception. Christianity is so absolutely revolutionary that when a person gets his spiritual temperature up where it ought to be everyone thinks he's got a fever. Please don't wander off on some diatribe either for or against communism, for the early Christians did not practice communism. What they did do was love their neighbors as they wanted to be loved. The golden rule is of universal application. Those whom we love as we do ourselves we will want to see in heaven — therefore we must tell them about Jesus. Those whom we love as we do ourselves we will desire to see clothed and physically comfortable — therefore we will share with them of our earthly means. The essence of the gospel is just that simple.

A Warning to the Ephesian Elders

The simplicity of the gospel was about to be corrupted at Ephesus and Paul issued this warning to the Ephesian elders:

“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them . . .” (Acts 20:29-30)

No matter what happened the elders at Ephesus were not to lose sight of the essential need to love one another. Consider Paul's concluding remarks:

“I have coveted no man's silver or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. *I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, it is more blessed to give than to receive . . .*” (Acts 20:33-35)

The book of Revelation reveals that the church at Ephesus lost its love. The letters of Paul to Timothy help us to understand how and why.

A Review of I Timothy

This letter in the Bible deals directly with the church at Ephesus. Timothy was left there to charge certain men not to teach any other doctrine. (I Timothy 1:3) The nature of this “other doctrine” is revealed throughout the letter itself.

Please do not be offended as I state my opinions about this "other doctrine." I recognize that my views are only an opinion, but I respectfully beg your indulgence.

The essence of the gospel is love. I am convinced that certain men lost sight of that goal and became obsessed with argumentation and debate over various other points of Christian doctrine. I have a growing conviction that this is identically the problem which we face in Christendom today.

Please note that in his introductory remarks, Paul reminds Timothy that "THE END OF THE COMMANDMENT IS LOVE OUT OF A PURE HEART AND FAITH UNFEIGNED . . ." His very next words charge that some had "SWERVED ASIDE" from love unto "VAIN JANGLING." (I Timothy 1:5-6)

The "end" or "goal" of all God's commandments is love. The commandments are not an end in themselves, they are a means to an end, and the ultimate end or goal of all God's commandments is love. When you command your child to stand in the corner because he had a fight, standing in the corner is not your ultimate desire for his life. It is only a means to help him understand the importance of loving his brother. When God commanded animal sacrifices, His ultimate aim was to teach us love. If men came to the altar and still had bad feelings toward their brothers, they had missed the intent of God. (Matthew 5:23-24; 9:13; 12:7; Hos. 6:6)

Those who are obsessed with only the technical aspects of Bible study will have little or no time to feed the hungry or clothe the naked. Their bag is jangling over a genealogy, doting about questions, or striving about words to no profit. Such an approach results in utter blasphemy to the doctrine of compassion and concern personified in Jesus.

How vividly I recall an instance many years ago when a former classmate was asked to lead in prayer at a religious meeting. The folk belonged to an opposing denomination and he felt constrained to offer a "three point prayer." He naturally believed them to be wrong and felt a strong compulsion to straighten them out in the only way he had opportunity . . . by his prayer. I was proud of him then, but ashamed of him now. This is identically the mentality of the troublemakers at Ephesus and is specifically forbidden in I Timothy 2:8.

My limited vocabulary is not adequate to describe properly the importance of brotherly love to the church of Jesus Christ. Please read again the letters to Timothy with this in mind.

One of the worst things that can happen to a church is to be embroiled in controversy. The church at Ephesus was, and Timothy was to stop it. The unity and harmony of believers is more important than the rights of husbands or wives, parents or children, masters or slaves. Unity is the very theme of the Ephesian letter and it is also inseparably woven into the fabric of Paul's letters to Timothy. It is not only directly associated with the ultimate aim of the Christian life, but is an essential ingredient to world evangelism. The Christian epistles are not filled with appeals to evangelism, but they are filled with repeated admonitions to love and unity. You cannot have the one without the other.

Remember! The goal of God for our lives is love out of a pure heart. It is the ultimate aim of all God's commandments. You may speak with the tongues of men and angels, you may have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, you may have all faith so that you can move mountains, but if you have no love you are nothing. (I Corinthians 13:1-3).

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:35)

Questions for Discussion — Lesson One

1. What prevented people in the dark ages from accepting justification by faith?
2. Is love really the ultimate command or can you think of something more basic?
3. Is love the major point of emphasis which an outsider would see in your church?
4. What caused the church at Ephesus to lose it's first love?
5. Is evangelism more important than benevolence?
6. Do the Scriptures teach that all argumentation is wrong?
7. Do you feel that the Christian world has given love a proper emphasis?
8. What steps can we take now to help future generations of believers to love one another?
9. If you were the devil, how would you keep Christians from loving one another?
10. Can someone speak in tongues and not have love?

Rejecting the Cornerstone

“This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner” (Acts 4:11)

The most important stone in the building is the corner stone. In ancient times it was laid first as a point of reference by which the dimensions of the building were governed and through which the separate walls were joined together.

Jesus is the chief cornerstone. He is the origin and focal point of all creation, and through Him all things are held together. (Colossians 1:17) Rejecting Jesus is the ultimate absurdity! Yet the Jews of the first century made this very mistake.

— They wanted to interpret the Bible, but they rejected the Author of the Bible.

— They were intent upon establishing a kingdom, but went about it in such a way that they wound up rejecting the King.

— They wanted to build a house for God, but rejected the Chief Cornerstone.

— Having cast The Cornerstone aside, He then became to them a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

Jesus is God!

There is an old joke about the psychiatrist trying to help a man who claimed to be Napoleon Bonaparte. "How do you know you are Napoleon?", asked the doctor. "God told me!" came the quick reply. Immediately the patient in the next bed jumped up and screamed, "I DID NOT!"

The story is humorous because of its absurdity. When a man claims to be God his insanity is a foregone conclusion.

This was the problem faced by Jesus. Many of his contemporaries thought He was crazy. The difference is that Jesus declared His deity by "infallible proofs." The many miracles, signs and wonders proved His claims, and if this were not enough the Scriptures teach that He was declared to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead. It is not within the scope of this book to debate that question, but simply to emphatically remind you that Jesus is God.

Because God is a Spirit, we had no accurate way to understand Him until He became flesh. Whatever concepts we had of God before the incarnation were inadequate and incomplete. Jesus, by contrast, is the perfect representation of God. In Him dwelled all the fulness of God in a body. (Colossians 2:9)

The Jews were trying to understand God by means of a partial revelation. They had pieced together various passages in support of widely divergent views. They were hopelessly divided! All of these divisions would have disappeared in Jesus. We do not understand Jesus by the dark shadows of Old Testament typology, we understand the dark shadows of Old Testament typology by Jesus.

The Cornerstone is not lined up by the walls, the walls are lined up by the Cornerstone.

A room full of people might have a wide variety of opinions about what was casting a certain shadow upon the wall. The disagreement disappears when someone turns on the light. Jesus is the light and in Him there is no darkness at all!

A shadow is obscure and difficult to understand. For this reason those who try to understand God by means of the Old Testament Scriptures will forever remain hopelessly divided just like the Jews were.

Suppose, for example, that I am a very legalistic person and I want to picture God as being just like me. Starting with the Old Testament Scriptures I can select a lot of passages which

support this point of view. Nadab and Abihu were killed by God when they offered strange fire. (Leviticus 10:1ff) The men of Bethshemesh died because they looked into the Ark of the Covenant. (I Samuel 6:19) Uzzah died because he touched the Ark of the Covenant (II Samuel 6:7), etc. It is possible to construct a whole theology from this perspective. Once convinced that you are right, it is easy to see in Jesus only those qualities which support your preconceptions. Everything looks yellow to a jaundiced eye!

On the other hand, suppose I am very lenient and that I want to picture God as an "over indulgent grandfather" instead of a merciless judge. This too can easily be done by selecting only certain passages. Eleazar and Ithamar did something wrong, but nothing happened to them (Leviticus 10:12-20). Hezekiah and all the people observed the Passover "otherwise than it was written" (II Chronicles 30:18) and the Good Lord pardoned everyone of them. David ate the show bread which only the priests were supposed to eat and God didn't care, etc. Once the mind is programmed to think only in this way, again our view of Jesus is distorted so that we do not accurately discern His true nature.

The Cornerstone is not lined up by the building, the building is lined up by the Cornerstone. We do not understand Jesus by the Old Testament, we understand the Old Testament by Jesus. Every prophet possessed something of God's Spirit, but only in Jesus was the Spirit given without measure. Thousands and millions of people have God-like traits, but only in Jesus is the fulness of God incarnate in a human body . . . He is the perfect and complete representation of deity to humanity.

Today as we survey the jungle of confusion created by denominational division and partisan strife, we need a landmark which cannot be questioned from which to make our measurements and computations. That landmark is Jesus! If we trust in Him as an accurate reference by which to judge all things, the world assumes a new perspective. We cease to see anything from a purely human point of view (II Corinthians 5:16). Doubt and confusion disappear and in their place comes a beautiful design unseen by unbelieving eyes.

Jesus is God!

Unity or Division

The apostles of Jesus had deep seated and serious disagreements. Matthew the publican and Simon Zealotes, for example,

were from opposite extremes of political thought. One was a turn-coat Jew who collaborated with the Romans, the other a revolutionary firebrand who hated anyone who collaborated with the Romans and especially publicans.

It is noteworthy that Jesus selected His apostles after a long night of prayer. The unity which He would bring to them would be typical of that unity which He would make available to all.

The three years of Jesus' public ministry were characterized by many disagreements among the Twelve. Once when they were arguing about which of them would be the greatest, Jesus took a little child and set him in the midst of them. Upon that occasion he taught that unless they had a change of mind and became like that little child they wouldn't even enter into the kingdom let alone be someone great. On the way to Jerusalem James and John came with their mother to seek special positions at the right and left hand of His throne. The ten were moved with indignation! Even at the last supper they continued to bicker over prestige and position. It was then that the weary Christ arose to gird himself about and to wash their feet. "Know ye what I have done to you?" (John 13:12) He enquired. They probably did not.

Golgotha was just a few short hours away and the very men who were destined to be the foundation of His kingdom had missed the essence of what it was all about. No eye had seen, no ear had heard, and it had never entered into the heart of men what God was about to do. The genius of His strategy had even been obscured from the inquisitive minds of the prophets and the inquiring eyes of angels. (I Peter 1:10-12)

"By this" He said, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

For three years they had bickered with one another. How would it be possible for such men to love in such a way that the world would know? Only by means of the Holy Spirit! Jesus would not leave them like orphans with no guidance or help. He would return to their very hearts by means of the indwelling Spirit.

Fruit is the outward manifestation of the inward nature. Thus the very nature of an apple tree causes it to produce apples. The inexperienced eye may be confused by the design of a leaf or the grain of its wood, but anyone can tell a tree by its fruit. This is the way that Jesus taught us to discern religious

leaders. Men do not gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles. Good teachers do not produce bad fruit!

The Apostles who were plagued with disharmony were going to receive a new source of strength. If they would only abide in Jesus they would partake of His very nature. Like a branch draws strength from the vine, they would draw strength from Jesus by means of the Holy Spirit. The nature of the Holy Spirit is love . . . Therefore the "fruit of the Spirit is love . . ." Jesus said, "By their fruit ye shall know them . . ." So when we manifest love we are demonstrating the reality of our relationship with Jesus.

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one toward another." (John 13:35)

The Sensual

"These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit." (Jude 19)

In a sex oriented society it is easy to think of sensuality only in terms of sexual immorality. In reality, sexual impurity is but one manifestation of the "natural" or "sensual" nature. Another very prominent aspect of sensuality is the lack of brotherly love. Jude reminds us that those who participate in division are sensual people who are void of the Holy Spirit.

The Galatian letter teaches to "walk in the Spirit" and thus avoid the "lust of the flesh." Again the context involves a divisive mentality:

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh . . ." (Galatians 5:13-16)

Biting and devouring one another directly results from the lust of the flesh.

The following verses in Galatians remind us that the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit is a lengthy one. Military terms are employed to describe the flesh entrenched on one side, and the Spirit entrenched on the other. Next the works of the flesh are listed. They involve not only a catalog of sexual misconduct, but also a wide assortment of ungodly attitudes which result in division between Christians. The two are part and

parcel of the same package. Fornication and lasciviousness are brothers to anger and sedition.

The Holy Spirit produces an entirely different kind of person . . . one who is characterized by love and a desirable variety of attributes conducive to unity. Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self control are the very qualities personified in Jesus. Those who are walking in His Spirit will not be desirous of vain glory. They will not provoke and envy one another but will bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. (See Galatians 5:13 - 6:2.)

Once this basic dichotomy is accepted it can be seen throughout virtually all the Christian Scriptures. Those who are godly are producing love and unity, and those who are sensual are preaching confusion and division. God is not the author of confusion but of peace.

The only division ever created by Jesus was between people who believed in Him and people who did not believe in Him. The Holy Spirit does not create division among those who believe in Jesus. Those who engineer division between Christians are sensual and do not have the Holy Spirit.

Rejecting Jesus

The total strategy of God is bound up in Jesus. It is God's plan to gather together in Him all of the divergent factions of heaven and earth. (Ephesians 1:10) Everyone who is joined to Jesus is in a sense joined to one another and like spokes on a wheel the closer we get to Jesus the closer we get to one another. When we arrive at "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" we will not only be in perfect fellowship with God but also with every other person who arrives at that maturity.

Why would anyone reject Jesus as the focal point of unity. I think there may be many reasons. However logical or rational they may seem on the surface, they all boil down to the same irrational mistake of rejecting the Cornerstone. Our unity is not in doctrines about the church, our unity is in Jesus. He is the Head of His Body and all who are members of that body are united in Him. Fraternity is based upon paternity. Men with a common father are brothers regardless of how vehemently they may disagree on matters within the family. We are not brothers in Christ because we like one another, or because we

agree with one another, but because we have a common Father. It doesn't take an intellectual giant to discover that the Christian world is in a mess. One reason it is in this mess is that human pride prevents us from coming to Jesus in genuine repentance and child-like humility.

There is an old joke about the man who worked as a stage hand for a TV studio. He took pride in always being able to ad lib his way out of any situation. The supreme test of his creativity came while filming a Western. He was pouring ketchup on the back of a shoot-out victim, simulating a bloody death. By accident the camera panned back upon him so quickly that he was caught in the act. "What did you do then?" asked a friend. "What else could I do" he said, "I ate him."

The arrogant legalist will sometimes swallow a "camel" before he will own up to an honest mistake. The human mind can rationalize almost anything to avoid genuine repentance. Some have spent virtually a lifetime "cobbling up the kingdom" because they got mixed up about the Cornerstone. When some Stephen reminds them of their stupidity it is easier to destroy the prophet than it is to correct the problem. So we hang on to our pride with bulldog tenacity and let the world go to hell in the shambles of a divided church. We maintain the image that we have it all put together and if the religious world would just listen to us, harmony would immediately be restored. This is not the answer, it is the problem! You are not the Cornerstone! I am not the Cornerstone! Jesus is the Cornerstone!

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Two

1. What do the Scriptures mean by referring to Jesus as the "Word" of God? (John 1:1, 14, 18)
2. Why did God become flesh and dwell among us?
3. Explain how Jesus brought unity to His disciples.
4. Is there anyone who cannot find unity in Christ?
5. Is there any association between such sins as "fornication and lasciviousness" and "hatred and strife"?

6. Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement and went separate ways. (Acts 15:39) Were they divided in Christ or united?
7. Is there a difference between disagreements "in" Jesus and disagreements "about" Jesus?
8. If the apostles could speak to us personally do you think they would approve or disapprove of denominational divisions?
9. Is it right to make anything a condition of fellowship which God has not made a requisite for salvation?
10. Discuss the slogan "No Creed but Christ."

Love vs. Fear

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth forever.” (Psalm 111:10)

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” (I John 4:18)

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Our spiritual journey begins from a selfish motivation. Once convinced of reality of judgment our strong desire for self preservation prompts us to a life of obedience.

The growth of spiritual maturity leads us from a selfish point of view to a selfless point of view. The apostle Paul was once a self righteous Pharisee who gloried in his own record of achievement. He ultimately was transformed into a man who abandoned any thought of righteousness for himself and even wished himself accursed from Christ so that his brethren might be saved. (Romans 9:3)

Fear and love do not peacefully co-exist. They are antithetical and antagonistic to one another. Love is stronger. Therefore, if allowed to mature it will progressively dominate our lives. Perfect love casts out fear. Ultimately we aim at

being as selfless and fearless as Christ. Surely God would not condemn us for being like Jesus so we attain a new boldness and confidence.

“Herein is our love made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.” (I John 4:17)

The Holy Spirit plays a distinctive role in this process of transformation. The cringing slave mentality is superseded by the Spirit of adoption which emboldens us to cry out “Abba, Father.” The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. The same power which produces the fruit of love in our lives was operating to produce the same results in the life of Jesus.

The manner by which perfect love casts out fear can therefore be accurately illustrated in the life of Jesus Christ.

The Sabbath from the Jewish Point of View

It was commanded by God:

“Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.” (Deuteronomy 5:12-14)

The people were responsible for enforcing the sabbath law:

“Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you. Every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death for who-soever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among the people.”

