

What are you anyhow . . . Some sort of a nut?

Whatdayamean you can't live the Christian life. Did you think that crosses were just to sing about? Did you think that enlisting in the army of Jesus was the end of the battle instead of the beginning? Are you so dumb that you thought the devil would roll over and play dead the minute you stepped out of the baptistry and hollered "Hallelujah"? You gotta be some sort of a nut!

Of course you're having trouble . . . Jesus did too! Of course you stumble and make mistakes . . . Peter did too! Of course you face discouraging situations . . . so did Paul! Anybody with one eye and half sense knows that. In a way you ought to expect a few hardships. You are something else!

Why in the world do you complain about the church? Are you so dense and adlebrained that you expected people to correct a lifetime of bad habits in a few days? Don't you know anything about the Bible? If churches didn't have problems, we wouldn't even need the Bible. Churches and people always have . . . and always will have problems. That's the reason the Bible was written! You've gotta be putt'n me on. Nobody is that stupid!

Maybe you thought they'd pass our purple hearts in boot camp? Maybe you dreamed of heroism Holly style . . . with no pain, bloodshed, or fatigue? Maybe you thought the enemy would be a gentleman who would fight fair and close up shop at 5:00. Amigo mio . . . you are outa sight!

Why don't you just calm down and clean out a few of those cobwebs? Go ahead! Give it a try! Thinking isn't all that painful. Think about this. Jesus once sent his disciples in search of a donkey. If anyone questioned what they were doing, they were to reply: "The Lord has need of him!" Now if the Lord could use one jack-ass maybe

there's hope for you. God has a way of using the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. Moses was tongue-tied ((Ex. 4:10.) Elijah was suicidal (I Ki. 19:4.) Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all liars (Gen. 12:13; 26:7; 27:24.) Jonah was a racist who couldn't even be stomached by a self respecting sea monster (Jonah 4:2.) James and John were hotheads who were styled by Jesus as "Sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17.) Paul was a cripple, described by his enemies as weak in body and contemptible in speech (II Cor. 10:10.) Every man that God has ever used has been sinful and imperfect. That's the only kind of men there are! He did not use them because they were sinners, but in spite of it. So . . . hang on friend! If God could make a preacher out of Moses, and an apostle of love out of a flannel mouth like John . . . just maybe He can produce a "vessel of honor" out of a slop bucket like you!

Don't tell me you can't go on! Don't tell me you have to give up! I know better! God has promised that He would never tempt you above what you were able to endure (I Cor. 10:13.) There's no reason for you to stick your neck in the coward's noose like Judas. God determined a time for you to be born without your help, and He can do the same for the time of your death. Mind your own business!

The secret of the Christian life is power. Not yours, but His! His power is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think (Eph. 3:20.) His power can put to death the deeds of the body and replace them with the fruit of the Spirit. Don't retreat when the first mortar explodes! Don't head for the showers in the fourth inning! Don't toss in the towel when Jesus is in your corner with divine instructions to fight another round!

The crown of life is not for those who start the race, but for those who finish it. The victory is for those are faithful until death. As long as you've got to die anyhow, why not die with your armor bucked on and your face toward the heavenly Jerusalem? Why not turn your wish bone into a back bone? Quit whining like a baby and put

some starch in your upper lip!

Jesus has promised never to leave you or forsake you. Help is only a prayer away! Sure I'm optimistic . . . even over a nut like you!

Camel Cuisine

Pierre Bordeaux was a master chef without equal. His utter dominance in the field of culinary art was without question. He had been born in Paris and was privileged to study under the tutelage of those privy to the secret recipes of French royalty. He had also served in the French Foreign Legion in North Africa. It was here he gained access to the gourmet delights of the Arab Sheiks and perfected his specialty in the preparation of Camel Cuisine.

It was a secret recipe, guarded so closely that even his most trusted assistants were not permitted to know the intricate details.

Well, when our church decided to hire Pierre to fix his specialty, I just knew it was going to be the most exciting and spiritual thing we had ever done. The Baptist preacher down the street made the fourth page of the daily paper when he sat on the church steeple and ate fried chicken. The Nazarenes got press coverage when their parsonage burned. The Catholics made the news when the Sisters of Mercy demanded the death penalty. I was confident, however, that nothing in our town could equal camel cuisine for 276 people, especially prepared for us by Pierre Bordeaux himself.

When I contacted Bordeaux's booking agent, I was amazed to discover that his fee was only \$1,750. Naturally, we would have been happy to pay much more than that, because of the kind of crowd we knew he would draw. This enabled us to mark down the tickets to only \$50 a plate. But to the clientele we were targeting, \$50 was chicken feed. Camel cuisine was definitely the type of food for the "Country Club" folks would enjoy. And that's the group of people we really wanted to reach for Jesus.

Our cost breakdown went like this. Chef's fee - \$1,750. With a little talking we were able to avoid hiring any of the assistants and were able to get by with volunteer

help. \$712.16 for his round trip ticket from Chicago. \$176.14 for the hotel (two nights.) \$1,217.43 to the Bismark Importers, Intl for camel steaks. \$74.18 to Brady Liquors for cooking wine (purchased, of course, through a third party.) \$228.98 for assorted vegetables and twenty-six loaves of Arabian bean bread. The grand total was only \$4,158.89. If we sold all 276 tickets at \$50 each, we would realize a profit of \$9,641.11. (Not counting the advertising, printing of the meal tickets, speaker's fee, etc.)

Well, I wish you could have seen Pierre. Somebody made the snide remark that his face looked like a claw hammer. This crude remark only revealed their own ineptness in the manifestation of discriminating taste. Bordeaux had class! You could tell it by the way he held his cigar. In fact, he wore his hooked nose like a badge of honor. Augmented by the mystique of his moustache and a uniform as white as the fresh fallen snow, he seemed to me like an angel from heaven.

We made arrangements for six capable volunteers. Three were women who were middle-aged and matronly. Each must have tipped the scales at over 250. Their size and demeanor convinced us that each one of them could hold their own in the kitchen. Next, we found a retired custodian from the local school district. He could peel a potato 45 seconds flat despite his arthritis and impaired vision. Finally, we had to fill in with a couple of teenagers. It was Mabel Swartz, and her boy friend, Edgar. The fact that Mabel had a runny nose and Edgar was afflicted with what some would call "terminal acne," did not dissuade us from the utmost confidence that we had a team which could cook a camel with the best of them.;

The week before the banquet we had to face the stark realization that everything was not going as planned. Since we had booked Bordeaux three months in advance, we had no way of knowing that the night we chose was in direct conflict with two major football games and a dog race.

At any rate, we prayed about it for a full fifteen

minutes and concluded that once we had put our hand to the plow, we should not look back.

Two days before "B Day," we had only sold 19 tickets, and none of them were purchased by the people we really wanted to impress. It was then that we realized the necessity of an advertising blitzkrieg.

We xeroxed 3,000 brochures about the banquet and dropped the price to \$25. (Naturally, we had to give refunds to those who had already bought their tickets for the regular price.) I must say it was a pretty sharp brochure too. The local art teacher drew the camel at no charge and everything. We got Shorty McDermitt to fly over the town in his Piper Cub and dump our brochures out the window. 3,000 brochures at 3,000 feet seemed pretty Biblical to us. Have you ever noted how many times the number "3" is found in the Bible? We thought about 7,000 brochures at 7,000

feet, but opted for the former as being more cost effective.

The night of the banquet we had sold 72 tickets for \$25 each which brought in \$1,800. We gave out 36 complimentary tickets to key people in the community we wanted to impress. At the last minute we offered tickets at the door for \$9.95 and got thirteen more people.

To say the least, the financial picture was not too bright. Our estimated cost of \$4,158.89 was a bit too low. One major factor was the fact that Shorty got fined \$750 by the F.A.A. for the unauthorized dropping of objects from his airplane. We wound up with assets of \$1,929.35 and a debit of \$4,908.89. (We payed for advertising, etc. out of the General Fund.) This left us \$2,980.54 in the hole.

You will be happy to know, however, that the entire indebtedness was erased at the next board meeting. We took \$1,500 from the Haitian Refugee Fund, \$1,000 that had been designated for Bangladesh, and the rest out of next year's evangelistic fund. Several balked about this food for the hungry thing, but everybody felt comfortable about using our evangelism money. Evangelism, you know, is what this whole Camel Cuisine thing was all about.

If you hear anybody criticize us about this banquet, you be sure and tell them that in the interest of spiritual integrity and good stewardship, we swallowed the whole camel.

Throngers and Touchers

The headlines of ancient Palestine were dominated by Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He was not only famous in Palestine, but in other countries as well. The whole country of the Gadarenes, for example, resounded with the testimony of transformed demoniacs who published the great things which Jesus had done for them. The Scriptures teach: "His fame went throughout all Syria . . . and multitudes followed Him from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond Jordan" (Matt. 4:24-25.)

Wherever Jesus went, as you know, He was thronged by the multitudes. They stayed with Him for days without having anything to eat. They lined the shores "en masse" to hear Him speak. They packed houses, ripped up roofs, climbed trees, and "trode one upon another," just to be near Him. He had no leisure and was often forced to leave by night, or flee in a ship to escape the surging multitudes who clamored for a glimpse of Deity.