An inspired example of what to do with sabbath breakers came when a man was found gathering sticks upon the sabbath. He was placed in ward until the mind of the Lord was revealed. The answer came:

“And the Lord said unto Moses, the man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp . . .” (Numbers 15:35)

When God poured out His wrath upon the Children of Israel in the wilderness, it was in direct association with sabbath violations. In Ezekiel 20:12-25 the “profaning of the sabbath” is

specifically mentioned four times. Here is but one example:

“. . . they profaned my sabbaths. Then I thought I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness” (Ezekiel 20:21) etc.

National oppression by the heathen was also predicted if Israel violated the sabbath.

“And I will scatter you among the heathen . . . and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies’ land . . . because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it.” (Leviticus 26:33-35)

When the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity they became extremely cautious about sabbath observation.

“And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt . . .” (Nehemiah 10:31)

The noble desire of the Jewish people to “remember the sabbath day” was on its way to a pendulous extreme. Consider this quotation from *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*:

“During the period between Ezra and the Christian era the scribes formulated innumerable legal restrictions for the conduct of life under the law. Two whole treatises in the Talmud are devoted to the details of sabbath observance. One of these, the Shabbath, enumerates the following 39 principal classes of prohibited actions: sowing, plowing, reaping, gathering into sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing it, beating it, dyeing it, spinning it, making a warp of it, making two cords, weaving two threads, separating two threads, making a knot, untying a knot, sewing two stitches, tearing to sew two stitches, catching a deer, killing, skinning, salting it preparing its hide, scraping off its hair, cutting it up, writing two letters, blotting out for the purpose of writing two letters, building, pulling down, extinguishing, lighting a fire, beating with a hammer, and carrying from one property to another. Each of these chief enactments was further discussed and elaborated, so that actually there were several hundred things a conscientious, law-abiding Jew could not do on the sabbath. For example, the prohibition about tying a knot was much too general, and so it became necessary to state what kinds of knots were prohibited and what

kind not. It was accordingly laid down that allowable knots were those that could be untied with one hand. A woman could tie up her undergarment, and the strings of her cap, those of her girdle, the straps of her shoes and sandals, of skins of wine and oil, of a pot with meat. She could tie a pail over the well with a girdle, but not with a rope. The prohibition regarding writing on the sabbath was further defined as follows: 'He who writes two letters with his right or his left hand, whether of one kind or of two kinds, as also if they are written with different ink or of different languages, is guilty. He even who should from forgetfulness write two letters is guilty, whether he has written them with ink or with paint, red chalk, India-rubber, vitriol, or anything which makes permanent marks. Also he who writes on two walls which form an angle, or on the two tablets of his account-book, so that they can be read together, is guilty. He who writes upon his body is guilty. If any one writes with dark fluid, with fruit juice, or in the dust on the road, in sand, or in anything in which writing does not remain, he is free. If any one writes with the wrong hand, with the foot, with the mouth, with the elbow; also if any one writes upon a letter of another piece of writing, or covers other writing' Shabbath xii. 3-5" p. 736

From this perspective the Jews saw Jesus as a blasphemous threat to national security. The High Priest stated it succinctly: ". . . it is expedient that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not . . ." (John 11:50) Thus they conscientiously sought to kill Jesus.

Jesus and the Sabbath

Jesus did not peacefully co-exist with Jewish legalism. He began His public ministry by driving animals out of the temple and overturning the tables of the money changers. (John 2:13-17) Later he came to the Pool of Bethesda where a multitude of sick and impotent people were gathered together. Upon that occasion he healed but one man and then asked him to carry around his bed on the sabbath day. (John 5:1ff) If His motive in so doing was merely human compassion He would have healed them all, but He healed only one. If His concern was concentrated upon the needs of the one man He healed, He would not have placed that man in jeopardy by asking him to carry his bed on the sabbath. Jesus was clearly in a confrontation with the interpretation of the Scriptures by the Jewish leaders and openly defied their traditions. John records

that they sought the more to kill Him. (John 5:18)

In Galilee Jesus again defied traditional sabbath understanding by eating grain from along the roadside and healing a man with a withered hand in the synagogue at Capernaum. Matthew records that they "held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him." (Matthew 12:14)

In another synagogue He was confronted by a woman who had been bowed together for eighteen long years. Surely a few more hours would have made little difference in such a chronic illness and Jesus could have avoided all controversy by simply waiting until sundown. Instead, however, He challenged the ruler of the synagogue and charged him with hypocrisy. Legalism is always inconsistent and these very men who expected this woman to wait would have shown more understanding and mercy to an ox or an ass. (Luke 13:11-17)

So also in the home of a chief Pharisee there was a certain man before Him which had dropsy. Jesus did not run from such a confrontation, He welcomed it. Light dispels darkness and perfect love casts out fear. Jesus not only made the man whole but in the process spoke in such a way that "they could not answer him again to these things." (Luke 14:6)

The recurring themes are evident in the way that Jesus dealt with sabbath controversy. First of all He focused attention upon His own identity. Jesus was God manifest in the flesh and as such He had authority even over the sabbath day. The incident at the Pool of Bethesda in John 5: presented an opportunity for Jesus to preach a sermon in defense of His own deity and then to regretfully observe that the Jews would not come unto Him that they might have life. As the Author of the Bible and the originator of the sabbath law He claimed the right to interpret it any way He wanted to.

In the second place Jesus made an appeal to mercy. Tithing was important, but mercy was more important. It was a "weightier" part of the law. (Matt. 23:23) Jesus correctly understood the law and the prophets and recommended to his enemies that they study again such passages as Hosea 6:6 ". . . I desired mercy and not sacrifice . . ." If they had only understood this they would not have condemned the guiltless. In every age men have made the mistake of elevating rules and rituals but neglecting the very attitude which these rules were intended to produce. The Pharisees would loose an ox or an ass to let them drink on

the sabbath, they would pull an animal out of the ditch on the sabbath, but in their warped and perverted way of looking at things they did not show mercy on people. In reality the sabbath day was made for man, not vice versa.

Jewish Legalism and Christian Legalism

We have already stated the principle that the Holy Spirit does not divide Christians. Those who divide Christians are "void of the Spirit" (Jude 19). Jesus and the apostles called believers to a life of separation. This divided families and communities. The division was sometimes dramatic. In Corinth, for example, the Christians met in a house which "joined hard to the synagogue." (Acts 18:7) You must remember, however, that the division was between those who believed in Jesus, and those who did not believe in Jesus.

Among those who believed in Jesus there were wide discrepancies of action and belief. The Jewish Christians continued to adhere to kosher foods and holidays. Their conscience would not allow them to do otherwise. Such a conclusion is unavoidable from such passages as Romans 14:1-23 and Acts 21:17-26.

Unity between Jewish Christians and Gentiles was realized by a remarkable strategem. Inasmuch as they were all descendants of Noah, they all were bound by what the Jews considered as the "Noachian Covenant." That is, abstinence from the pollutions of idols, from fornication, from things strangled, and from blood. (Acts 15:20)

The Jews, however, were not only bound to these general restrictions, but more specifically by a covenant which they had through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore the Jews continued to circumcise their children and to keep the Mosaic Law, but they did not bind this upon Gentile converts. (See again Acts 21:20-25)

Paul did withstand Peter to the face for refusing to eat with Gentile Christians, (Galatians 2:11-12) but he never demanded that the Jews abandon the law of Moses. Jewish Christians were free to circumcise their children and to keep the law, provided they understood that Jesus was their only hope of salvation. Paul circumcised Timothy with his own hands (Acts 16:3). He sheared his own head at Cenchrea (Acts 18:18). He purified himself and worshipped in the Temple (Acts 21:26). But he never lost sight of the fact that salvation was by grace, through faith, and not of works lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-10).

We need to love Christian legalists, not divide from them.

Legalism - The Personification of Egotism and Self-righteousness

“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” (Romans 10:3)

The self-righteous person is afraid to relinquish his claim to fame by being wrong. If he can be proven to be wrong he will endeavor to redeem his righteous reputation by being humble. Regardless of what happens he must always salvage something of his righteous self esteem. He emotionally avoids the childlike humility of utter trust because of his own strong self image. Fiery serpents may be dangerous to some of the weaker brethren, but somehow the self-righteous person thinks he can figure out a way to be safe by occasionally taking his eyes off Jesus and displaying some of his own ingenuity and strategy. Perfect love casts out this fear.

The self-righteous feel so familiar with the Scriptures that they invariably believe that those who disagree with them are utterly naive and ignorant. Being right, however, is only a part of the story. Once you are right it is important to be vindicated for your rightness. This is the stimulus which leads such a person to pray in public to be seen of men, or perhaps to bestow a gift for the purpose of public acclaim. Once infected with the disease of legalism it is of paramount importance to have the praise and approval of men. This is one reason why the field of legalism is strewn with ugly weeds of argumentation. Perfect love casts out this fear.

Those who trust in the righteousness of Christ can afford to be wrong on some doctrinal issues, but those who trust in themselves find a special comfort in being right about everything. They will discuss fables, endless genealogies, and a wide variety of other issues which minister questions rather than godly edifying. They have neither the desire nor the time to get involved with the fatherless and widows for they have been called to the ministry of vain jangling and striving about words to no profit. Doting over a question, or striving about a word seems to fill a special vacuum in their lives for it affords the blessed opportunity to be justified before men.

It is worthy of note that the conversion of Saul of Tarsus came as a direct result of casting self-righteousness on the garbage heap where it belonged.

All of our righteousness is like filthy rags. All of our religious pedigrees are like the proverbial fig leaves that have never been sufficient to cover for man's corrupted nature. When we stand like the self-righteous Pharisee and thank God for our doctrinal purity and religious integrity we insure a journey to our house unjustified. The secret to salvation is not our righteousness, but His. When we come to the wedding feast in a garment of our own making we are destined for outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Paul put it like this:

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." (Philippians 3:7-8)

If salvation is achieved by abandoning our own righteousness for His, and it is, then the irreligious may have some advantage over those who have achieved some record of personal merit and achievement. Jesus put it like this to the religious leaders of His day.

"The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." (Matthew 21:31)

Every way of man is right in his own eyes (Proverbs 21:2) but men with no convictions are much easier to change than those who have forged out their faith by diligent study and personal pride. This is not to say that a great company of priests could not become obedient to the faith — because they did. This is not to say that a Saul of Tarsus could not become an apostle, because he did. It is simply to observe that a thief on a cross has absolutely no choice but grace: and the rest of us have probably got a bag full of tricks yet to be tried before we cave in and admit our utter destitution and failure.

Paul the Pattern

"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." (I Timothy 1:16)

When dealing with the hide bound traditions and hard headed obstinance of legalistic people we are apt to despair until we think again of Paul. He was the champion legalist of his generation. He was a super Pharisee who out stripped his fellows in splitting theological hairs. He was the most zealous opponent of the followers of Jesus and even had letters of authority to harass them all the way to Damascus. But he still became a Christian. He came to the place where he was willing to throw all of his righteousness on the garbage heap that he might gain Christ.

He reminds Timothy that though he was the chief of sinners he still could be saved. As a matter of fact Jesus extended His longsuffering to Paul as an encouragement to the rest of us. If a legalist like Paul can be saved, anybody can be saved! If the love of Christ can develop enough strength to cast out the legalistic fears of the "Pharisee of Pharisees" he can do it for anybody!

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." (I John 4:18)

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Three

1. Is fear good or bad?
2. Did Jesus ever fear God? (Heb. 5)
3. Did Jesus change the sabbath or just correctly interpret what God had always wanted?
4. Why were the Jews so legalistic about the sabbath? Can you understand their point of view?
5. Were there any dangers in the approach of Jesus to the sabbath?
6. Can you understand why concerned Bible believing people would have opposed Jesus?
7. Is there any distinction between love and perfect love?
8. Where do we receive the love which casts out fear?
9. What fear is cast out?
10. Is it possible to be too merciful?

Two Covenants

“For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are two covenants . . .” (Galatians 4:22-24)

The Old Testament (Covenant)

The first thirty-nine books of our Bible are not the Old Testament. They never have been, and they never will be. How this popular misconception got started and why it is so widely held I do not presume to know. In the language of Scripture the Old Testament was the Ten Commandments. As proof of this I offer the following:

1. The Scriptures explicitly teach that Moses received a covenant while he was forty days upon Mount Sinai; the covenant was written upon two tablets of stone; the covenant was called “The Ten Commandments,” and once the covenant was completed God added no more to it. (See Exodus 34:27, 28; Deuteronomy 4:11-13; 5:1-3, 22, 9:11, etc.)

2. The receptacle where the ten commandments were kept was called “The Ark of the Covenant” (Numbers 10:33). This ark disappeared before some books of prophecy were even written.

3. The old covenant was made in Horeb (Deuteronomy 5:2) which is also Mt. Sinai in Arabia (Galatians 4:25), but the first thirty-nine books of our Bible were written in Palestine, Babylon and Persia.

4. The old covenant was made when God took His children by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt (Hebrews 8:9). The first thirty-nine books of the Bible were not written at that time.

5. The old covenant was broken by the time Jeremiah wrote (see Jeremiah 31:32), but a number of books in the Hebrew Bible had not yet been written.

The Old Covenant, or Testament was the Ten Commandments. The Old Testament:

- Did not give life (Galatians 3:21)
- Was a ministration of death (II Corinthians 3:7)
- Was a ministration of condemnation (II Corinthians 3:9)
- It was a shadow of good things to come (Hebrews 10:1)
- It was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ (Galatians 3:24)

The New Testament (Covenant)

The New Testament is not the twenty-seven books of Scripture which we have traditionally so named.

1. The new covenant is written upon men's minds and in their hearts (Hebrews 8:10).

2. The new covenant is not written with ink but by the Holy Spirit upon the fleshly tables of the heart (II Corinthians 3:3).

3. The Christian Scriptures were not completed until near the end of the first century but the new covenant was a complete reality from the time of the very first convert to Christianity. The fact that John was over sixty years removed from the visions which he would incorporate into the Book of Revelation did not alter or affect the covenant which God made with His people on the day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2).

Ishmael and Isaac

The Galatian letter is distinguished by the fact that it does not contain one word of commendation. Even to the Corinthians Paul had a few complimentary things to say before dealing with their many problems. To the Galatians, however, he states his credentials and then immediately launches into a

tirade against what he calls "another gospel." He then explains that it is really not another gospel but simply a perversion of the one true gospel (Galatians 1:1-8).

A study of the letter leaves little doubt about the nature of this perverted gospel. It was a gospel of legalism! To persist in this perversion would ultimately cause one to be severed from Christ and thus to fall from grace (Galatians 5:4).

The dramatic distinction between the two differing philosophies of religion in Galatia may not have been easily seen. Ishmael and Isaac were probably quite similar in their appearance. Because Abraham was the father of both they no doubt both inherited a physical likeness to him. They may have worn similar clothing, eaten similar food, and lived in similar houses. But they were different.

The teachers who came to Galatia may have used Bible terminology and professed the same loyalty to Jesus that Paul did. But they were different.

In order to focus on this difference Paul makes reference to Ishmael and Isaac. They represent two distinct philosophies of religion. They had a common father but different mothers. One was born of the flesh to a bondwoman. The other was born by promise to a freewoman. One brings bondage . . . the other freedom. One leads you to persecute those with whom you differ. The other has "many more children" in spite of unfavorable circumstances.

The name "Ishmael" means "God hears." He was so named by the angel of the Lord who heard the afflictions of his mother Hagar. God had promised Abram and Sarai a son but the fulfillment of that promise was delayed until Sarai was past the age of bearing. Because they conceived their present circumstances as "too hard for the Lord" (Genesis 18:14) they set about to improvise and manipulate their own fulfillment to the promise.

Before Ishmael was ever born it was predicted that he would be a "wild man." "His hand would be against every man, and every man's hand against him" (Genesis 16:12).

This was the very nature of the legalists who came to Galatia. In the wake of their teaching came hatred and enmity, strife and jealousy, factions and divisions, heresies and envy (Galatians 5:20-21). A teacher is known by his fruit. Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles.

Ishmael was a slave who was born of a slave. His bondage was also typical of that experienced by the Judaizers. Their every thought of the Master caused them to cringe in fear. They labored under a heavy yoke which neither they nor their ancestors were ever able to bear.

Ishmael was born after the flesh. His birth involved no special miracle or dispensation of grace. This too was characteristic of that legalistic perversion of truth which insisted that a man could be made perfect in the flesh (Galatians 3:3).

Issac corresponded to the ministry of Paul. His very name meant "laughter." With Paul there was no oppressive slave mentality but a Spirit of adoption which enabled him to be so familiar with the Father that he would call him "Abba" or "Papa."

With Isaac and Paul there was no spirit of contention and rivalry which would lead people to "bite and devour" one another. Instead there was the beautiful display of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self control.

The teachings of Paul were more productive because people respond more readily to a love feast than a fight. ". . . the desolate hath many more children . . ." (Galatians 4:27) The church that thrives on debate is destined to be small.

The First Century

As we have said before, this basic dichotomy of covenants, once suggested, can be easily seen throughout virtually all of the Christian Scriptures.

James might well have been the first inspired book to be written since the close of the Old Testament Canon. One indication of an early date is the use of "synagogue" in James 2:2. The Jewish Christians of the Dispersion were still meeting in synagogues when James wrote. Note the contrasting philosophies at work in the church and the fruit which they would produce:

"Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." (James 3:12-18)

Remember that the distinguishing mark of the Christian is love. By this shall all men know that we are His disciples.