In Capernaum a strange thing happened, however, which probes our intellect and causes us to examine our own relationship with Jesus. As the multitudes thronged about Him, an invalid woman stretched out her feeble hand and touched the border of His garment. Jesus immediately stopped and demanded, "who touched me?" The disciples were bewildered by such a question. Peter and the others said, "Master, the multitudes throng Thee, and press Thee . . ." It seemed absurd to ask who touched Him, when it seemed that everybody was touching Him.

Sometimes, however, the things which seem absurd to us, provide dazzling insights into the world of the Spirit. At last, the precious soul came forward and confessed the "touch," which thrilled her soul and transformed her life forever.

For twelve long years this woman had suffered from an infirmity of the flesh. She had spent all of her living on

physicians, but was made no better. In desperation and despair she joined the crowd at Capernaum.

The crowd was a strange mixture of the coarse and curious, and the pious and devout. It was a melting pot of mingled emotions about Jesus. There were the Apostles who had left all to serve Him. There were the Pharisees who sought to kill Him. There was Jairus, waiting impatiently for Jesus to heal his daughter. There were the rich and the poor, the master and the slave, the young and the old. In the midst of this rabble the camera of inspiration focuses our attention on a penniless cripple. She emerges into the light of Bible history a single time. She appears with neither name or face to find a place in divine history. Her "issue of blood" rendered her unclean. She was prohibited by Mosaic Law from contact with others. Yet, while the multitudes thronged Jesus, she touched Him. She dared to do that which Moses had forbidden. Her sterling faith transcended the noise and confusion of the careless multitude. She saw through the clouds of pessimism and doubt and dared to dream of a bright new tomorrow. While others thronged, she touched. She stretched out her hand into the spotlight of eternal fame. She only touched the border of His garment, but in doing so she blazed a trail through jungles of doubt for the rest of us to follow

The multitudes rubbed shoulders with Deity and remained unchanged. They saw what she saw, but in a different light. They heard what she heard but in a different way. They touched what she touched, but none of His healing power coursed through their bodies or transformed their lives.

How tragic it is to extrapolate this story to our own generation. Thousands throng to church without the faintest idea that the power of Jesus can transform their lives. They sing the songs, and say the prayers, and go away unchanged. They grimace when the choir is off key, and frown at our watch when the sermon is too long. They honor Christ with their words, but their hearts are far from

Him.

One problem with the crowd in Capernaum, is that they were waiting to see what Jesus would do with the daughter of Jairus. This ruler of the synagogue had come to Christ for help. His daughter was at the point of death.

Jesus began the journey and their curiosity about her obscured the reality of what He could do for them.

The heroine of our story, however, was an exception. She stepped out of the grandstands into the arena. She was not content to be a spectator and find out what Christ would do for someone else, she risked everything to see what Jesus would do for her.

What about you? Are you a thronger, or a toucher? Are you willing to risk all to hear Him say: "Thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace."

Dollars and Noses

Several years ago some words were spoken to me that have weighed heavily upon my heart. They were spoken by a missionary. He was a man with years of experience in a foreign country. He did not speak these words in bitterness, but with a sad resignation. He said: "Sometimes I think that all our brotherhood is interested in is dollars and noses."

At first, it is rather easy to dismiss this statement as sour grapes that do not merit further consideration.. Those who are critical of numbers invariably have no numbers to be critical about. Did not Luke record the number of conversions at Pentecost? Did he not remind us when the number of disciples grew to five thousand men? Does not God even number the hairs of our head? Certainly God would be less than pleased if His people handled finance carelessly. Surely He would not hold us guiltless if we neglected even one precious lamb who had strayed from the fold. Yes, there is a sense in which numbers are definitely important to God!

After reflecting upon his words, however, I am convinced that there is also another side to the question. From another vantage point, it seems there is ample justification for concern. There is nothing wrong with attending meetings and giving money, but true Christianity ultimately involves something much deeper than this. God cares about much more than dollars and noses.

The problem may well be a problem of emphasis. Jesus accused the Pharisees of paying their tithes, but neglecting the "weightier matters of the Law" (Matt. 23:23.) Is it possible that our emphasis on attendance has caused us to do the same? When inquiring about a church, our first question is quite often: "How many did you have?" It is remarkable that such a question was never asked in Scripture. The Apostles never asked a congregation how many they had in attendance. Evidently, these inspired

men thought differently than we think.

Consider the church at Sardis. They had a name that they were alive, but God considered them to be dead (Rev. 3:1.) There may have been many in attendance, but only a few in Sardis had not defiled their garments and were worthy to walk with Jesus in white. A similar situation faced the church at Laodicea. They considered themselves to be rich, increased with goods, and in need of nothing (Rev. 3:17.) In the eyes of God, however, they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. They were, as you know, neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. If God still vomits the lukewarm out of His mouth, some of our biggest churches may be in big trouble.

Someone has observed that God is in the Remnant Business. In every age the majority of people have bowed the knee to Baal or kissed some pagan image. In times like this, however, there has always been a remnant that was true. Remember, the way that leads to life is straight and narrow, and only a few will find it.

The "numbers game" is particularly important to missionaries. If they return from the field with glowing reports of great numbers, their support is much more easily obtained. If only a "few" converts are reported, the going may get tough. I have heard that some have even stooped to paying "converts" a stipend to be baptized. If this is true, surely it must make the angels weep instead of rejoice.

A similar situation, however, is also a stateside reality. The pastor with a "track record" of church growth and black ink will usually be in great demand. He can climb the corporate ladder to bigger churches and higher salaries. The fervor of competition has caused some to abandon principle and become "hucksters." This is something which Paul specifically said he would not do (II Cor. 2:17.)

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. If there are ninety nine in the fold, and only one who is lost, He will search for the lost lamb until He finds it. Not once, however, did Jesus permit the pursuit of popularity to alter His preaching

or change the priorities of God. There was a time when the multitudes came to Jesus and tried to force Him to become a king (John 6:15.) A short time later, many of these same disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Jesus never changed His message, or His ministry to please men. Instead of watering down His message, Jesus asked the Twelve if they wanted to leave too. Satan offered Jesus all the Kingdoms of this world and the glory that goes along with them. Jesus, as you know, refused that temptation and reminded the evil one that we are to worship the Lord our God, and Him only shall we serve.

May the emphasis of your life be to please God and accomplish His will, and not focus on dollars and noses.

Be Ye Doers

America is fast becoming a nation of spectators. Our specialized society leads us to develop only a few talents and abilities. When we cannot participate in that which is our speciality, we stand on the sidelines and watch.

There was a time when Americans developed many skills. Most everyone was a "jack of all trades." The housewife was also nurse, midwife, harvest hand, tailor, butcher, baker, and candlestick maker. She not only raised and cared for her children, but manufactured many items which we buy, and solved many problems which we leave to the experts.

The husband and father was also farmer, mechanic, inventor, carpenter, cobbler,, veterinarian, athlete, and musician. He was not happy unless he was personally involved in the activities around him. Even while "resting" from the burden of his work our forefathers would often have contests to see who could throw the furthest, jump the highest, or lift the most weight.

Our ancestors were not content to be spectators. They wanted to see how fast they could run, or how loud they could holler. Frequently neighbors would congregate around the family piano with a wide variety of instruments. They often would sing and play until the wee hours of the morning. We should charitably note that their efforts were usually less than professional. Yet, each time they participated, they improved. We learn by doing. Exercise helps us to grow proficient and strong.

Today, the picture is radically different. Only the most energetic fill the bleachers as spectators. The rest stay home on the couch. Someone has observed that football is twenty two men in desperate need of rest, and 22,000 in desperate need of exercise. This is the age of the spectator. We leave athletes, and almost everything else, to the experts. We will watch and pay the carpenter

and mechanic. We will pay and watch the musician and the athlete.

It is impossible to understand the modern American without television. It was turned on in the hospital on the day he was born. It will probably be on in the I.C.U. on the day that of his death. The years in between are filled with many hours of television every week. Our meager efforts pale into insignificance by comparison with what we see on television. The most beautiful and talented people on earth perform for us at the push of a button. When some difficult and dangerous feat is performed, the announcer will warn, "Please don't try this at home!" Usually the warning is totally unnecessary. We are not doers, we are hearers and watchers.

It is interesting that such a modern problem is addressed in Scripture. James warned: **Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves (Ja. 1:22.)**

In this passage, spectators are compared to a man who looks in the mirror, and forgets what manner of man he saw. Spectators quite often deny the reality of their own ineptness. We shout insults when someone in the arena makes a mistake. We would do better than that, we tell ourselves. But such thinking is an exercise in self deception. The mirror tells us the truth, but we quickly forget what we see and suffer delusions of our own grandeur.

The spectator syndrome is particularly to be regretted in the church. God gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teaching pastors to perfect the saints for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12.) In the early church everyone exerted an effort to exhort, but today everyone must be exhorted to exert an effort.

By one Spirit all we all baptized into one Body (I Cor. 12:13.) Every Christian is a member of Christ's Body. When a member of His Body does not function, Christ is to some extent handicapped.

Please don't handicap the Body of Christ. Let His

Spirit fill you with power to DO exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think. Be ye DOERS, and not hearers only!

By Comparison

“ . . . They measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (II Cor. 10:12.)

By comparison with an elephant an ant is very small. The ant, however, is big in comparison to an atom and the elephant is small in comparison to a tree. Even a mountain can be either big or small, depending upon your frame of reference. The earth is big by comparison with the moon, but small by comparison with the sun. The sun, which is a million times larger than the earth, is small by comparison with other stars. By comparison, anyone can be either big or small, strong or weak.