The same type of distinction mentioned by James forms a basis for understanding the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. The legalists who represented Ishmael came down from Judea and taught "except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." These are, no doubt, the "false brethren" referred to by Paul in Galatians 2:4. They crept in privately to perpetrate their philosophy of bondage in the primitive church. Those personified by Isaac had to forbear such people in love, endeavoring to keep the unity which the Spirit had created.

The influence of these wicked teachers was not only felt at Antioch and Jerusalem, but throughout virtually all of the Mediterranean world. They were the gospel perverters of Galatians 1:6-9; the false apostles of II Corinthians 11:13; the grievous wolves of Acts 20:29; those judging about foods and holy days in Colossians 2:16; the arguers of I Timothy 1:4; and the heretics of Titus 3:10.

Though times and circumstances varied, their basic nature always reflected satanic influence:

- * They exalted their own righteousness (Romans 10:3).
- * They were more interested in money than people (I Corinthians 4:15; II Corinthians 11:12).
- * They used the unscrupulous methods of a huckster (II Corinthians 2:17).
- * They loved to argue (I Timothy 1:4; 6:4).
- * They loved to have the preeminence (III John 9).
- * They did not receive the brethren and cast out those who who did (III John 10).
- * They separated from other believers (Jude 19).

Jesus said "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). The most accurate way to determine the nature of a tree is not by examining the texture of its leaves or the grain of its wood, but by its fruit. The true nature of a teacher is best determined in the same way. God is not the author of

confusion, but of peace. As James wrote "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:18). Those who reflect "love" reveal the nature of that Holy Spirit within them. Those who create anarchy and confusion among believers reflect an absence of that Spirit.

The Twentieth Century

There has never been a time in the history of Christianity when believers in Jesus were more divided. Because every way of a man seems right in his own eyes we continue to compound our problems with the insane idea that if everyone would just listen to us, unity would miraculously appear. As I have previously stated this is not a part of the solution, it is a part of the problem. It is not a time for us to police the brotherhood in search of divisive people, it is a time for us to examine our own hearts.

"Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobate." (II Corinthians 13:5)

If Jesus Christ is within us, we will reflect His nature, and bear His fruit. We will love our enemies and bless them that curse us. We will do good to them that hate us and pray for them which despitefully use us and persecute us. By so doing we will demonstrate our royal birth in the family of God. By this shall all men know that we are his disciples, because we love one another.

How Many Times?

Peter once asked Jesus, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?"

Jesus said, "I say not unto thee, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven." (Matthew 18:22)

The legalist bases his understanding and actions upon some concept of law. Let us suppose, for the sake of illustration, that Jesus agreed with Peter that one should forgive his brother seven times. This is not the end of the problem, it is the beginning. Next we are thrown into a controversy as to what actually constitutes a "sin" against you. What about a verbal insult which did not result in either bodily harm or financial loss? What about a business venture which infringed upon my income? What about failing to inform me of an opportunity

which would have brought happiness and prosperity to my family? etc., etc., etc. Then you face the very practical matter as "who" will judge what and how many offenses actually occurred. What I deem to be one legitimate offense, the man whom I offend may consider as two or three.

The whole legalistic concept is fraught with controversy. It drives you from the quiet domestic atmosphere to the wind swept plains where, like Ishmael, you will always be embroiled in conflict.

Love transcends all of these difficulties by sweeping away personal rights to anything. Jesus was more concerned about saving His enemies than condemning them. For this reason He abased Himself that they might be exalted. He became sin that they might be delivered from sin. It is in this very context that the Scriptures enjoin, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:5)

Such a mentality is so utterly supernatural that like Isaac it can only come from God. No unregenerate person can develop such love without the Holy Spirit anymore than Sarah could conceive a child in a dead womb.

When the first covenant was ratified at Sinai 3,000 died as a result of their rebellion (Exodus 32:28). It was and is a covenant of death. When the new covenant became a reality at Pentecost 3,000 were saved because of their submission (Acts 2:41). It was and is a covenant of life. It is paradoxical, but true, that men will sometimes choose death rather than life, and slavery before freedom.

The first covenant began with holy words engraved on stone and holy places erected by man. It sought to make men conform to a divine standard by external pressure and threats of punishment. It did not work! The new covenant began with the Word of God made flesh and His only temple is the humble and contrite heart of those who have received Him by faith. Praise God, it works! What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, has now been accomplished by those who walk in the Spirit. We are not conformed . . . we are transformed!

When faced with the frustrations of life, however, we still have the very real temptation to plan for the birth of Ishmael. Human rules and legal regulations tend to make us feel secure. Though a long list of touch nots, taste nots, and handle nots, may have an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of

devotion and self abasement, the Scriptures categorically affirm that they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh (Colossians 2:23). The solution of the problems of worldliness is not to be found in law . . . but in love.

The "works" of the flesh are manifest . . . the "fruit" of the Spirit is love. "Works" result from human effort . . . "fruit" comes from the power of God.

By this shall all men know that we are His disciples, if we have love one for another!

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Four

1. If the first thirty-nine books of the Bible are not the Old Testament, what are they?
2. If the twenty-seven books of the Bible which we call the New Testament are not the New Testament, what are they?
3. Why is understanding the nature of the covenants important?
4. Is it possible for two people to ever come to an identical understanding of all Scripture?
5. Is the Christian living under the Ten Commandments?
6. If the New Testament is a testament of peace, why did Jesus and the apostles have so much trouble?
7. Why did Ishmael persecute Isaac?
8. Why do people born of the flesh persecute people who are born of the Spirit?
9. Is denominationalism good for Christianity?
10. Why do we sometimes reject love and insist on law?

What is the Church?

“With love there are no questions, and without it there are no answers.” Ignatius of Antioch

Having thus stated the priorities of Jesus about love, and the basic nature of the new covenant, we will now seek to show that the most basic questions about Christianity are impossible to answer from a legalistic standpoint. Ignatius of Antioch stated it succinctly when he wrote, “With love there are no questions, and without it there are no answers.” The one basic mark of the Christian is to be our love. It is to be profoundly regretted that we have departed from the simplicity of the gospel and made it into something tedious and technical.

It is almost insulting to ask a question so utterly basic as “what is the church”? We have the idea that any ten year old coming home from Christian Service Camp can answer a question like that. The Church is the body of Christ, we say. It is believers in Jesus who are called out of a world of darkness into His kingdom of light.

More careful students of the Scriptures may be aware that the word “church” is not only used of local assemblies in someone’s house as in Romans 16:5, but that it is also used of all believers, regardless of where they may be. “He is the head of the body, the church . . .” (Colossians 1:18)

The plot thickens when we try to differentiate between the singular and plural uses of the word church. If every "house church" were in fact "the church" then every city with multiple gatherings would have "churches." This is, however, not the case. As a matter of fact, the word "churches" is never used in the Scriptures to refer to the Christians in a single city. There may have been a hundred "house churches" in Jerusalem but every reference to them is always in the singular. (See Acts 5:11; 8:1, 3; 11:22; 12:1, 5; 15:4, 22; 18:22, etc.) This is not only true of Jerusalem but also of Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and every other city where a church existed.

The word "churches" does occur over thirty times in the Scriptures, but it never refers to the Christians in a single city. It is always the "churches" of a country or a province. Thus we read of the "church" in Jerusalem but "churches" in Judea; the "church" of Antioch, but "churches" of Syria and Cilicia; the "church" of Ephesus, but "churches" of Asia; etc.

Ephesus affords us a most striking example. Paul left Priscilla and Aquila there while passing by on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 18:19). They continued to labor there and eventually had a church in their own home. (See I Corinthians 16:8, 19.) Paul returned to Ephesus as rapidly as possible and remained for two or three years (Acts 19:10; 20:31). While he was there all of Asia was evangelized and idol makers were in danger of going out of business (see Acts 19). Paul is forced to leave but returns some months later to summon the elders of the church to Miletus for a conference (Acts 20). "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church . . ." (Acts 20:17) Please note — church, not churches. All of Asia had been evangelized from Ephesus and yet they had remained only one church. There were churches in Asia (I Corinthians 16:19; Revelation 1:4, etc.) but only a "church" in Ephesus. But more amazing still is that this remarkable unity was to be continued for another generation so that when the Book of Revelation was written toward the close of the first century the Lord directed a letter "Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus" (Revelation 2:1). Thus we have followed the progress of the gospel for some forty years in the thriving metropolis of Ephesus without moving from church to churches. Somehow they remained only one church.

One Theory

Someone has said that a church ought not to consist of more people than can assemble together at one time. The Christians in Jerusalem could and did assemble in the temple in addition to meeting "house to house" therefore, in a sense, they were only one "church." The Christians in Judea were unable to meet regularly at one central location but were forced to meet in various locations, therefore they were "churches."

This simple approach has a lot of merit, but it cannot be proven beyond the shadow of a doubt and to attempt to do so would cause one to miss the whole genius of the Christian System. We are not united because we agree on some technical point of teaching but because we have surrendered to Jesus.

I know of one community in the Mid-West with a population of only 400. Not only do they have a variety of denominations but one denomination has even split and therefore has two churches in the same little community. Touche! The devil has done it again. He knows that a divided church will never win the world for Christ and every division in the body of Christ is a tribute to his cleverness and subtily.

City Church?

Yes, there is a considerable amount of evidence to commend the concept of a city church. The Christian Scriptures were originally written in Greek and the very word for "church" in the Greek language is the word "ecclesia" which did refer to an assembly of qualified citizens by which Greek cities were governed.

There does seem to have been a city church in Jerusalem, as we have mentioned before, but there also seems to have been city churches in other metropolitan centers as well. The brethren in Antioch did at least upon occasion assemble together (Acts 14:27; 15:30). So also with the brethren in Corinth (Romans 16:23). The reference to the "public" teaching in Acts 20:20 is taken by some to imply that the brethren in Ephesus had one central place of assembly.

As Paul journeyed to Jerusalem the Holy Spirit testified in every "city" that bonds and affliction were waiting for him. When he commissioned Titus to ordain elders it was also to be in "every city." (Titus 1:5)

Again, however, it would be a mistake to form a new denomination around the shreds of evidence which can be woven

together about a city church. Neither is it advisable to fragment and fracture your own church any more than it is already. *The whole purpose of this lesson is to demonstrate the utter folly and futility of seeking to establish legalistic definitions for the church.*

All That Be in Rome

The brethren in Rome were at the focal point and hub of the ancient world. Their faith was spoken of throughout the whole world (Romans 1:8). A long and unique list of exemplary Christians is given in Romans 16. There were many things to commend their work of faith and labor of love but apparently there was no city church in Rome.

The Roman letter is not addressed to the church at Rome, but rather "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints" (Romans 1:7). The word church is not even found in Romans until the sixteenth chapter where it is used of a church in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:5). Some infer the presence of other house churches in Rome by the wording of Romans 16:14-15.

Greetings are sent to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which were with them.

Other greetings are sent to Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, Olympus, and all the saints which were with them.

Be that as it may, we must remember that Christ did not form His kingdom upon legal technicalities, but upon His own deity. All who are "in Christ" are saved, regardless of their views about what constitutes or fails to constitute a church in Rome.

Sorting or Serving

"Just what is the church?" I asked a distinguished professor of a Christian College. "Boyce," he replied, "whenever we become more concerned about sorting people than serving them we have missed the essence of Christ's teaching and example." How beautiful! It is not necessary for us to "draw the lines" but it is necessary for us to serve. Our love not only causes us to become enslaved to our fellow believers, it even causes us to do good to them that hate us and to pray for them which despitefully use us and persecute us. While we have some special responsibilities to those who are of the household of faith it is still our basic goal to do good unto all men. Our example is Christ. The Lord not only helped His close

friends like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, but He also touched the ear of Malchus in the garden and from the cross cried out for mercy on behalf of those who drove the nails into His hands and feet.

To reduce the all pervading love of Christ to the shriveled up concept of "who is my brother" is an immeasurable injustice to Jesus. Even unbelievers have that kind of love. Those, by contrast, who would be the children of God must open their hearts and lives to the power that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, and to shed abroad His love by means of the Holy Spirit.

Converging Course in Christ

The Jews and Greeks of the ancient world had totally different concepts of the "ecclesia." The wide divergence of their backgrounds would make it unreasonable to think otherwise.

The Jews, no doubt, saw the term "ecclesia" in the context in which it appears in the Septuagint. (The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.) The word "ecclesia" occurs some 100 times in that version. Israel was God's "assembly."

When Jesus spoke of building His "ecclesia" in Matthew 16:18 we have every reason to believe that the apostles were thinking only in terms of their nationalistic history. Though Jesus had specifically commissioned these men to go to all nations they continued to preach to none but the Jews for many years. Even after a series of miracles coerced Peter to the house of Cornelius he still felt locked into a ministry to the circumcision. This incredible fact is recorded in Galatians 2:9 and is probably twenty years after the Great Commission was given and ten years after the conversion of Cornelius.

"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel" they said (Acts 1:6). Their reading of the Septuagint had convinced them that the "ecclesia" was Israel and nothing Jesus had taught them seemed sufficient to change their minds.

When the Gospel came to the Gentiles the word "ecclesia" gave them a totally different set of associations. The word can be traced in Greek literature as far back as five centuries before Christ. It referred to a popular assembly of competent full citizens by which the city was governed. The ecclesia opened with prayers and sacrifices to the gods of the city. Every citizen had a right to speak, propositions could be made upon the testimony of expert witnesses, and decisions were made by voting.

When the Gentiles heard that Jesus was going to build His ecclesia they would naturally think of that word as they had always thought of it.

In Christ, these radically different peoples were on a converging course. The Jews came to realize that as John the Baptist put it, "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matthew 3:9). Perhaps he gestured with his hand toward Gentile territory when he made that statement.

The Gentiles came to realize that all who are in Christ are also descendants of Abraham and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29). The true Jew is made by the inward experience of conversion and the real circumcision is of the heart (Romans 2:28-29). Not all the peoples of physical Israel had been accepted by God, only a remnant. The remnant of believing Jews combined with believing Gentiles composes the Israel of God in a spiritual sense (Galatians 6:16).

The Church Today

I think we can objectively say that there are some real difficulties involved in attempting to legalistically define just exactly what constituted the "church" in such cities as Jerusalem, Antioch, or Ephesus. It seems that the more deeply we probe into the question the more complex it becomes. Fenton J. Hort in his excellent book, "The Christian Ecclesia," draws a keen distinction between the use of "of" and "in" with reference to the church. There does seem to be a difference between the church "of" a city and the church "in" a city but such technicalities are far afield from the crucial questions which we face in these perilous times.

It has been stated that when the Bolshiviks took over the revolution in Russia that the clergy were locked up in a heated debate over what color robes should be worn on special Sundays.

If you think defining the church in Ephesus is a drag, give it a whirl for some modern city. Not only do we face the unbelievable quagmire of quarreling denominations but a wide assortment of other Christian institutions involved in evangelism or benevolence, or some other facet of Christian work. What is the church in St. Louis or San Francisco? From the legalistic standpoint we may be able to arrive at a definition which makes perfect sense to us. It may satisfy every question which you can personally think of to ask. But I want to unequivocally affirm that your definition will not satisfy everyone's questions.

The answer to the dilemma is not to be found in writing more laws but in showing more love. Not sorting, but serving!

Some time ago I asked a man how many churches there were in Joplin, Missouri. Just one, he said with a straight face. Further discussion revealed that the one true church of Joplin was a little group of less than one hundred people with whom this man just happened to be associated. I glanced at his hands. The absence of nail prints convinced me that his answer was not the final word on the subject.

With love there are no questions, and without it there are no answers. By this shall all men know that we are His disciples, if we have love one to another!

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Five

1. Does real love mean that we will never ask any questions? What does it mean?
2. Is it possible for someone actually to be saved whom we think is lost?
3. How would you define "the church"?
4. How would you distinguish between "church" and "churches" as used in the Scriptures?
5. Is the concept of a "city church" practical?
6. Why are there so many denominations?
7. What can you and your church do to promote unity in your community?
8. Is it possible for people to be united in Christ who do not agree on all points of doctrine? How do we determine what is essential and what is not?
9. Can you think of anything in the modern church more serious than the first century disagreements between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians?
10. How important is it for us to know who is saved and who isn't?

What is the Task of the Church?

“What Jesus began to do in the body, the body continues to do in Jesus.”

When Jesus was upon the earth He ministered to human needs by means of His earthly body. Because the Church is His body, directed by His Spirit, He continues to minister to human needs by means of His spiritual body, the Church. So what Jesus began to do in the body, the body continues to do in Jesus.

Simon Peter described Jesus as a man anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil (Acts 10:38). How beautiful! How simple! Jesus went about doing good! When He saw a need He met it. If people were hungry he fed them. If they were sick He made them well. If they were crippled He healed them. If they were confused He gave them direction. All of this He accomplished with an amazing measure of confidence and assurance.

His Jewish critics, however, were never quite certain about a legitimate course of action. For this reason they went through

life with nagging doubts about their personal conduct and profound questions about the orthodoxy of their actions. As Ignatius said, "With love there are no questions, and without it there are no answers."

Exodus to Hidden Valley

The *Reader's Digest* has published an excellent book entitled, *Exodus to The Hidden Valley* by Eugene Morse. This book is but one thrilling chapter in the lives of a veteran missionary family that has spent more than half a century in the Orient. It has been my good fortune to know personally many members of this family and to interrogate them in great detail about their work. The essence of their ministry has been much like that of Jesus. They have gone about doing good. They have moved with confidence into virtually every area of human need without suffering from pangs of conscience that they had violated the will of God.

Man's greatest individual need is for a personal relationship with Jesus. Thus they have preached the gospel in all its purity leading people to personal decisions for Christ. But the tribes with whom they work have many other needs as well. They needed help and instruction in agriculture, finance, and education. Not only were they illiterate, but some of the tribes did not even have a written language at all. Those who are members of His body, and who are motivated by His Spirit, must do for people what Jesus would do. Thus they have made a diligent effort to meet every human need.

They have reduced languages to writing and translated the Word of God into the vernacular of the tribal people. They have designed cities and built schools. In these primitive areas it has sometimes been necessary for them to manufacture their own "blackboards" and "chalk," their own gunpowder and medical supplies. Throughout their long years of service they have ministered for Jesus as doctors, nurses, educators, inventors, bankers, farmers, and in other areas too numerous to mention. In short, there is virtually no area of life which the Spirit of Jesus has not touched through them. Their great love for the needs of the people left them no alternative.

Those infected with a legalistic approach to the work of Jesus would have some serious difficulties with the church getting involved in "education" or "agriculture" or "medicine." "That's not the job of the church," they would howl. They would feel

more comfortable "passing by on the other side" and letting some lonely Samaritan handle this "social gospel" stuff.

A Christian Marriage Contract?

Christianity is like a marriage. As a matter of fact the marriage union may very well be the most accurate and complete analogy available to man about our relationship with God through the church. We are supposed to learn from marriage about the nature of the church, but we have not. To illustrate this let us reverse the procedure and attempt to set up a marriage like we do the church.

First of all we must begin with a "contract." This always gives to legalistic people a real sense of security. The contract itself, however, is not enough, so we must incorporate into the contract a series of safeguards and a system of enforcement. The finished contract may be something like this:

I, _____, the party of the first part, do take thee, _____, the party of second part, to be my lawful wedded wife.

Conditions:

A. It is hereby agreed that _____, the party of the first part shall spend at least 40 hours each week in gainful employment for at least 50 weeks per year. The remuneration from said employment shall be dispursed through a committee composed of both husband and wife together with at least four in-laws (two from each side of the family). This finance committee shall meet at least twelve times per year, no decisions are to be made unless a quorum is present and all checks must have two signatures.

B. The party of the first part also agrees to kiss the party of the second part at least twice each day (Monday - Friday). Once shall be while departing for work and the other time when returning. On emergency or unscheduled visits the kiss is to be considered as optional. The party of the first part also agrees that the more intimate experiences of marriage be regulated by the party of the second part and her mother, and one medical expert.*

C. In the event that children be born to his union the party of the first part agrees to spend at least 15% but not more than

* The term "expert" is to be defined biennially by a committee of husband, wife, two in-laws, and minister.

33 ⅓ % of his gross annual income on said children. The monies will be divided among said children upon a pro-rated basis depending upon age. (Absolutely no discrimination is to be permitted upon the basis of sex, size, color of hair, eyes, or skin.)

D. In view of the many temptations to immorality the party of the first part agrees to watch only those television programs, and movies, and to read only those magazines, books and periodicals approved by committee composed of: the party of the second part (wife), the party of the second part's mother (mother-in-law) and two other parties, etc., etc., etc.

But enough of this trivia. You know that no marriage could possibly survive such legalism, but what about the church? Our legalistic approach has literally raised more questions than answers. It has bogged us down in a quagmire of technicalities that has stifled the Spirit and handcuffed the body of Christ. You could write a thousand rules on marriage and never have a Christian home. You could fill a library with legal precedents involving the Christian family and never deal with every circumstance that could arise. The home is not built upon law, but love and, praise God, Jesus has given us the same blessed relationship in the church.

Back to the Question

But now let us return to our question regarding the task of the church. Love provides us with the freedom to do whatever we think Jesus would do in similar circumstances. Because our backgrounds vary, and because our levels of education and understanding are different, we will always see "what Jesus would do" from different perspectives. This is the way it should be. Because every member of the body has a different role or function to perform, it is imperative that we see things from a different point of view. The body is not one member but many and each has a unique role to play. If the whole body were an eye how could it hear anything? Each member of the body is necessary, no matter how insignificant or diverse.

In an orchestra different people can play different instruments on different notes and still have harmony. This is the kind of unity and harmony we have in the body of Christ. It is a unity in diversity because we are all responding to the same Lord.

Once you depart from love and attempt to direct the body

of Christ by legalism you are caught in a quagmire of controversy. Remember the legalistic covenant is characterized by Ishmael. He was a wild man who was perennially in trouble.

Let me demonstrate these difficulties by referring to but one simple Scripture. Please remember that this series of debatable questions can be repeated on an almost infinite number of questions relating to the task of the church. The Scripture is:

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” (James 1:27)

In order to simplify matters as much as possible we will concentrate our attention upon but three aspects of but one phrase of this verse.

1. What does it mean to visit?
2. What is meant by fatherless and widows?
3. What is meant by “their affliction”?

I want to warn you at the outset that we are off on an endless venture. We can satisfy ourselves, and we may even convince a number of others to adhere to our own personal point of view, but not one of us will utter the last word on the subject even if we spent a lifetime in research and investigation.

What Does It Mean to Visit?

Students of the Greek language will be aware that “visit” is from the Greek word “episkeptomai.” It is akin to the word “episcopal” and therefore has some direct association with the type of “oversight” that elders or pastors were to give to the flock of God (Acts 20:28). (Forgive me as I parenthetically explain that many and perhaps most people do not know that the New Testament Scriptures were originally written in Greek, and could not care less.)

I will optimistically assume that everyone will be willing to interpret the word “visit” to mean more than an occasional hello at the front door. I will further assume that we all see the need for and agree in the wisdom of systematic and consistent oversight. The questions then become: “How?” and “To what extent?”

There are some who argue that the best and more obvious way to care for people is to take them into your own home, or otherwise personally to care for their needs. These would insist

that benevolent institutions rob the individual of his rights and privileges to practice pure religion.

Others contend that while this may be the ideal we are not living in an ideal world. Therefore it is better to have an institution doing benevolent work on terms that are less than ideal than it is to have no benevolent work at all.

One person may feel led of God to support one orphan and one widow and then politely shut the door on all others. In so doing he may prayerfully hope to "force" others to care for the needy. Another person may just keep taking in orphans and widows until he has to build a bigger house and ask for help from Christian friends . . . and an institution is born.

Each may be responding in perfect harmony with the leading of God in his life, but should he feel constrained to divide the brotherhood over his convictions he demonstrates that he is void of the Spirit (Jude 19).

As incredible as it might seem whole books and entire debates have been conducted on the very question before us. There are literally an infinite number of very practical questions to be answered when you begin to care for needy people. In addition to the spiritual aspects of their lives they may need food, education, medicine, discipline, clothing, housing, etc., etc., to say nothing of companionship and love.

Let us, however, let others write these volumes and proceed to question number two.

Who Are the Fatherless and Widows?

Once while teaching on this verse an elder said to me, "But we don't have any widows in our church." I think he had missed the point. Suppose you meet a starving woman in the gutter of some large city. Upon investigation you discover first of all that she is not a Christian, and that secondly she has a husband who is living. Are you therefore exempt from showing mercy and extending help? I think not! I rather imagine that James referred to the fatherless and widows simply to point out people with needs. But times have changed. Children's homes today are filled with needy children who are not orphans. Almost invariably they are neglected or abandoned children whose parents are both living. Widows in Jesus' day were the very symbol of helplessness. They often had no means of sustenance or employment. Widows today are sometimes among the most wealthy people in the entire community.

Again, from the legalistic standpoint, we are caught in the vortex of great controversy. Did James mean literally the fatherless and widows, or just anyone with needs? Did he mean Christians, or non Christians? If you say Christians then how do you define the term? What about people of different denominations, for example? The term "oversight" implies a willingness to be "overseen," some would say. Others say "No," "The people with the greatest needs often deny their need for help and Jesus would want us to help them in spite of it."

Again I hope you see that legalism paints us into a corner of confusion while love provides a sense of direction and assurance.

What is Meant by Affliction?

The Greek word for "affliction" is *Thlibo*. It is interesting to observe that this is the very word used to describe the pathway of the redeemed in Matthew 7:14. The word means "straightened" or "narrow." It refers to the tribulation one experiences from the pressures of life. The context in the Sermon on the Mount leads me to believe that the Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12 and the "strait" gate and the "narrow" way of Matthew 7:13-14 are one and the same. When we love our neighbor as we do ourself we share his afflictions as though they were our own.

What is a genuine affliction which would merit the prayerful concern and help of Christian people? Who is going to draw the line in cases of hardship, pain, and poverty? The truth of the whole matter is that each of us must draw that line every day of our lives. Our actions are not based upon some arbitrary standard handed down by some religious council or church board, but by our own threshold of endurance. We must love our neighbor as we do ourselves. Any other criterion will lead us to bind upon someone else some kind of burden which we would not touch with one of our fingers.

The priest and the Levite saw a man in need and passed by on the other side (Luke 10:25ff). We can never fully know the mental gymnastics which enabled them to do this but we can be sure that every way of a man is right in his own eyes (Proverbs 21:2). Whatever standards these religious men employed made sense to them. The way of religious legalism is a "broad" way. It enables us to rationalize around any personal involvement. How poor is poor? How hungry is hungry? How naked is naked? Our own cleverness enables us to escape scott free, until we

get hooked on the golden rule. Then like the good Samaritan we will find ourselves very much involved. When we bear some "affliction" in our own bodies, we become more sympathetic and understanding to others who suffer in the same way.

Remember that love works no ill to one's neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. When we love our neighbors as we do ourselves we will be operating upon a level which transcends legal definitions and judicial decrees. Such love will demonstrate to the world that we belong to Jesus.

By this shall all men know that we are His disciples, if we have love one to another.

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Six

1. How can we know what Jesus would do in a given circumstance?
2. Are missionaries governed by a different standard than others?
3. What is a missionary?
4. List ways that Christianity is like a marriage.
5. Is there any possible association between the breakdown of family life in America and the problems we are facing in the Church?
6. How can you distinguish between the task of the Church and the task of the individual Christian?
7. What can a person be wrong about and still be saved?
8. Why are divisive people said to be void of the Spirit? (Jude 19)
9. Who is our neighbor?
10. How serious should someone's problem be before we are obliged to help?

How Should the Church be Organized?

“Tradition! We who are about to die salute thee!”

In the previous lessons we have sought to demonstrate the folly of a legalistic definition of the church or a legalistic job description for the church. In this lesson we will deal with the organization of the church from the same perspective. Our use of the term “church” will be in the broadest possible sense. If there are only two or three of you gathered together in the name of Jesus we will most charitably acknowledge you as a church. We will not pause to inquire if you have elders or deacons or whether you are incorporated by the laws of your state. On the other hand you may be a part of some denomination which has an organization even larger than a city church. Again we shall not attempt to deny your standing before God. Rather, in this lesson we will make an appeal for love and common sense to triumph over traditions, regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

The Emperor's New Clothes

Hans Christian Anderson has given to the world a great many folk stories and fables which have profound implications. One such story is of an eccentric emperor who was obsessed by clothing. His uncontrollable desire for something new and novel made him an easy prey for two swindlers. The swindlers pretended to be weavers and boasted of the ability to make a miraculous garment. The miracle of the garment was this — to everyone who was unfit for office or hopelessly dull, the clothing became invisible. Thus, the emperor, by wearing this apparel could immediately discern all who were worthy in his kingdom.

The foolish ruler paid the swindlers a large sum of money and they began their pretense upon an empty loom. Periodically the emperor would send one of his officials to check on their progress. Each was shocked to see absolutely nothing but was too timid to tell the truth. If he admitted what he saw he feared that everyone would think he was incompetent. The clever criminals described in great detail the imaginary garment so that each intimidated "observer" would carry a consistent report to the emperor.

At last the deluded ruler himself was brought in to see his expensive and elegant clothing. He too was too proud to tell the truth. And thus upon a special day he removed his real clothing and draped in nothing but his imagination he paraded through the town for all to see.

Everyone saw that the emperor was naked but no one had the nerve to say it. Each assumed that such a statement would be an admission of incompetence. At last a little child cried out, "But he has nothing on!" The initial implications of this bold assertion brought out feelings of sympathy and compassion for the poor little innocent child, so void of understanding. The longer they thought about it, however, the more reasonable it seemed. Soon everyone, even the emperor, was aware that he was naked.

The saddest part of the story is that even then he refused to hide himself in shame. Instead he stiffened himself with pride and marched on.

The application of the little parable to Christendom is painfully obvious. Many of us have seen the nakedness of the institutional church and been too timid to admit it. We assumed

that such an admission would brand us as irreligious or incompetent. Thus we have stared at the ground and held our tongues, while the naked church is on parade.

The "modus operandi" of accumulated traditions is often so insane and absurd that it leads me to believe that the very existence of the church in our day is a strong testimony to its divine origin. It is hard for me to see how anything else could have survived the outrageous and unreasonable procedures which have become a sacred and integral part of our most holy traditions.

The Scriptural Farm

Perhaps I can illustrate a little of what I mean by a brief reference to an unpublished satire called "The Scriptural Farm."

The fictitious story is about a man named Frederick Randolph Perch who inherited 160 acres of rich farm land. Being a new Christian he determined to pattern his farming operation after the church and thus run it "Scripturally."

With the help of the chairman of the Board of the local church, he selected seven board members to run the farm . . . not one of them was a farmer or had ever been instrumental in running a successful farming operation. Some of them were so totally disinterested in the project that they had to be talked into serving. Each, however, lived in the vicinity of farms, or had been raised on a farm years before, and therefore felt competent to vote his convictions in the acid test of how the farm would be managed.

Next they traveled across the state to hire a farmer. Fresh from agricultural college he too had the disadvantage of never having been associated with a successful farming operation. But he did have a head full of ideas and a desire to work. After a trial "plow'n," an annual wage was agreed upon and he moved his young family into an abandoned old farm house.

The farmer was instructed to make regular reports upon his activities and intentions and not to do anything without board approval. Several problems immediately appeared. Seven chiefs and one Indian always makes for confusion. The farmer's every suggestion was turned down or tabled and a nostalgic page from the past assumed its place. But this was only the beginning of sorrows.

Next came the committees! There was the Weed Committee,

and the Seed Committee, the Tractor Committee, and the Harvest Committee, etc., etc. All committee reports and recommendations were channeled through the official board (just like the church) and anything the board had not heard of before or which cost money was turned down (just like the church). Thus there was no hybrid seed, no herbicide, not enough fertilizer, and naturally not much of a harvest.

By the time controversial decisions had been tabled and prayed over they were late for planting, late for cultivation, and did not harvest the crops until February.

Tempers flared in the wake of marathon meetings and special sessions and when the books revealed that they were operating in the red they decided it was time to start looking for another farmer.

Wise as Serpents

It is indeed surprising to discover that the Bible does not provide us with specific details regarding how the work of Christ is to be accomplished. Apparently we are given a great deal of freedom to be creative.

Upon one occasion Jesus sent out His disciples with no gold, silver or brass in their purses. They were to take no bag to hold provisions, no extra coat or shoes, and were to survive like sheep in the midst of wolves. Sheep in the midst of wolves need to stay very close to the shepherd. They need to listen to His voice and rely upon His divine protection. There is also a sense, however, in which the sheep are partially responsible for their own well being. Jesus said "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." (Matthew 10:16) They were not told exactly "how" they were to evangelize and survive in a hostile territory, but there is at least a strong implication that they were to use a measure of shrewdness and common sense.

The serpent survives by stealth. In the absence of speed and mobility he has to be extremely clever. The Scriptures refer to the devil as a serpent and generally we think of serpents in very negative terms, but there is at least something about the serpent that Christians are to imitate. We are to be as wise and clever as the serpent is, but we are to avoid his treachery and remain as harmless as doves.

Soccer Ball Strategy

The November, 1977 *Reader's Digest* carried an article entitled, "All Quiet on the Western Front." The article was about fallen soldiers who died in Europe. One quotation from that article literally etched itself into my mind.

" . . . On the first day of the Battle of the Somme, July 1, 1916, some 60,000 British troops were killed. They were walking across no man's land in neat rows, *led by an officer kicking a soccer ball.* And they died and are buried in the same neat rows . . ."

Those who are history buffs will remember that the major German offensive was directed at the French Fortress of Verdun. The battle began on February 21, 1916 and was to continue for many months. The Germans gained four miles of territory but at a frightful cost. The casualties of the battle numbered over one million.

The Battle of the Somme was intended to be a diversionary tactic to relieve the pressure at Verdun. The attack was led by an officer kicking a soccer ball. 60,000 troops died in a single day.

Forgive me if my comments upon this betray an ignorance of military strategy and history. I do not know why a British officer would kick a soccer ball across a field that was riddled by machine gun fire but I assume it was a time honored tradition in the British military. I assume it was the same type of screwy thinking that caused them to lose the Revolutionary War. Don't you remember the Battle of Bunker Hill? Row after row of Red Coats advanced upon a handful of revolutionaries who were told not to fire until they saw the whites of British eyes. The strategy was apparently to overwhelm the opponents by sheer force of numbers. With the old muzzle loading rifles only a few shots per rifle could be fired before you were engaged in hand to hand combat.

Even then it would have made more sense to me for the British soldiers to have worn dingy uniforms which would have blended with the terrain instead of the traditional "red coats" which showed up like a bull's-eye in the center of a target. If I were going to have to march across "no man's land" with someone shooting at me I would select something like the William Tell overture, instead of the slow and monotonous drone of the drums. But tradition holds a sacred sway over the minds of men and somehow we would rather die kicking

a soccer ball at a machine gun nest than to break with our traditional ties with the past.