It is not at all uncommon for various churches and denominations to advertise themselves by “comparison” with others. We are the biggest church in town, for example, or the fastest growing denomination in the state.

If you are not the biggest church in town, or the fastest growing denomination in the state, please do not despair. With a little creativity you can still salvage some self esteem. You can be the church with the biggest youth group, or the best missionary program, or perhaps more programs than any other church in town.

If your church does not excel in any of these areas, select a smaller frame of reference. For example, you might say, “our church is the biggest and best north of the tracks”, or “we have the most evangelistic church west of the river.”

Most of our comparisons prove more about our own insecurity than anything else. No inspired apostle or prophet ever tried to recruit followers by comparing the number of their followers with those of a pagan cult or heresy. Those who tried to do so were deemed to be unwise.

Here is the way that J. B. Phillips renders Paul's denunciation of false brethren at Corinth. ***"Of course, we shouldn't dare include ourselves in the same class as those who write their own testimonials, or even to compare ourselves with them! All they are doing, of course, is to measure themselves by their own standards or by comparison within their own circle, and that doesn't make for accurate estimations, you may be sure (II Cor. 10:12.)"***

The ancient Pharisees felt the need of man's approval. They prayed to be seen of men. They sounded the trumpet when they did alms so that men would be aware of their generosity. They sought out the chief seats in the synagogue and loved to be called Rabbi in the marketplace. They felt quite righteous by comparison with publicans and sinners. There was, however, a fatal flaw in their theology. God would be their Judge, not man! They justified themselves but were ignorant of that true righteousness which comes from God. The publicans and harlots which they condemned, would ultimately enter into the Kingdom before they would.

Modern Christians may be more like the Pharisees than we care to admit. It bothers us when our church is not as big as someone else's. To solicit the praise of men we arrange our fig leaves and then make some prideful announcement.

By comparison with Jesus, none of us has a right to brag about anything. Isn't it time that we quit focusing on ourselves and concentrated on the glorification of Christ. Jesus said that he who speaks of himself seeks his own glory (John 7:18.) Let's forget our foolish comparisons and say with John the Baptist: **"He must increase, but I must decrease"** (John 3:30.)

The Pearl Handled Plow

There was a certain farmer, who with his oxen, sought to till the vast countryside. He labored long and hard, but was limited each day to a very small amount of progress. He thought within himself, saying, "What shall I do? My barns are nearly empty and the weeds grow faster than the grain."

And it came to pass by reason of time that three friends came by. The first said, "The people of the city must be trained to help. If each person had his own oxen, and his own plow, the countryside could all be tilled."

The second friend said: "You must buy a tractor. A tractor can do much more work than oxen. If you will buy a tractor, then the whole countryside can be tilled."

The third friend, however, said, "Sell all that you have and buy a pearl handled plow."

Now the farmer was a Christian. The words of the third friend reminded him of the words of Jesus. He seemed to remember something from the Bible that sounded almost the same.

The farmer did not study the Bible to see if it was so, but nonetheless, sold all that he had and bought a pearl handled plow.

That is why the countryside has never been tilled!

Want To?

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:17.)

This interesting verse is exactly the opposite of the way we would like for it to be. Most of us would like to be certain just exactly what God's will is . . . THEN we will decide whether to obey it or not. Jesus put it the other way around.

J. B. Phillips translates the verse like this: **“If anyone wants to do God's will, he will know whether my teaching is from God or whether I merely speak on my own authority.”**

Using this text as a key to interpret and diagnose the religious ills that plague our modern world, we are forced to the conclusion that our hesitancy and reluctance are due, not to a lack of knowledge, but to a lack of desire.

This reminds me of the old story about a farmer who was encouraged by his neighbors to go to college and study agriculture. He responded: “What for? Already I ain't farm'n as good as I know how to.”

In a similar way we have lots of folks who need their “want to” worked on more than they need a college degree. Already we know more than we are willing to do. Our problems stem from the heart, and not from the head. Taking notes at some convention won't help most of us one bit. We didn't even do anything with the notes we took last year. Our heads are full and our hearts are empty. We can parrot the plan of salvation, but we still haven't won anybody to Christ. We can recite many reasons why the Lord's Supper should be spread every week, but that doesn't mean that we will be there. We may “believe” that immersion is the correct form of Bible baptism, but the thought of actually baptizing someone never seriously enters our mind.

Our churches are full of people who stepped into the baptistry over bridges they refuse to burn. Like the inhabitants of ancient Israel we “fear the Lord,” but “serve our own gods” (II Kings 17:33.) We pay our dues and attend when it is convenient but are careful to avoid any sacrificial commitment to Christ. No wonder we’re not quite sure about the doctrine of God.