Common Sense

Mr. Average American exists and survives in a complex and competitive society. All week long he strives for a cheaper, easier, cleaner, and more efficient operation. If he employs others he will undoubtedly seek to utilize every man hour in the most efficient manner. His eye is on the "bottom line" and he knows that bankruptcy is just a few stupid decisions away.

The very same businessman, however, comes to a board meeting with a totally different mentality. Men who spent thousands of dollars of their own money before 4:30 in the afternoon will now gather to debate a fifty dollar expenditure of the "Lord's money" until 11:15 in the night. This is the way we have always done it and to suggest otherwise is to run the risk of being deemed irreligious or incompetent. It would all be comical if it were not so tragic. The world goes to hell in the shadow of the church building while our keenest minds are trapped in a board meeting discussing some sort of trivia which the custodian of the local church could have handled all by himself if someone would have only asked him to.

I spoke to a church some time ago that was deeply involved in missions. Their missionary existed on a meager personal salary but was entrusted with over \$1,000 every month to invest in outreach and evangelism. This "service link" money was his to use as he saw fit. He was wise and competent and never betrayed the trust of his supporters. The same missionary, however, should he return to the United States to labor, would immediately lose his "service link" and be destined to work in a ridiculous system of boards and committees which would strangle his creativity and cancel his effectiveness.

The situation has become so severe that large numbers of individuals have for all intents and purposes "left the church," and created a wide variety of institutions to do the work which it was impossible to accomplish in the traditional framework of their own denominations.

The Biblical Pattern

For many years I labored under the illusion that there was in the Bible a divine pattern which provided a blueprint for the structure of the local congregation. A careful study of the

Scriptures has convinced me that this is not the case. There are five different Greek words that are either translated as "pattern" or which have a similar meaning. Not one of them is used in the Bible to refer to the governmental structure of the church.

Certainly the early church continued steadfastly in the Apostle's teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and in prayers, but the specific details of how these functions were carried on is not revealed.

The fact that the Jerusalem church set apart seven men to serve tables does not at all imply that they constituted an "official board" or that they ever "voted" on anything. Because we live in a society dominated by corporations it is easy for us to read into the Bible our American way of doing things.

Perhaps a personal illustration may provide insight. It has been my privilege to serve as a "deacon" in a mid-western congregation. Our little church had an attendance of only 250-300 people. Invariably during the course of the year someone would come to us asking for physical or financial assistance. If the need was urgent a special meeting would be called, otherwise the matter would be handled at a regular monthly meeting. In either instance the case would be presented to the board for discussion and each board member would vote his convictions on whether or not he deemed the person "worthy" of the Lord's money. At the present time that church has seventeen deacons.

The Jerusalem church, by contrast, numbered into the thousands. Some have estimated that by the time seven men were set aside to serve tables they may have numbered in excess of 20,000 people. The sheer volume of people needing help would have precluded our system. Our little church never dealt with over a dozen cases of benevolence in a year, but they must have handled hundreds every day. They could not possibly have indulged themselves in the luxury of marathon board meetings over a \$35 expenditure. As risky as it may seem to us they had to trust these men with vast sums of money. The magnitude of their responsibility made it incumbent for them to have tremendous freedom to operate. They may have employed literally dozens of people to help them expedite the volume of work to be done. Seven doctors, or seven plumbers could operate indefinitely out of the same office and never vote on anything, and these seven men could have done the same.

Let me give you another example. A small mid-western church decided that to get people involved in the Lord's work they would combine the elders and deacons and all interested church members in a steering committee to help give the church direction. For over three years this steering committee discussed the pros and cons of owning their own riding lawn mower. At last it was decided to purchase a riding lawn mower, but because the expenditure involved over \$500 it was necessary to bring the matter before the whole congregation for a vote. The necessary details were worked out and the favorable vote was received. At the very next meeting of the steering committee the decision was reversed. Now it was decided that the best thing to do would be to contract the yard work done and not to buy a mower at all. Remember that the steering committee was composed of all the elders, all the deacons, and all interested church members. The keenest minds in the church were trapped in these endless hours of trivia. If each steering committee member had been paid the minimum wage for the time spent in meetings, they could probably have purchased two new mowers with money to spare. The irony of this situation is compounded by the fact that high salaried executives were present at virtually every meeting. These were men so honest and capable that their employers would trust them with literally hundreds of thousands of dollars. The church, by contrast, wouldn't trust anybody. We add to our by-laws, enlarge our committees, multiply our safeguards until the soldiers of the cross in our generation have been likened unto men hunting rabbits in a tank. We have thought little, dreamed little, planned little, and fished close to shore.

How should the church be organized? The Scriptures do not give us detailed answers to this question. We must remember that the church is the body of which Christ is the Head. We must remain sensitive to His Word and His will, but surely there is a place for common sense. Certainly we are not compelled to be bogged down by centuries of accumulated tradition. The time has come for us to open the windows and let in a little fresh air and light.

The distinguishing mark of the New Testament Church was not weekly Bible study and elders and deacons who met high qualifications. The Jewish synagogue had all of this. The distinguishing mark of the Christian was love. It is the one divine "pattern" which can be safely surperimposed on every

gathering of Christians in the first century without doing violence to the evidence which is available.

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Seven

1. What is the difference between an organization and an organism?
2. Is it wrong to speak critically of the Church since it is the Bride of Christ?
3. Is there any Biblical evidence that the elders and deacons of Bible churches ever met to vote on anything?
4. Is the committee concept efficient, or inefficient?
5. Would you like to run your business, or your home, like your church is run?
6. Why is change so difficult to achieve in the church?
7. How can we prevent a campaign for common sense from making us disrespectful of God's authority?
8. Does a church have to have elders and deacons in order to be a church?
9. While Paul was alive he visited many congregations, and directed the lives of many Christian workers like Timothy, Titus, Aquila, and Priscilla. Did anyone do this after Paul died?
10. How does your denomination determine someone who is loyal to Jesus?

What Can the Church Own?

“Neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet . . .” (Acts 4:34-35)

The church in every age has had access to and responsibility for a tremendous amount of wealth. The Jerusalem church was no exception. The very idea that people sold their lands and houses and gave the money to the church almost literally boggles the mind. Now the question arises, “For what can the church legitimately spend this money?”

At the risk of being redundant may I remind you that this is a book about love. We are endeavoring to prove that a legalistic approach to Christianity is utterly insufficient to answer even the most basic questions relative to the functions of the Christian assembly. The question before us is no exception.

The situation in Jerusalem was really quite simple. Thousands of pilgrims had traveled to that holy city for the Jewish passover. They had remained for Pentecost and had been converted to Christ. The crowded conditions of the city made

it impossible for them to find work and their travel funds had been depleted by their extended stay. The remarkable "fellowship" or "koinonia" which they had with one another is exemplified by their tremendous love and generosity. Can you imagine what would happen in your community if the church was known by this dimension of love? Truly the Jerusalem fellowship was like a city upon a hill which could not be hid.

The conduct of the Jerusalem church was governed by "needs" not "rules." This immediately involved them in providing food, clothing, shelter, medicine, comfort, counseling, and many other needs, which beset the Christian community. It is not unreasonable to assume that at least some equipment would have been needed to expedite the meeting of these needs. Women like Dorcas may have needed needles and thread and vast sums of material from which to make clothing for the needy. They may have needed additional materials and equipment to wash and prepare used clothing which had been donated to the poor.

Ministering to the needs of thousands of hungry people can become a complex and complicated assignment. We have no way of determining exactly how the hungry were fed, but again it is not unreasonable to assume that at least some equipment to prepare, distribute, and deliver the food was needed. The technical details of who "owned" the equipment was totally irrelevant. The important thing was the needs of the people.

One of the reasons why we have so many hassles over what the church can or cannot own is that we have misunderstood the very nature of Christianity. It is not a system built upon law, but upon love. Every legal concept or statement must be interpreted. Even a code of conduct as simple and as brief as the Ten Commandments had thrown the Jewish people into spasms of controversy. The law was a "schoolmaster" to bring us unto Christ. It was to teach us, among other things, the utter futility of trying to solve the needs of the world through legalism.

Viewed from the legal standpoint the very simple situation in Jerusalem suddenly becomes tremendously complex. Some who resent the idea of the church being turned into a "restaurant" or "haberdashery" will attempt to prove that the church can only receive and distribute "money." Money, they reason, could be given to the poor and needy and then they can buy their own provisions. This would free the church from the many

problems and complexities of handling food and raiment. But what is "money"? Many primitive societies do not have coins or cash at all but exist by trading pigs and chickens for clothing and grain. What would these people give to the church, and what would the church do with what they give? In Jerusalem there may very well have been people who had no money to give but who did give food, grain, or other commodities which were directly needed to alleviate human suffering.

The whole question of what the church can or cannot own is not nearly as important as what the church does with what it does own. If the church is using a tax exempt status to enter into unfair competition with legitimate business it would be diametrically opposed to the very principle of love. We must love others as we would want to be loved. We must do unto others as we would want them to do unto us. It is also basically unChristian to watch people suffer and die and do nothing because we are afraid of some legal technicality.

On the Mission Field

Legalism is invariably inconsistent. It causes us to operate under a double set of standards. The legalist will be very apt to bind upon others a variety of burdens which he would not touch with one of his fingers. All of which seems perfectly logical when you are twisted into a tangle of your own design. Remember, every way of a man is right in his own eyes.

The man who baptized me into Christ lamented the fact that his congregation would send money to Africa to evangelize black people, but wouldn't even invite them to church right here in the United States of America. We are proud of our missionaries when they build schools and hospitals but we would argue until midnight that our own church has no business getting involved in such matters. I heard recently of three American churches who turned down an opportunity to run a hospital for this very reason. Half way around the world we expect the church to feed the hungry and clothe the naked but we would strenuously object to any systematic meeting of similar needs here at home. How many churches do you know of here in America that have any viable programs to meet physical and social needs in their own community? I know of missionaries who established a bookstore in a foreign city. It became a self-supporting medium through which Christian literature has been distributed to thousands of people. An

American church which strongly supported that very mission turned down a bookstore which was offered to them in their community. Our inconsistencies are almost without number. A few courageous congregations are breaking out of the traditional mold, but their critics are legion.

There is a very real sense in which the United States of America is a mission field. We are beset by violence and crime of unparalleled proportions. Our homes are eroding away and our children are disenchanting. Perhaps it is time for us to employ the same evangelistic fervor and humanitarian concern which we expect of our missionaries in foreign lands.

It is ironic, almost beyond words, that the one thing which the traditional Christian Community feels safe in owning, may be the very worst investment of the Lord's money. We may not be sure about owning a coffee house, a hospital, an orphanage, an old people's home, a gymnasium, or virtually anything else . . . but we feel certain that it is right to own a church building. We can sink a half million dollars into some grandiose "sanctuary" in which to worship Jesus and none of our colleagues will condemn us. Most of them will gaze upon it with envy and admiration . . . even though it may prove to be the most worthless weapon in the Christian arsenal. We may use it less than five hours a week. It may dominate a lion's share of our budget. The stewardship of that facility may prove to be the major function of our corporate existence.

May I respectfully remind you that history considers the time as "The Dark Ages" when buildings were more important than people. Following the crusades the Roman church owned one-third of all the real properties of Europe. The feudal system left vast segments of society in abject poverty and indescribable need. The church in the meanwhile was not as concerned with the needs of the people as it was with ornate cathedrals and exquisite chandeliers. It was at this time that Julius II demolished St. Peter's Basilica and determined to rebuild it on such a grand scale that the entire revenues of the Roman See would not suffice to pay for its construction. At this juncture in history Tetzal toured Europe to sell indulgences. The ignorant and superstitious masses were promised the forgiveness of their sins the moment that their money clinked in the coffer. It was this blasphemous swindle which prompted Martin Luther to draft his famous ninety-five theses and to nail them to the castle door in Whittenberg.

A Lesson from Hetty Green

Harriet Green has the dubious distinction of being listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the "World's Greatest Miser." She had one hundred million dollars in the bank and was too cheap to take her own son to the doctor. She procrastinated until the boy's leg had to be amputated.

The story of the family fortune is told by Arthur H. Lewis in his excellent book, *The Day They Shook the Plum Tree* (Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. N.Y.). The story begins in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1624 with the purchase of one black cow. The frugal and prolific family in a few short generations had multiplied that original investment into a six million dollar fortune. Hetty Green inherited this money in 1865 and went on to amass a hundred million dollar estate.

Hetty died in 1916. At that time she was perhaps the richest and yet the most detested woman in the world. She left her millions to her two children.

Ned, her one-legged son, became a play boy. He spent some three million dollars a year on yachts, stamps, diamond studded chastity belts, pornography and teenage prostitutes, orchid culture and Texas politics.

Her daughter, Sylvia, became an irrational recluse who kept \$31,000,000 in one bank account that did not even draw interest. Her gardener, Dan Chicko, worked thirty years for Sylvia. She spoke to him only twice in all that time. Once to tell him that his wages would be docked because he was late to work, and the other time to tell him to keep his daughter off the premises . . . she didn't like children.

They're all dead now. The plum tree has been shaken. Almost without exception the money to which that family was enslaved has wound up where it was needed the least and where it would accomplish a minimum amount of good.

The church ought to learn a lesson from Hetty Green. The "bottom line" in our relationship with deity does not involve how many buildings we erect or how much money we amass, but how many people we help. Jesus valued people and used things, and too often we value things and use people.

The Christian Church was born in a world that revelled in religious architecture. The Jewish Temple was begun by Herod in 19 B.C. and was not completed until A.D. 64. It was the largest and most ornate temple ever erected to Jehovah. In other cities like Baalbek, Ephesus, and Corinth were other

temples erected to pagan deities. The early church by contrast did not build temples. The church itself was the temple of God and Jesus found a sanctuary in the heart of every believer. The money they invested went directly to meet human needs and to alleviate human suffering.

Hetty Green never gave a dime to any humanitarian cause. One newspaper made this statement and was challenged by irate members of the family. They did not back down, but instead published a challenge for anyone who had ever been helped by Hetty Green to come forward and be identified. No one came!

In the end of the age the compassionate Christ may write "Ichabod" across the investments of which we are the most proud and say, ". . . I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not . . ." (Matthew 25:42-43).

The Social Gospel

A generation ago the "liberals" abandoned the doctrine of the blood atonement and Biblical conversion for mere humanitarianism. They did not care what happened to a man after he died, their only concern involved the "here and now." Such a pendulous extreme is a betrayal of Christ and a denial of much of His teaching. Now we see many "conservative" congregations at the opposite extreme. We will preach to the hungry, sing songs to the cold and naked, pass out tracts to those who are sick, and pray for the strangers. This too can be a betrayal of Christ and a denial of much of His teaching. Notwithstanding we give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?

The church is the body of Christ, and what Jesus began to do in the body the body continues to do in Jesus. Those who possess His Spirit will inevitably show compassion on every human need and will make every reasonable effort to do for that person what Jesus would do for them. It probably would be wise for us to purge from our vocabulary such terms as "liberal," "conservative," etc. for it is always easier to hate a label than it is a person. Once we label someone they are to a certain extent dehumanized. Perhaps this is the reason Jesus warned against calling someone "raca" or "fool."

Love Meets Needs

When I speak with admiration and appreciation about missionaries who build and operate schools and hospitals there is ever the danger that someone will falsely assume that the church ought to do this in every community. It would be sheer folly for the church to erect a clap trap medical station in the shadows of Mayo Clinic. The needs of our communities ought to regulate and direct our activities and expenditures.

Man's number one need is, of course, conversion. The first and great commandment is to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Before someone can be converted he must receive with meekness the implanted Word which is able to save his soul. Now what can the church own in order to meet this need? The list, of course, is virtually limitless.

It would include buildings, microphones, printing presses, radio and television stations, satellites, cameras, projectors, recorders, and a host of other items too numerous to mention. Often it is both possible and practical for the church to utilize such item which someone else owns. Remember, however, that love meets needs.

Sometimes our traditions make void our ability to meet needs. I know of people who have tried to evangelize in the inner city with 19th century methods developed in the mid-west. They will build a "little brown church in the dale" in the shadow of a high rise apartment and wonder why the world is unconverted. Trying to evangelize in the megalopolis with this mentality is comparable to the little child who wanted to stop up the Mississippi River with a corn cob.

The second great commandment is that we love our neighbor as ourselves. The legalist will want to know "and who is my neighbor?" Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan to answer this question and then commanded us to "go and do likewise."

Many social programs which the government has instituted stem directly from the churches' failure to get involved. We have passed by on the other side and left such matters to the irreligious. What can the church own to meet these social needs? It is impossible to make a list which would ever be complete. If we could it would be out of date within a year. Not only do needs vary and change, but our technology to meet those needs increases with each rising of the sun. Around the corner may be discoveries which will make the computer,

the xerox machine, and the television seem primitive and ineffective by comparison. The question of whether the church can own such things or not is almost totally irrelevant. The big question is whether or not we are meeting human needs. If we view God as a harsh and austere Judge, we are apt to bury our talent in the ground and refuse to take a chance . . . God help us to do anything but that!

Remember! The mark of the Christian is not what we own . . . but love. By this shall all men know that we are His disciples, if we have love one to another.