Those who really “want to” do the will of God are not difficult to find. They radiate confidence like a beacon. No one has to argue them into a Sunday School class or pressure them to pray. No one has to beg them to read the Bible or share their wealth with a world in need. The WANT TO do the will of God. Consequently, they do what they want! Desire finds a way while indifference finds an excuse. Desire makes the call while indifference turns on the TV. Desire searches the Scripture while indifference reaches for the evening paper. Desire calls out to God in prayer while indifference snores through the storm like Jonah. Desire digs deep and does without while self serving indifference gives God the scraps.

Desire is the secret of the transformed life. It is the elixir which explains the new creature in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are not to be CONformed to the world, but TRANSFORMED by the “renewing of our mind” (Rom. 12:2.) The Bible word for repentance literally signifies to “change the mind.” When a man repents, he comes to God with a broken and contrite heart. His shattered will is surrendered to Jesus. Old things are passed away and everything becomes new. The Holy Spirit plants seeds in the fertile soil of that surrendered heart and His glorious “fruit” is seen by all.

THIS IS THE DOCTRINE OF GOD, AND YOU CAN
KNOW THAT IT IS,
IF YOU WANT TO!

A New Kind of Honesty

The story is told of a dual track meet between the United States and China. In this particular instance, the U.S. won. When the Chinese reported the event the headlines read: "CHINA SECOND - U.S.A. SECOND FROM LAST." I suppose there is a sense in which the report was accurate, but for all practical purposes it obscured the truth instead of telling it.

Those who report the news in the United States can also slant reality to correspond to their own bias and prejudice. Those who favor abortion, for example, are consistently designated as "pro choice." This is not an accident. It is a clever way of diverting attention from the horrible reality of death. Forgive me, but I fear that the very practice which we decry in the media is fast becoming acceptable in churches across the country.

A DISTURBING EXPERIMENT

Some time ago a group of preachers came together for their monthly meeting. The speaker had recently participated in a group therapy experiment, but he was uncertain whether the same thing would work with preachers. "Why not?" someone asked. His answer was: "Because, for the experiment to work the subjects have to be honest." He didn't seem to be kidding.

The essence of the experiment was this. Each person was to paraphrase three verses from I Cor. 13 and apply them specifically to his own life and ministry. Each participant was urged to avoid generalizations.

Several made a stab at it and shared their thoughts with the group. Each carefully worded his thoughts to salvage his own self image. Finally, one brother shocked the group by confessing: "True love does not envy. If I had the right kind of love, I would not be envious of other preachers who are more successful than I am."

A strange silence came over the group. Finally someone dared to ask: "Are you jealous of other preachers who are more successful than you are?" "Yes!" he shamefully replied. "I know it is wrong, but that's where I am. If I hear about another Brother who had some great spiritual victory, I wish it had been me."

We preachers normally have the luxury of selecting texts that enable us to point the finger of accusation at others. This preacher, however, had been involved in a Bible study which forbade any participant from applying Scriptures to others. He had been meeting with several friends to study the Bible each week. Each agreed that the only comment they could make from the Word of God would be a truth which related specifically to them.

This self deprecating honesty had a therapeutic affect on the group. It was almost like someone had flipped a switch. Others joined in the confession and joking and laughter were replaced by a genuine spirit of repentance.

THE CRISIS WE FACE

After nineteen hundred years of seeking to evangelize the world, there are more unbelievers now than there were when we started. World population at the time of Christ is estimated to be 250,000,000. It took 1,650 years for this population to double. Today the population of the world is over 6,000,000,000 and is scheduled to double in only a few decades.

The key to evangelism, is not our power, but His. Jesus commanded His disciples not to try it on their own, but to wait for the Holy Spirit and power. His power would be able to accomplish exceeding abundantly above all that we could ask or think. This power, however, would not be appropriated by hypocrisy and deception. He who created the heavens longs to dwell in a heart of a man with a humble and contrite spirit.

WHOM SHALL WE IMPRESS

We preachers are skilled and adept in the use of words. This is the way we make our living. Perhaps you have heard the joke about the preacher who was asked how many he had in church on Sunday. He replied: "Somewhere between eight and ten thousand." The actual count had been 37, but he defended his answer by saying: "37 is between 8 and 10,000." Such antics may be comical to us, but it is doubtful that they are comical to God.

While the previous illustration was only a joke, there is still a tendency to report the news in such a way that we will appear more spiritual and successful than we really are. When baptisms decline, we report decisions. "Decisions" include baptisms, rededications, transfers of membership etc. This inflates the number and projects an "image" of success. Someone quipped, "Everyone in church made decisions. Some were for God, and some were against Him!"

Paul was bold in his declaration that if he was trying to please men, he would not be a servant of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:10.) We need to decide whom we are trying to impress. It seems to me that any effort to impress men is a step in the wrong direction.

Jeremiah put it like this: **"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart"** (Jer. 29:11-13.)