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Eight

1. Discuss the needs of the Jerusalem church and the way those needs were met.
2. Should the church get involved in every kind of thing that Jesus did?
3. Do you agree that we have a different standard for missionaries? If so, why?
4. Is it possible that someday someone may send missionaries to the United States of America?
5. Do you agree that the early church evangelized without church buildings? If so, how did they do it, and could the same be done today?
6. What is the value of your present facilities? and how many hours each week are they used?
7. Make a list of ten needs in your community which need to be met.
8. How could your church help to meet those needs?
9. List things which your church owns today which were not available fifty years ago.
10. List things which your church could own today which would help to meet the needs of your community.

Whom Can the Church Hire?

“. . . The labourer is worthy of his reward . . .” (I Timothy 5:18)

When we attempt to answer such questions as whom the church can hire, it is important that we think in terms of Scripture as opposed to our American religious heritage.

Many people still think of the “church” as a little building in a “valley by the wildwood.” We nostalgically think that these were the “good old days” and somehow believe that a return to their simple faith would solve all of the complex problems of modern society. There may be more truth in this concept than might first appear.

Our fathers in the faith were pioneers who initiated bold reform in the generation in which they lived. Wilson L. Thompson observes in his doctoral dissertation on “Small Colleges and Goal Displacement” that ninety percent of all college presidents in the United States before the Civil War were clergymen. In the year 1856 there were 40,000 individuals who graduated from American colleges and fully one-fourth of them entered the ministry.

When the minister arrived at the “church in the valley by the wildwood” he frequently became the most influential person

in the entire community. This is why he was called "the Parson," which simply means "person." Not only was he usually the best educated person in the community, but he served at the focal point of all community activity. The "meet'n house" where he preached was also the place where farmers met to discuss the problems of agriculture. Local citizens came here to debate social and political questions, and householders gathered to make plans for their families. Quite often that little building was also the local school and the Bible was a part of the curriculum. I stress again that these men were pioneers. They were bold thinkers who challenged the limited frontiers of their fathers. They dared to leave the traditional ruts of previous generations and to dream new dreams. With the help of God these dreams became reality, forged from the wilderness in a furnace of affliction. They did not "play it safe" and closely adhere to traditional thinking, they buried themselves in an exciting exploration of Scripture and out of that experience God spoke to them to meet the needs of their generation.

The secret of their amazing courage is not to be found in studying their amazing courage. It is to be found in studying the Bible. The Word of God is alive and active. It is able to build us up and to give us an inheritance among them which are sanctified. It is a perennial source of wisdom and courage; for God does not give us a spirit of timidity and fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. When we study the Word, as they did, perhaps we too will launch out into the mainstream of community activity.

For the last few generations the church has been obsessed by a fear mentality and has reacted by forming a defensive posture. We feel that Jesus must have made a tactical mistake by sending us out like sheep in the midst of wolves and we have improvised a wide variety of man made protective devices to "correct" the problem. We've been afraid to get involved in education, afraid to get involved in social problems, afraid to get involved in anything but "preaching the Gospel." Thus we build our little buildings and retreat from the world around us. Let crime run rampant and divorce mills grind away the foundations of society. We will ring the bell and preach to everyone who crosses the threshold of the "sanctuary." This, my friends, is not a first century concept. It is medieval. It is a monastic concept brought out of the dark ages and dressed up for the twentieth century.

First Century Nuns

At the risk of opening a pandora's box of controversy, permit me to remind you that the first century church did have a group of women who took a vow never to marry. They differ from modern "nuns," however, in a great many ways. Their qualifications are listed in I Timothy 5:9, 10.

"Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for her good works; if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work . . ."

The following verses forbid young widows to enter this group and take the vow or pledge never to marry again. It is my personal opinion that we are not at all talking about merely "supporting" needy people. It would seem that Christians have an obligation to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, regardless of their background or marital status. When the Christian finds a woman dying of starvation and exposure it is not necessary to have her fill out a questionnaire regarding her age, religious background, and whether or not her husband is still living. The subject before us is not just about benevolence. It is about a group of women who were supported by the early church to do good works.

It is my own personal opinion that Dorcas was such a woman. When Peter came to raise her from the dead all of the "widows" stood by him weeping and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas had made when she was "with them." When she was raised from the dead Peter called the saints and "widows" and presented her alive (Acts 9:36-41).

It is my further opinion that the "widows" of I Timothy 5 may also be directly related to the "aged women" of Titus 2:3-5. In this passage certain "aged women" were commanded to train the young women in their domestic responsibilities. Unhappily for the church and the world this Scripture has been buried beneath heaps of traditional thought and we have relegated the counseling of young women to young men who are ministers of the gospel. The tragedies resulting from this indiscretion are without number.

Back to the Basics

The reference to "nuns" or "widows" was not intended to promote the making of a "Scriptural list" of individuals who

could be hired by the church. Quite to the contrary. I would rather seek to prove that the list itself is a B.C. concept in an A.D. world.

The church is the body of Christ. A body is flexible. It can adjust to different circumstances with great dexterity if it is healthy. We need to abandon the paralytic mentality which would cause someone to think that it was "Scriptural" to support Paul because he was a preacher, but "unscriptural" to support Luke because he was a physician. The truth of the whole matter is that we have every right and every responsibility to invest the "Lord's money" on anyone or anything which helps to accomplish the work of Jesus in the world.

There is a sense in which we do this already without realizing it. Multiplied millions of the "Lord's money" is taken directly from the "Lord's treasury" and given to carpenters, mechanics, plumbers, painters, typewriter repairmen, lawyers, bankers, grocers, and a host of other individuals too numerous to mention. Usually we do not ask these men for a statement of faith or spiritual résumé. We hire them because we have a need. The same board, however, which will hire a man to fix the furnace and pay him with the Lord's money, may feel it is "unscriptural" to hire a doctor to fix a human body, or a psychiatrist to minister to the human mind. Our legalistic approach to spending the "Lord's money" needs a total re-evaluation.

The Faith of Our Fathers

I know a man in the midwest who lives on ten acres of ground. He farms exactly as his father did fifty years ago. He plows with a tractor purchased in the 1920's and harvests his corn by hand. He cooks on a wood stove purchased by his mother shortly after the turn of the century. He lives in a home built by his parents from wood harvested from their own land and fashioned into boards by the family saw mill. His operation is a "novelty." People either inquire about it out of curiosity or with the desire to purchase some of his antiques. In a world with two billion people going to bed hungry every night, it is fortunate that his philosophy of farming is not widespread.

There is a very real sense in which this man is not imitating his father at all. His father was a progressive thinker. While other farmers were thinking about those "new fangled tractors" he went out and bought one. When their horses failed to turn enough earth he began to do custom plowing for them. When

harvest time rolled around he owned the latest equipment and harvested for all their neighbors.

When we seek to emulate our fathers' faith, we must be willing to cast caution to the wind and face a new frontier. Our fathers' faith was in Christ and they refused to be intimidated by the dangers of the wilderness or the innovations which were necessary to cope with the unique problems which they encountered there. They closed the day by the kerosene lamp with an open Bible. Exhausted they would fall to their knees in prayer and cry out to God for wisdom. God answered their prayers. Somehow they not only survived, but they laid the foundation for the greatest country on earth and bequeathed to us a legacy of courage so that we might stand upon their shoulders and see new horizons.

Whom Did the First Century Church Hire?

We do not have a legalistic catalogue given to us in the Bible, but I have a growing conviction that the church of Jesus Christ has unlimited freedom to meet needs. The church in Jerusalem did minister to the needs of those who were victims of poverty and discriminations and they had every right to "hire" anything done which needed to be done. They could hire teachers, counselors, cooks, repairmen, administrators, doctors, dentists, farmers, or anyone else that they needed to alleviate human suffering.

The good Samaritan found the victim of a crime bleeding by the roadside. He bound his wounds and poured in oil and wine. This involved an expenditure. He took him to an inn and paid money to the proprietor. Moreover, he made arrangements to return and pay the additional expenses which would be incurred during the period of his recuperation. All of this involved money. With our legalistic approach to serving Jesus we would never have gotten anything like this through the committees or approved by the board. Like the priest and the Levite, we would have kept the "Lord's money" safe in our pockets and passed by on the other side.

Who Fixed the Roof?

Luke chapter five relates the thrilling story of four men who brought their paralyzed friend to see Jesus. When they arrived at the place where Jesus was they could not get near to him because of the multitude. The urgency of their mission

caused them to devise a bold and innovative plan. They carried their friend up to the roof, tore up the tiling, and lowered him down into the presence of Jesus. Hallelujah! Not only were his sins forgiven, but he was healed of his paralysis.

How would you like to have the responsibility of trying to get something like that approved by the committees and boards in your local church? First of all, the idea is too spectacular for most of us. Surely there must be a more conventional way to get that man to Jesus. Secondly, the plan called for the destruction of someone's personal property and made all who participated liable to legal action. Finally, no matter how you slice it, someone was going to have to fix the roof, and that seems like a pretty secular expenditure of money that was given for "spiritual" purposes. Thus we would have "saved the money," "saved the roof," and let the man go to hell!

The Priority of People

God owns every beast of the forest and the cattle upon a thousand hills. He has clear title to the universe with its vast treasures and indescribable wealth. The one thing, however, which means more to God than anything else is people.

God made the earth for people to enjoy. He created us in His own image and gave to us the privilege of enjoying an innumerable variety of fruits and vegetables. He expected us to have dominion over every beast, and every fowl, and every creature which creepeth upon the earth. He made the sun and the moon primarily for man and suspended the stars especially for us to see. Nothing in the entirety of the universe is more important than man.

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"
(Romans 8:32)

Never is the church more "on target" than when it invests in the betterment of man. Our first and foremost need is for salvation. But the Biblical concept of salvation is much broader than merely being saved for eternity. Man needs to be made whole in the here and now.

Jesus went about doing good. He healed the sick and made the blind to see. He was a companion to the lonely and a friend of publicans and sinners. He cared for little children and gave sympathy and concern to the bereaved. He fed the hungry and

provided guidance to those who were like sheep without a shepherd.

The church is His body. It is the temple of His Spirit. What Jesus began to do in the body, the body continues to do in Jesus. By so doing we display to the principalities and powers in heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God. Our fellow men behold our love and take knowledge of the fact that we have been with Jesus!

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Nine

1. One hundred years ago the church was at the focal point of all activity in the community. How did we lose that position?
2. Discuss the responsibility which the Christian has to do good unto all men but especially unto the household of faith. (Galatians 6:10)
3. Is the government today doing benevolent work which should be done by the church?
4. We know that churches sometimes sent money to Paul (II Corinthians 11:8; Philippians 4:15, etc.). Would it have been wrong for him to share this money with Luke the beloved physician or John Mark the attendant?
5. What does the Bible mean by "double honor" in I Timothy 5:17?
6. Phoebe was a servant of the church in Cenchrea and the Christians in Rome were instructed to help her in whatsoever business she had need of them. Would it have been wrong for her to be paid by the church?
7. Is it more "scriptural" to hire a Bible teacher than a secretary? Discuss!
8. Is it more important to hire a plumber to fix a broken toilet for the church or to hire a counselor to help mend a broken home?
9. At one time a man who "entered the ministry" took a vow of poverty and agreed never to marry. Was this good or bad?
10. Name at least one need in your church or your community which hiring additional personnel may help to solve.

Who Runs the Church?

“The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them . . . but ye shall not be so . . .” (Luke 22:25-26)

The disciples of Jesus were involved in a number of abrasive encounters over greatness and authority. They anticipated the establishment of an earthly kingdom and therefore sought for positions of power at the right hand and at the left hand of the throne.

In response to this, Jesus constantly reminded them that His kingdom was not of this world. The church of Jesus Christ was to be characterized by a radical and revolutionary concept of authority. It was to be totally diverse and distinct from the way that human governments functioned. However the church was to be run and men were to have influence, it was not to be like the Gentiles did it. Jesus proposed that greatness in His kingdom would be associated with service. At the last supper He demonstrated this profound lesson by girding Himself with a towel and washing His disciples' feet. “Know ye what I have done to you?” He inquired. The symbolic gesture with the basin and towel was representative of a concept quite basic to

Christianity. Service and greatness are inseparably associated. Christian leaders are specifically forbidden to "Lord it over" the people of God (I Peter 5:3).

Having said this, let us return to our question, "Who runs the church?" Almost everyone will agree that Jesus is the Head of His body, the Church, and that all authority has been given unto Him both in heaven and on earth. Since Jesus, however, is at the right hand of God, someone else is going to have to be making many minor decisions in the local congregation.

"Aye! There's the rub." Who does run the church? Is it the elders or the pastor? Is it the congregation or the "official board"? Is it a traveling evangelist or someone located in the community? Is it the men who think they run it, or their wives who meet on Tuesday to make quilts?

The Church is a Body.

At the very outset it must be remembered that the church of Jesus Christ is a body not a business. It is an "organism" more than it is an "organization." The body is not one member, but many. It is a team of individual members united together in Christ and specifically directed by Him. God is not the author of confusion, but of peace. When there is confusion in the body of Jesus Christ it is evident that some influence has been exerted which is diametrically opposed to God.

The presence of division in the Church at Corinth was therefore a matter of great concern to Paul. Even their regular meetings had become a negative influence so that they came "together, not for the better but for the worse" (I Corinthians 11:17). To correct this horrendous situation Paul reminded them that

"... there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all" (I Corinthians 12:4-6).

A body is composed of many members. Each has a different design and function so that we complement one another for the good of all. There are no vestigial organs in the body of Christ. Every member has a specific function to perform and was added to the body of Christ for a purpose.

A More Excellent Way

In the midst of this discussion about “gifts,” “administrations,” and “operations” Paul pauses to remind his readers about the priority of love. It is possible for a church to be endowed with all of the spiritual gifts and yet be characterized by confusion. Love is more important than angelic languages or prophetic mysteries. It is more relevant than miracle working faith or benevolent martyrdom. It is the divine catalyst which stimulates every member to function in harmony with Jesus and also with one another.

Love is patient, enabling us to wait on one another without murmuring.

Love is kind, that we might promote healing in the body.

Love is without envy, so that we can remain contented at our job.

Love is not boastful or proud, creating ill will and disharmony.

Love is not haughty, selfish, or rude, leading us to insult our brethren in Christ.

Love does not demand its own way and it is not irritable and touchy.

Love does not keep a record of wrongs or gloat over the errors of others.

Love leads us to be loyal to one another, to believe in one another, to expect the best of one another, and to put up with one another.

Love enables us to endure whatever comes.

A Multitude of Counselors

“For God so loved the world that He did not send a committee.”

Jesus did not choose one apostle to represent Him, he chose twelve. Every church in the Scriptures seemed to have a plurality of leaders. Antioch had five prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1). Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every church (Acts 14:23). Titus was instructed to ordain elders in every city (Titus 1:5). The church at Philippi had “bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1). The church at Jerusalem had elders (Acts 11:30), and the church at Ephesus had elders (Acts 20:17), etc.

The principle of the jury system is that when you multiply judgments, you reduce error. This seems to be in harmony with a statement in the Proverbs, “Where no counsel is, the

people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14).

These and other considerations have brought many to the ridiculous notion that the committee concept is "scriptural," and that to entrust one man with "authority" is both "unscriptural," and "unwise."

The extent of our error is epitomized by the caustic little comment, "For God so loved the world that He did not send a committee." A church that is cursed with the committee concept is doomed to be little. The whole idea is so utterly irrational that it only survives in the church because we have been brainwashed into believing that it is "scriptural."

Let us go back to the Proverbs and reconsider what it means to have a "multitude of counselors." First, we need to ask the most obvious and elementary questions: Who is speaking? to whom? and under what circumstances?

Solomon was responsible for most of the Proverbs, and he was a king. As a king he had unlimited authority. He could order his brother killed and an infant to be cut in half and no one could have prevented it. He had the power to marshall the entire nation for battle or to acquiesce to an enemy in unconditional surrender. Under such circumstances it was wise for the king to be surrounded by knowledgeable men. Before going to war he needed to have at his fingertips the latest intelligence information and the wise counsel of a variety of men who were experts in their various fields. Once advised, however, the decision was his. There is a difference between a "multitude of counselors" and a "multitude of voters." Solomon was not the president of a democracy or the head of a giant corporation . . . he was a king.

Individuals vs. Committees

We have five children in our family. Our youngest is separated from the other children by eight to fifteen years. It has been my experience that an individual took better care of him than a group. If I wanted him to be in bed at 9:00 I would assign that responsibility to only one brother or sister. Everybody's responsibility is often nobody's responsibility. It is difficult to reward, or to prosecute a group or a mob.

The same principle applies to the church. An individual may not be able to move a piano, but he can be responsible for having it moved. If the buck stops at his desk he can round up

enough manpower or equipment to get the job done. The committee, on the other hand, is unwieldy and indecisive by its very nature. Strong personalities often cancel one another's effectiveness, and domineering individuals sometimes use their committee as a cloak for personal vendettas.

It is not at all unscriptural to assign great responsibility to an individual. God did this to Moses, Joshua, and all the judges. It was His "modus operandi" in the age of the Hebrew prophets and it will still work today.

The concept is quite compatible with the plurality of leaders we observe in the New Testament Church. There is a difference, however, between having eleven men on a football team and in having eleven quarterbacks. This brings us back to where we began. The kingdom of Christ is not to be run like the Gentiles would run it. Greatness and authority are not to be conferred by titles and positions, but by ministry and service. One young minister said to me, "The elders of our church have all of the authority and no responsibility, and they have given to me all of the responsibility and no authority." This is precisely the kind of leadership which the Scriptures explicitly forbid.