CHRIST KNOCKS AT THE DOOR

Chapters two and three of Revelation contain seven letters to seven churches. The two with the best public image were Sardis and Laodicea.

Sardis had a name that they lived, but to be honest about it they were dead (Rev. 3:1.) Laodicea boasted that they were "rich, increased with good, and in need of nothing" (Rev. 3:17.) But to be honest about it, they were wretched, poor, miserable, blind and naked. The Faithful and True Witness was not impressed by their public image.

The good news is that even though Jesus knows all about our hypocrisy and sin, He still loves us. In tender mercy He lovingly knocks at the door of our hearts and politely asks to be invited in.

He will come in . . . but we must invite Him in with a new kind of honesty!

Advice . . . about women?

Adam awakened from a deep slumber . . . and there she was. Her only covering the tresses of her beautiful hair cascading seductively down the dimensions of her perfect body. She was a woman without blemish, sexually ripe and tantalizing. They were both naked, and unashamed.

It must have been difficult for Adam to believe that anything but good could come from this consummate creature that had been prepared for him by God. She was so soft, so subtle, so witty, so beautifully designed to complement his deficiencies and loneliness.

It is therefore important for every man to focus all of his mental and spiritual energies on this fascinating story. In it we find one of the most startling paradoxes in the Bible. The Scriptures teach explicitly that **“Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression”** (I Tim. 2:14.) Eve ate the forbidden fruit because she was deceived. The gleaming and iridescent serpent beguiled her with his subtlety and she believed a lie.

Adam, on the other hand, was not deceived. He actually realized that in the day he ate the forbidden fruit he would “surely die.” Adam, however, ate it anyhow. The only explanation he offered to God for his irrational behavior was “the woman.” The exact phraseology is: **“The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat”** (Gen. 3:12.)

This simple statement of fact introduces us to one of the profound mysteries of life. This, my dear brothers, involves the essence of my advice. It is the “point of the story,” so to speak. Each and every man would do well to give this remarkable reality some serious consideration.

Adam was not deceived . . . yet he ate it anyhow. Why did he do it? What strange force coerced him in the denial of his reason? Remember that Adam was perfect

too. He was a flawless specimen of manhood designed by God to have dominion over everything creeping on the earth. He was not deceived. Yet, by this one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin. Adam apparently possessed the moral stamina to say “no” to the serpent, but not to his wife. His “dominion” over the animals is not to be questioned, but his “dominion” over his wife is the point of our discussion.

It is interesting, in this regard, that the words “winch” and “wench” are linguistically associated. They both come from the Old English “wincian,” which means “to wink.” The “winch” is a device that is designed to move and manipulate. It was apparently so named in recognition of the awesome power of women. Our ancestors came to understand that a woman fluttering her eyes possessed a power similar to a machine that pulls up tree stumps by the roots. Perhaps Adam was “wenched” away from the Tree of Life.

Since the Scriptures are profitable for “doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness,” let us consider what the Scriptures inform us about the relationship between men and women. This, of course, will not be an exhaustive study, but hopefully, a profitable one.

THE FLOOD

When the Scriptures introduce us to the story of a world wide flood that brought judgment to humanity, it is done so with reference to women. **“The sons of God looked upon the daughters of men that they were fair . . .”** Our male ego assures us that there is nothing to worry about, but pride has a way of going before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Someone has observed that the moral fiber of a nation is determined by the character of its women. This being the case, the “sons of God” should have been more careful what they looked at.

ABRAHAM

Consider also the case of Abraham! He was prophet, priest, and king. He was also a brilliant and courageous general who defeated the kings of the East with servants trained in his own household. His name is found 88 times in the New Testament Scriptures because from him we can learn a wide variety of lessons about spiritual reality. Perhaps we can also learn from him about women. His wife, Sarah, obeyed Abraham "calling him Lord." Yet, there is a sense in which Abraham was like soft putty in the hands of his beautiful wife. Read again the story in Scripture and you will see him dutifully walk into Hagar's tent like a little boy on an errand for his mother. Then see this great general timidly send Hagar away when Sarah said that she had to go. I fear that there may be a little of Abraham in all of us.

ISAAC

Or look at the story of Isaac and Rebekah. Who would have dreamed that the innocent little girl, bowing and scraping before the servant of Abraham, could have conceived a plot to deceive her blinded husband? As remarkable as it seems, the same woman that fetched water for the camels, conspired with Jacob to defraud her firstborn son, Esau, of his blessing. I rather imagine that some of us are as blind as Isaac without realizing it.