In I Corinthians 12:28 and Scriptures teach that God placed "governments" in the church. The Greek word translated as "governments" is "kubernesis." It is the word used in Acts 27:11 of the man who steered a ship. The welfare of the ship and two hundred seventy-six souls were in his charge. When it was time to turn into the wind or weigh anchor, he did not have to call a board meeting, or ask for a show of hands from all the passengers. Steering such a vessel called for many decisive and immediate decisions and the captain's background and experience made him the logical one to make these judgments.

One reason why many modern churches do not need someone to exercise the governmental gift is that they aren't going anywhere. As long as the ship of Zion stays anchored in one place, you can afford to table matters until the next board meeting. Once you cut loose, however, and get on the move for God, you will see the immediate need of guidance and direction . . . and you may not have time to convene a committee.

Barnabas and Saul

“. . . The Holy Spirit said, 'separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them . . .'" (Acts 13:2)

There is something to be said for the disciples of Jesus working pairs. The Holy Spirit did not say just Barnabas, or just Saul, but Barnabas AND Saul. Jesus, you will recall, sometimes sent out His disciples "two by two." This would not prevent individuals like Timothy and Titus from receiving personal assignments all by themselves, but it does provide an interesting variation of the way the Holy Spirit works.

If power corrupts, then absolute power will corrupt absolutely. How aptly this was illustrated in the life of the late Jim Jones. This self-styled Messiah who spat on the Holy Bible obtained a tyrannical hold upon the minds of his followers. Like a malignant growth, this power so corrupted his mind that he came to believe that virtually everything was his to use or abuse at will. He did not believe that his followers had any rights to their money, their bodies, and ultimately even their lives. Over nine hundred individuals perished in a shocking murder, suicide fiasco in the jungles of Guyana.

Working in pairs may serve to mitigate some of the dangers of working alone. Like the two wires essential to completing an electrical circuit, two personalities may provide a positive and a negative approach which enable each to function at full capacity.

Diotrephes and the Nicolaitans

Diotrephes is distinguished in the Bible as a man who loved to have the preeminence (III John 9). He prated against the Apostles with malicious words and refused to receive the brethren. He cast out of the church whom he would and demonstrated by his behavior that he was not of God.

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans may have been associated with the conduct of Diotrephes. The word itself comes from *nikao* which means to conquer or overcome, and *laos* which means people. It literally signifies to conquer people.

Jesus came to serve, not to be served. Someone has compared Him to Alexander the Great by this stunning contrast. Alexander the Great conquered the world at thirty-three and it killed him. Jesus was killed by the world at thirty-three and He conquered it. The bottom line involves our relationship with people. Those who "lord it over" their fellow men will not be guiltless before God.

Conclusion

Who does run your church? Is it the pastor? the elders? the board? the congregation? Thus far we have sought to demonstrate that legalism does not help us to arrive at the proper conclusion and the question before us is again no exception.

Legalistically speaking, I think that I can present a better case for the authority of Paul as an apostle than you can for the authority of your pastor or your church board. Paul was an apostle of Christ and his credentials are quite impressive. Yet he did not use his authority to lord it over people. He "greatly desired" that Apollos journey to Corinth with the brethren. Apollos didn't do it! (I Corinthians 16:12) Without rancor or bitterness Paul simply remarked that ". . . he will come when he shall have convenient time . . ." To Philemon he preferred to appeal, rather than command regarding the beloved Onesimus, whom he begat in his bonds (Philemon 8-10). To the Thessalonians he was gentle like a nurse cherishing her children. He was so much in love with them that he was ready not only to impart the gospel but his own soul, because they were dear unto him (I Thessalonians 2:7-8). To the Corinthians he made the contrast between a father and a teacher. They could hire ten thousand instructors who would serve for a paycheck, but Paul loved them like a father. He pleaded with them to imitate this kind of love (I Corinthians 4:14-16).

Instead of sitting around pouting about your authority, may I suggest that you search for a basin and towel and begin to serve. The people on your block are lonely and desperate. They are like sheep without a shepherd. When they visit the gathering of believers they could not care less about "who runs the church" but they do care if you love one another.

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Ten

1. Why did the apostles of Jesus think that He was about to establish an earthly kingdom?
2. Did Jesus give to some apostles more authority than others?
3. Is Jesus great because of who He is, or what He did?
4. Why are committees so prevalent in American churches?
5. Would it be "unscriptural" for churches to function without committees?

6. To what does the word "governments" refer in I Corinthians 12:28?
7. How does pride sometimes prevent us from learning from people who are wiser than we are?
8. The disciples of Jesus were free to leave Him (John 6:67).
9. How do Christian people sometimes "lord it over" one another?
10. How can a church make the transition from an "authoritarian" leadership to a leadership based on "service"?

A Brief Review of Scripture

“One thing we learn from history is that people do not learn from history.”

In the previous lessons we have sought to represent “love” as an essential and prominent part of Christianity. If this thinking is correct, it should be reflected in the Christian Scriptures. A brief review is therefore in order.

The words of Jesus “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another” were spoken in the upper room the evening before His death. We shall therefore begin with the Book of Acts and continue to the Book of Revelation. Time and space will not permit us to tarry long in one place, but we encourage each student to search your own Bible to see if these things are so.

Acts

The word “love” is not found in the Book of Acts, yet the doctrine of love is much in evidence. It is here that we discover the amazing generosity of the Jerusalem Christians, selling their possessions and goods and distributing to all men as every man

had need (2:44-46; 4:34-35). Here we read of swift action by the church in dealing with discrimination and poverty (6:1-7); of Dorcas making coats and garments for the needy (9:36-39); and the Church in Antioch sending relief to the poor saints in Judea (11:27-30). Surely the world could see that these believers loved one another.

Romans

Rome was a melting pot of races, creeds, and nationalities. Racial and social differences sometimes place additional strain on personal relationships. Therefore, love between brethren would receive a severe testing in the crucible of the Roman Church. Note these verses:

“Kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love” 12:10

“Bless them which persecute you” 12:14

“Be of the same mind one toward another” 12:16

“Live peaceable with all men” 12:18

“Owe no man anything but to love one another for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law . . .” 13:8

The whole of the fourteenth chapter teaches against excluding a Christian brother over his opinions.

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification” 15:1-2

Re-read the whole section from Romans 12:1 — 16:27 from the vantage point of love and unity. Remember that those who cause divisions are to be marked and avoided because they serve not Jesus Christ but their own belly (16:17-18).

I Corinthians

The church at Corinth was plagued with an alarming number of serious problems. They had division, immorality, court hassles, marriage problems, difficulties over idolatry, the Lord's Supper, and spiritual gifts. Surely this was not the harmony for which Christ prayed. The divine antidote for the poison infecting the church was love. Chapter 13 exalts love to a place of prominence above all else and chapter 14 begins with an admonition to make love our aim.

II Corinthians

Love and interpersonal relationships are so essential to evangelism that Paul admonished the Corinthians to confirm

their love toward a man whom they had been forced to discipline (2:8). Two whole chapters are devoted to a relief offering for the poor saints in Judea (8 and 9) and their generosity to these poor Jews is considered as "subjection to the Gospel" (9:13).

Galatians

The Galatian letter is distinguished by the fact that it is without one word of commendation. After a few introductory remarks Paul launches into a denunciation of them for accepting a perversion of the gospel. Love is again given as a divine prescription for their problems. By love they were to become enslaved to one another (5:13). All the law is fulfilled in love (5:14). If they would "walk in the Spirit" they would experience the fruit of the Spirit (which is love) and they would not fulfill the lust of the flesh to bite and devour one another (5:16-22). Bearing one another's burdens is the fulfillment of the law of Christ (6:2).

Ephesians

The theme of the Ephesian letter is "unity" and love is an essential means to achieve that end. The letter was written from Rome, yet Paul had heard of their "love unto all the saints" (1:15). Their care for one another was not an irrelevant tangent, but an essential element of the gospel "rooting and grounding" them in their relationship with Christ and enabling them to experience all of the fulness of God (3:17-19). They were to forbear one another in love (4:2); speak the truth in love (4:15); edify one another in love (4:16); and walk in love as Christ also loved us (5:2).

The love of the husband for his wife, and the submission of the wife to the husband is used as an illustration of the way that believers are to be submitted to one another in the fear of God (5:21). The analogy has a specific application to Christ and the church (5:32).

Philippians

The church at Philippi was distinguished by its generosity to Paul. When he departed into Macedonia no church shared in his affliction by sending a gift but them. Even in Thessalonica they sent once and again unto his necessity (4:14-17). When Paul was sent to prison in Rome they dispatched a personal ambassador named Epaphroditus to minister to his wants (2:25).

From his Roman prison Paul prayed that their love would abound yet more and more in knowledge and judgment (1:9).

Euodias and Syntyche had a disagreement (4:2) and perhaps others in the church were at odds with one another (1:27 — 2:14). An emotional appeal with Christ as the example is used so that they might be "like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind . . ." (2:2).

Colossians

Paul had never been to Colossae (2:1) yet he had heard of their faith in Christ and love to all the saints (1:4). The recurring expression about "love to the saints" undoubtedly refers to social action in behalf of the poor and the needy.

A long list of Christian virtues is recommended in chapter three with the admonition to put love on top of them all because it is the bond of perfectness (3:14).

I Thessalonians

"Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love" (1:3)

"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men . . ." (3:12)

"But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia, but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more . . ." (4:9-10)

"But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love . . ." (5:8)

"Esteem them highly in love for their work's sake, and be at peace among yourselves . . ." (5:13)

II Thessalonians

"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth . . ." (1:3)

I & II Timothy and Titus

The reader is referred to chapter one for more details concerning these books which are designated as "pastoral epistles." Timothy and Titus were both urged to avoid argumentation and strife and to devote themselves to "sound" or healthy teaching.

This directly involved the relationships of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves. The end, or goal, of their teaching was love out of a pure heart (I Timothy 1:5).

Philemon

"I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints" (vs. 4-5)

"For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the hearts of the saints are refreshed by thee . . ." (vs. 7)

Hebrews

"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister . . ." (6:10)

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (10:24)

"Let brotherly love continue. Forget not to show love unto strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (13:1-2)

(Note - the command to love thy neighbor as thyself had a direct association with loving strangers - see Leviticus 19:33-34)

James

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (1:27)

"If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself . . ." (2:8)

"If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so, faith, if it hath not works is dead, being alone" (2:15-17)

"Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned" (5:9)

I Peter

"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1:22)

"Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king" (2:17)

"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren . . ." (3:8)

"And above all things have fervent love among yourselves: for love shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging" (4:8-9)

II Peter

". . . and to your brotherly kindness (add) love. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (1:7-8)

I John

There are over forty references to love in five short chapters. John who once was surnamed by Jesus "boanerges" or "Son of Thunder" came later to be known as the "apostle of Love." These few verses are representative of many others:

"Hereby perceive we the love of God because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath of this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and truth." (3:18)

II John

"I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we have from the beginning, that we love one another . . ." (4-5)

III John

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; Which have borne witness of thy love before the church . . ." (4-6)

Jude

"Mercy unto you, and peace, and love be multiplied" (vs. 2)

"These are spots in your feasts of charity" (vs. 12)

(Note - The early church had feasts of love to demonstrate their affection for one another in Christ.)

Revelation

"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love . . ." (2:4)

Christians First in Antioch

". . . and the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch . . ." (Acts 11:26)

The distinguishing characteristic of the Christian was love. Jesus taught, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

The Church in Jerusalem demonstrated a tremendous love for Jewish Christians, but not for Gentile Christians. It has been suggested that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch because it was the first integrated congregation in the world. It was the first group of believers who put into practice the lack of racial bias exemplified by Jesus. They were the first to "love one another" to the extent that Christ had intended. Not just people with whom they related because they had similar background and experience, but all people regardless of their background. The church in Antioch stands out in the spotlight of divine history as an honorable example for all. If we are to be called "Christian" we too should love all men as they did, and as Jesus did.

We have scanned the pages of New Testament Scripture and shown that love is an integral part of apostolic teaching. The Scriptures are strangely silent about attendance drives and contests. By this shall all men know that we are His disciples, if we have love one to another.

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Eleven

1. Were the New Testament Epistles written to Christians or non Christians?
2. What was the purpose of these letters?
3. Do we have any basic problems today which are not mentioned in the Scriptures?
4. If an inspired apostle were writing to your church, what do you think he would say?
5. "Fellowship" to us often means only "cookies and kool-aid." What did it mean to the Christians of the First Century?
6. There are many references in the Scriptures to "love for the saints." (Ephesians 1:15; Colossians 1:4; II Thessalonians 1:3; Philemon 5; etc.) What does this expression mean?

7. What does your church do that could be classified as "love for the saints"?
8. Name several areas of need among the saints which are not being met.
9. Which is more important, social justice or Christian unity?
10. Can a church be segregated and still be "Christian"?

Persecution

“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (II Timothy 3:12).

Jesus did not promise His disciples a life of luxury and ease. He sent them forth like sheep in the midst of wolves. He warned them of trouble in the synagogue, and persecution from city to city. He spoke of death at the hands of deluded men who would think they were doing God a service.

The source of this persecution is most interesting. It did not come from disgruntled publicans and harlots, or from corrupted political powers like Herod and Pilate. The source of the persecution, at least initially, was religious people. It came from those who professed an allegiance to Jehovah and a loyalty to the Scriptures. It came from those who read the Bible in the Synagogue and emblazoned it upon the doorposts of their homes. They committed its words to memory and placed its holy message in the borders of their garments. They laboriously counted the letters of every inspired word so that they might not inadvertently omit a single jot or tittle from the Law of God. They were scrupulous beyond our comprehension in their diligent attempts to study the Bible, and yet — paradoxically — they felt a “religious” compulsion to crucify the Author of the Bible.

The context of II Timothy 3:12 involves the persecutions which Paul received at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. This persecution came from fanatical Jews who thought they were serving Jehovah. This was the same element of society which persecuted Jesus . . . and which would also persecute Timothy. This is also the same mentality which will persecute all who dare to imitate the life-style of that lowly Carpenter who fraternized with the "wrong kind" of people.

A sheep does not have to be troublesome and provocative in order to be attacked by ravening wolves. It is the very nature of wolves to attack a sheep regardless of his behavior. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God. He is eternally kind, and understanding. He is the very personification of love. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Jesus did not have to change His nature in order to be persecuted. As a matter of fact, the more mercy He displayed, the more determined His enemies were to destroy Him.

God did not just love the Jews, He loved the whole world. When Jesus made reference to the care of God for Gentiles, His neighbors at Nazareth sought to cast Him headlong down a cliff (Luke 4:29).

People have always meant more to God than rules and regulations. The sabbath day was made for man, not vice versa. When Jesus healed a man on the sabbath day who had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years, the Jews sought the more to slay Him (John 5:16). In Galilee He healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath Day and they went out and held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him (Matthew 12:14).

I repeat that these were religious men who plotted the death of the Son of God. Their strong antagonism to Jesus was directly associated with their perverted approach to the Bible. Anyone who studies the Bible without a proper emphasis on love is liable to the same outrageous errors and inconsistencies. Pilate could find no fault in Him! The Jews, however, cried out: "We have a law and by our law He ought to die . . ." (John 19:8).

The point, again, is that persecution often comes from deeply religious people who think they are doing God service. When you dare to be like Jesus you are exposing yourself to danger. When you endeavor to imitate His love for all people, regardless of race, color, or denomination, you are a prime candidate for the proverbial "ax." Do not be surprised if the

people who wield that ax have a "testament" in their vest pocket or a purse full of "Biblical" tracts. Their antagonism to you may be nothing personal, but rather an act of religious devotion. They may not want to do it, but they feel that they have to. Those who put you to death, said Jesus, will think they are doing God service (John 16:2).

I suppose that there are certain dangers associated with the suggestion that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." It may create in some a "persecution complex." It may cause some of us to be accusing and offensive in our dealings with others. It could conceivably lead us into a life-style which is diametrically opposed to the genius of the Christian Spirit. But it is in the Bible, and for that reason it needs to be considered.

The Sermon on the Mount

The "Sermon on the Mount" should be studied in the context of Jewish legalism. Jesus did not come to destroy the law, but rather to fulfill it. He proposed a life-style which would transcend legalism. Legal concepts are fraught with controversy, but there is no argument against love. Love is the major doctrine in all the Bible, but in particular of the Sermon on the Mount. It is the very essence of all that God requires. The Biblical doctrine of love is not some weak and watered down philosophy which has no impact upon our lives, it is rather the most revolutionary concept in all the world. Those who dare to emulate the Jesus kind of love will find themselves enslaved to the victims of poverty and discrimination and in devout prayer for those who spit in their face and drive nails into their hands.

But note that the life-style of love and mercy is beset by persecution. Take, for example, the beatitudes. There seems to be a logical progression through the process of conversion and Christian maturity, to the place where we are persecuted for righteousness sake.

The beatitudes begin with the "poor in spirit" who "mourn" because of their own unrighteousness. They progress to "meekness" which means that they are teachable individuals who come to "hunger and thirst" after righteousness. Next they develop "mercy" and a "pure heart." Finally they strive to be "peacemakers" and to unite the divergent and divided peoples of earth. This is the proverbial straw which breaks the camel's back. The Jews could have tolerated Jesus and His disciples

if He would have only associated with the "right kind" of people. Acts 22:21-22 provides us with an interesting case in point. The Jewish people gave audience to Paul up to the very moment when He dared to mention the Gentiles. At that juncture the Scriptures record:

"And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices and said, away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live . . ." (Acts 22:22)

Therefore Jesus followed His remarks about "peacemakers" with a stern reminder about persecution:

". . . Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you . . ." (Matthew 5:9-12).

While our thoughts are focused on the Sermon on the Mount, note also the "Golden Rule" and the verses which immediately follow.

I am convinced that the "Golden Rule" of Matthew 7:12 is the "strait gate" and the "narrow way" of Matthew 7:13-14. Love is far more narrow and demanding than legalism. But note the next verses which warn of men that look like sheep but who have the inward nature of ravening wolves. Ravening wolves do not have mercy, and neither did the Scribes and the Pharisees. Their strong "religious" convictions seemed to preclude the possibility of showing mercy. Mercy and compassion were "weaknesses" to be avoided rather than virtues to be incorporated into their lives. They paid their tithes of mint, anise, and cummin, but omitted the "weightier" matters of the law.

It is to be profoundly regretted that mercy is not a major doctrine in the rank and file of evangelical Christianity.

The Example of Paul

Probably no one had a better insight into persecution than did Paul. He knew what it was to be a persecutor, and he also knew what it was to be persecuted.

It was his zeal for God which caused him to persecute Christians and try to compel them to blaspheme. The irreligious

and the indifferent could not care less, but Saul of Tarsus was super conscientious. This is why he was on his way to Damascus with authority to imprison and persecute the followers of Jesus.

His dramatic conversion on the Damascus Road brought about his own persecution. In Damascus he escaped from his enemies by being lowered over the wall in a basket. This was only the beginning of sorrows. In virtually every city where he went to preach Jesus he was persecuted. His persecution invariably came from those who had a legalistic approach to religion. How well he must have understood their point of view.

It would have been easy for Paul to avoid any contact with these who chased him from city to city. One might even expect him to develop a hate for the synagogues in which he had been beaten and abused so many times. It would have been natural for him to hang out with the Gentiles where he was loved and avoid the Jewish legalists who were responsible for so much torment and torture. Quite to the contrary. He continued to love the Jews and to pray for them which persecuted him. He believed that the gospel was to the "Jew first" and the synagogue was always the first place where he would preach. At a time when the Jews were plotting his death (Acts 20:3), he wrote to the Romans:

"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh . . ." (Romans 9:1-3).

Encouragement for Timothy

Some have assumed from I Corinthians 16:10 and other passages that Timothy may have had a problem with timidity and fear. Be that as it may, when Paul came down to the last mile of the road he wrote an impassioned letter to Timothy and suffering is a part of every chapter. Read again the epistle of II Timothy from this perspective.

Chapter 1 — Paul is in prison waiting to die, but is unswerving in his faith. He knows whom he has believed and is persuaded that He is able to keep that which he has committed unto Him against that day. Timothy is therefore encouraged to stir up the gift of God and to remember that God does not give us a spirit of timidity and fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Therefore Timothy is urged to be bold

and unashamed of Paul, and also to be a partaker of the affliction of the gospel. Additional reference is made to Paul's suffering, and Timothy is admonished to hold to sound doctrine in faith and love.

Chapter 2 — Timothy is to endure hardness as a good soldier, remembering that Jesus, though put to death in the flesh, was raised up by the power of God. Additional reference is made to Paul's suffering "enduring all things for the elect's sake" and a reminder that if "we suffer with him we shall also reign with him . . ."

Chapter 3 — Timothy was from the vicinity of Derbe and Lystra, and was no doubt an eyewitness of Paul's suffering in those cities. Timothy knew what it was to see leaders of the synagogue cast stones at a preacher of the gospel and drag his blood stained body out of the city and leave him for dead. Thus he wrote:

"But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, patience, persecutions, afflictions which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse . . ." (II Timothy 3:10-13).

Chapter 4 — Please remember that all Timothy had to do in order to incur the wrath of some people was to be like Paul. Remember also that Paul was simply trying to be like Jesus. Both Jesus and Paul went about doing good, and both were violently opposed by men who failed to see the love emphasis of the Scripture. Therefore, as Timothy was commissioned to "preach the word" he was also warned to "watch in all things," and to "endure afflictions." Paul is ready to die, and he is confident of his reward. Timothy is warned of Alexander who did Paul much harm and greatly withstood his words. He is reminded that when Paul came up for trial no man stood with him but all forsook him. Jesus, however, proved faithful and stood by him so that the Gentiles might hear the gospel.

Anyone who believes that the gospel is for all people and puts that doctrine into practice is a prime candidate for religious persecution just like Jesus and Paul.

Persecution Today

There is an old joke about the man who said, "If I ever have a brain transplant, or a heart transplant, I would like for the

donor to be a bigot." "Why?" someone said. "Well," he replied, "I would have a brain which had never been used, and a heart which had never had to suffer."

There was a time when religious men with a legalistic bias could nail Jesus upon a cross, and there is little doubt in my mind that their descendants could crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame. You will know these men by their fruits. Men do not gather grapes of thorns nor figs of thistles. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love . . . and men who are filled with love will stand out like lights in darkness. Like a city set upon a hill they cannot be hidden. Men without that Spirit may profess to protect the light, but their every effort to do so will only produce darkness.

The original participants in the crucifixion were intelligent and capable men who were the leaders of their nation. In spite of their mental acumen, and intelligence, however, they crucified the Son of God through ignorance (Acts 3:17). Paul was such a man. He excelled in everything he did, he even excelled in the persecution of Christians. In spite of his cruelty he suffered no pangs of conscience. The fact that God could save a legalist like Paul is used as evidence that God can save anybody:

"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners: of whom I am chief. Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." (I Timothy 1:15-16)

A Challenge to be Sheep

Violence has a tendency to beget more violence. Force seems to illicit a reaction which is equal and opposite. Sheep are nonviolent animals who are almost totally dependent upon their shepherd for survival. We are to be His people and the sheep of His pasture. The Lord is our Shepherd. He is our shield and defender. Vengeance belongs to Him, and He will repay. It is not necessary for us to punish the wicked, for God is the ultimate Judge and the executor of divine justice. He is perfectly capable of delivering the godly out of temptation and of reserving the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished. In nothing should we be terrified by our adversaries. Our calm assurance in the face of persecution will be a perennial reminder of our relationship with Jesus. It will be an evident token to our

enemies of their perdition and a constant goad against which it will be difficult for them to kick.

When Jesus made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, He was tottering upon the back of a little colt that had never been ridden before. He was the very picture of defenselessness. As strange as it might seem, however, this meek and submissive spirit is the secret of our victory. Our strategy is love . . . and by this shall all men come to know that we are His disciples.

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Twelve

1. Why did the Jews of the first century persecute Christ and His apostles?
2. Which is more important, tithing or mercy?
3. Did Jesus ever use force to make men follow Him?
4. Is the Sermon on the Mount a "new law"?
5. Should a parent "turn the other cheek" when smitten by his own child?
6. Is it wrong for police to carry guns and be violent?
7. What are some of the obstacles to Christian unity in our generation?
8. Why didn't Paul hate the Jews who persecuted him?
9. Do you know anyone today who is being persecuted for the cause of Christ?
10. Compare Christianity and communism. Which will triumph?

Simple Solutions

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your mind should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (II Corinthians 11:3).

Naaman was a leper. His physical condition had baffled medical science. No human doctor was capable of a healing prescription.

The Word of the Lord came to Naaman through Elisha the prophet:

“Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean” (II Kings 5:10).

The simplicity of this solution made it seem unsatisfactory to Naaman. The Scriptures record:

“But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper . . . so he turned and went away in a rage” (II Kings 5:11-12).

His servants came and reasoned with him:

“My father, if the prophet has bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, wash and be clean.” (II Kings 5:13)

Naaman hearkened to their advice, washed in the Jordan, and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child.

A Rotten World

We live in a rotten world. Not only have evil men waxed worse and worse, but their capacity to do evil has been greatly multiplied by the inventions of modern science. For the first time in the history of the world mankind has at his disposal the weapons and technology to annihilate the human race. Before the weeping eyes of angels the blood-stained juggernaut of war rumbles on over the bloated bodies of its victims. It siphons off the wealth of nations and leaves vast multitudes in ragged and wretched despair. It takes food from the mouths of starving babies to buy bombs and bullets with which to maim, and cripple, and destroy. It fans the flames of hatred and revenge to blacken the pages of history with atrocities beyond imagination. It promotes and perpetrates hostility and retaliation. It rapes the heart and robs the soul of virtue.

The sophisticated weapons of World War II have been systematically discarded as hopelessly out-of-date. The billions which we invested in this military hardware now slowly turns to rust in the thousands of acres consigned by our Government for the storage of surplus junk. In the meanwhile the monsters of starvation and vitamin deficiency stalk our starving world like ravening wolves. Twelve thousand people die every day of starvation and malnutrition and millions more are left blind and crippled and diseased.

But war is only one of the many problems in our world's great repertoire of wrongs. Besides it are multiplied woes without number and a million sufferings which defy description.

A Divided Church

In the midst of the carnage and confusion of a lost world is a divided and impotent church. No matter how you slice it the disciples of Jesus in the twentieth century are not distinguished by their love for one another. While three billion precious souls languish outside the saving grace of Jesus we convene our theological conclaves to debate the price of admission. While millions of hopeless men have never even heard of Jesus we marshal our forces to conjugate a difficult verb or split a theological hair. We have taken the sword of the Spirit which God intended for us to use on the devil and turned it into a weapon to cut and slash at our own brethren.

Those outside the framework of the Christian faith behold in us a babel of confusion. They watch with bewildered eyes as we wave sectarian flags and rally around the slogans and shibboleths of our own particular denomination. One visitor from Nepal told me that Americans worshipped many Gods. He arrived at this conclusion because he saw us pay homage at different shrines. His background caused him to believe that a different deity demanded a little different type of building and a different type of worship. I tried to explain that all denominations were trying to worship the same God but somehow I don't think that I ever quite convinced him. The longer I think about it the less I am able even to convince myself.

Simplicity in Christ

Paul warned the Corinthians that the devil through his subtility may corrupt them from the simplicity that is in Christ. Two Greek words are of particular interest in this verse.

The word "subtility" is from the Greek word "panourgia." The word "pan" means "all," and the word "ergon" means "work." The word "panourgia" therefore literally means "all working." In other words the devil will do anything to make us depart from the simplicity that is in Christ. He is totally without scruples and the moment we think we understand how we will act we betray an ignorance of his treachery.

The word "simplicity" is from the Greek "haplous" which means to be "single" or "simple" in contrast with "diplous" which means double.

The immediate application of this verse involved corrupted teachers who sought to take advantage of the Corinthian church. They were like "hucksters" hawking their wares at a market of religious ideas (II Corinthians 2:17). They were "false apostles, deceitful workers . . . transformed as the ministers of righteousness . . ." (II Corinthians 11:13). They lacked the simple straightforward integrity to adhere to principle but were characterized by duplicity as they slithered around the issues and sought to project the proper image. Rivers are crooked because they take the easy way around every obstacle, and people get crooked in the same way.

The word "simplicity" is also used to describe the generosity of the Macedonians and the Corinthians. In II Corinthians 8:2 it is translated as "liberality"; in 9:11 as "bountifulness";

and in 9:13 as "liberal." It refers to an unswerving and single-hearted devotion which prompted these Christians to give more than they could afford to give. The Macedonians were in deep poverty but their blind and unswerving trust in Jesus prompted them to give "beyond themselves." Their abject poverty made it necessary for them to urge Paul with "much entreaty" for him to even receive their generous gift.

This then, is the simplicity which Paul feared would be corrupted. Once you find someone with the integrity and faith to put God first regardless of the circumstances, you begin to wonder how long it will be before some smooth talker comes along and beguiles him into a more conventional approach to Christianity. Many a radiant witness has been tarnished by duplicity and obscured by the "broadening" influence of those who question the wisdom of taking Christ literally.

A Sad Letter

Some months ago I received in the mail a series of sad statistics. 5,500 congregations had only shown a net increase in membership of 5,373 in a six year period of time. A disastrous shortage of preachers was much in evidence and churches were folding as fast as others were being started. Of twenty-one area churches involved in a Bible School Contest only three showed a greater attendance than the year before. One out of every four priests was said to be leaving the priesthood and one out of every eight protestant ministers was said to be quitting the ministry.

The letter concluded with this quotation:

"We have several discouraged preachers, puzzled elders, confused deacons, many searching for answers and many wondering what we are doing? Are we getting anywhere? Where are we going? Many of us feel that we have been in a rut for years without facing the issue."

My response to the letter was straightforward and simple. If the brethren referred to in that letter are not known for their love toward one another perhaps we have put our finger upon the problem.

Regardless of your own personal views about love, it cannot be denied that love was of paramount importance to Jesus. When asked about the greatest commandment in the Bible He responded that it was to love God with all the heart, mind,

soul, and strength. He then continued that the next most important commandment in all the Bible was to love your neighbor as yourself. His final instructions to His disciples informed them that all men would know of their relationship to Him if they would only love one another. But alas! Such a solution is too simple for many to accept!

A Sad Story

One of the saddest stories I have ever read was about the life of Dr. Ignax Phillip Semmelweis. He was born in 1818 and died in 1865. The following facts were taken from his biography, *The Cry and the Covenant* by Morton Thompson.

Dr. Semmelweis is said to have done more for the mothers of this world than any man since Jesus Christ. He was the first man in history to make an accurate association between physical contamination and childbed fever.

In that age of ignorance, a doctor began his daily routine by going to the morgue and dissecting the bodies of people who had died within the preceding twenty-four hours. Then, without ever washing his hands, he would proceed to the hospital and make pelvic examinations upon expectant mothers. One out of every six women died in childbirth.

Dr. Semmelweis began to associate these examinations with the fatal infections of puerperal fever. He brought in basins of a chlorine solution and demanded that doctors wash before and after every examination. The death statistics dramatically improved but Dr. Semmelweis lost his job and his wash basins were discarded.

He moved to Budapest and again instituted the practice of making doctors wash their hands. Again he lost his job and his colleagues laughed him to scorn.

He opened a clinic of his own and in eleven years 8,537 babies were delivered with the loss of only 184 mothers. He incorporated these statistics into a book entitled *The Etiology, the Concept and the Propylaxis of Childbed Fever*. He spent the prime and vigor of his days debating the issue and answering objections with statistical evidence. Virtually no one believed him!

On June 15, 1848 he delivered these words to a medical society in Europe:

“I have now shown on three occasions before this body, that puerperal fever is caused by decomposed material conveyed to a wound. I have shown that it is a pyemia, a pus in the blood. I have shown that a man can infect a woman with this pyemia and that a man can infect another man with it — for so Kolletschka

died. I have shown that it can arise after surgery as well as after childbirth and in the non-pregnant as well as the pregnant. I have shown that it can be prevented. I have shown how it can be prevented. I have proved all that I have said with facts, with records, with laboratory experiments, and with human beings. I have talked a great deal. But while we talk and talk, gentlemen, women are dying. And doctors are killing them. There is no lying-in hospital where women are not dying of childbed fever. And their children with them. And we talk, gentlemen. We talk and talk and talk. And it is not necessary to talk. I am not asking anything world shaking. I am asking you only to wash. In the name of pity — stop the murder of mothers, gentlemen. Wash your hands. Wash everything that contacts a patient. Stop this murder. For God's sake wash your hands."

They did not believe him! In desperation he printed handbills and passed them out like a madman upon the streets. Before they led him away to an asylum he rushed into the dissecting room and slashed his own finger and rubbed the open wound in the abdominal cavity of a bloated corpse. He died in the asylum at the age of 47. His hand had almost rotted off and the death rattle of a thousand women was ringing in his ears. His son Bela committed suicide at the age of 25 because he despaired that no one would believe his father.

Before his death Dr. Semmelweis penned these memorable words to humanity:

"When I with my present conviction look back upon the past, I can only dispel the sadness which falls upon me by gazing into the happy Future when where the lying-in hospitals, and also outside of them, throughout the whole world, childbed fever will be no more . . .

But if it is not vouchsafed me to look upon that happy time with my own eyes, from which misfortune may God preserve me, the conviction that such a time must inevitably sooner or later arrive will cheer my dying hour."

Conclusion

It is with profound regret that I admit the many fallacies and imperfections of this documentary on love. Others who are better organized and more incisive will no doubt present the case with greater force and clarity. I can only say that I have tried. These words are penned with the prayer that the Blessed Holy Spirit will magnify this meager effort into a monument

of praise to the cause of Christ and hasten the day when men will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. If it is not vouchsafed me to look upon that happy time with my own eyes, from which misfortune may God preserve me, the conviction that such a time must inevitably sooner or later arrive will cheer my dying hour.

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (The words of Jesus Christ as recorded in John 13:35)

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Thirteen

1. Would Christianity have made greater progress if Christ had chosen highly educated men as apostles instead of peasant folk who were considered “unlearned and ignorant”?
2. How does satan blind the minds of unbelievers? (II Corinthians 4:4)
3. Is the world getting better or worse? Why?
4. What influences in our modern world hinder a proper emphasis upon brotherly love?
5. Who would object if all Christians suddenly began to love one another as Christ commanded?
6. How should one begin a personal campaign to love the brotherhood?
7. If you should die today what would your relatives and friends remember as the major emphasis of your life?