JACOB

Then there is the story of the mighty Jacob, weeping like a little child at the kiss of Rachel. The poor soul was so oblivious to reason that he labored seven long years for her, and it seemed to him like only a few days. He was so thunderstruck and bewildered by his passion that it was not until the morning after that he

figured out what went wrong the night before. Then, however, it was too late. This man's name was changed to "Israel," because he could prevail with men and God. When it came to women, however, he seemed to have his hands full. He started wanting only one wife, and wound up with four. There is an old story that in the pictographic language of the Orient the word for "trouble" is made by drawing one roof with two women under it. If this is true, Jacob had the superlative of double trouble.

JUDAH

In the battle of Judah vs. Tamar, any good male chauvinist would give you 8 to 5 that the "brawn" would triumph over the "broad." When the battle was over, however, and the smoke and dust had cleared away, the "weaker vessel" had won a unanimous decision.

JOSEPH

Now Joseph seems to be an exception. I have always had a great deal of admiration for him. I appreciate his firm resolve and steadfast determination not to sin against God. However, when you see the woman he rejected lounging in her penthouse, and the unshaven Joseph rotting in a filthy prison, it does lead the objective observer to wonder "who showed who?" Fortunately, the "rest of the story" has a happy ending. Hundreds of years later Paul would advise us to flee from fornication. That is precisely what Joseph did, and as such is indeed a wonderful role model for every man.

SOLOMON

Though Solomon is regarded as the world's wisest man, he confessed that there were some things too wonderful for him to put in words. One such thing was the "way of a man with a maid" (Prov. 30:19.) It

is a well known fact that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. If he could not find words to express himself with all that experience, it certainly doesn't create much confidence for the rest of us. It seems that he too was mesmerized like Adam into munching his own version of forbidden fruit. It was his wives, as you know, that turned him away from God. It seems that he too sinned with his eyes wide open in recognition of the dire consequences of his own action.

A PERSONAL ILLUSTRATION

I shall never forget a very illuminating experience I had many years ago while counseling a young couple with marriage problems. I spoke with each separately, and then counseled them both on several occasions. In our initial session the husband blurted out that he was the problem. He said he was "over-sexed." His wife, he concluded, was so busy caring for the children that she was too "tired" to respond to his advances. In those days, I was naive enough to believe that he knew what he was talking about.

The whole case, however, blew wide open when this "frigid" woman left her husband and children and ran off to California with her boy friend. She had apparently not been "too tired" for his sexual advances for many months. In California, it was "deja vu all over again." The boy friend came home from work at midnight to an empty nest. To his utter amazement she was spending the night with someone else.

Though I still do not profess to understand the matter completely, I do think I have learned something from the experience. The husband was dumb enough to think he understood his wife, I was dumb enough to believe him, and she was smart enough to keep her mouth shut.

GODLY WOMEN

Every man needs to remember and honor godly women like Mary, the mother of Jesus. All generations are to call her "blessed." We can be challenged by the selfless generosity of women like Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and the other women who followed Jesus and ministered unto Him of their substance. We ought never to forget the unswerving devotion of those godly women who anointed His feet with tears, His body with ointment, and His cause with the sacrificial offering of their own sweat and blood. Jesus was not prejudiced against women, and we should follow His example. Just as the physical world is but one generation from extinction without them, so also the spiritual world cannot survive and flourish without women.

When Paul sent greetings to the church at Rome, he included such heroines of the faith as Phoebe, a servant of the church which was in Cenchrea. He instructed the Christians in Rome to assist her in whatsoever business she had need of, for she had been a helper of many, and of Paul too. Then there were special greetings for Priscilla, who had laid down her neck for him . . . and a sister named Mary, who labored much. There were also greetings for Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis. The Greek word "kopian," means to labor to the point of utter exhaustion, and this is precisely the word which the Holy Spirit used to describe the labors of these godly women. Romans chapter 16 also contains greetings for Julia and the sister of Nereus.

Some of these women may have been godly mothers like Lois, Eunice, Hannah, or Elizabeth. Others may have helped in the planting of new churches like Lydia. Still others may have played active roles in benevolence like Dorcas. But whoever they were, and whatever role they played in the Kingdom, the Majesty of heaven did not discriminate against them because they were women, and neither should we. I tremble with fear when I think that in any way I might diminish any man's love for his mother, wife, daughter or sister in the Lord. Yet I still feel constrained to proceed with the wearisome and unpleasant

task of reporting that side of womanhood to which many men are blind. One caustic observer said: "I have watched TV evangelism proceed from infancy to adultery." Unfortunately, this is not only a problem for TV evangelists.

LESSONS FROM CREATION

God created the heavens and the earth with a delicate system of checks and balances. Every creature also has a God given means of survival. The deer is swift and the turtle has a shell. The porcupine has a thorny wardrobe and the chameleon can change its color. The predator cannot completely annihilate the prey. Perhaps it is only appropriate that women, usually diminutive and size and inferior in strength to men, should be endowed by God with special abilities to survive. Their cleverness and subterfuge, however, not only enable them to survive, but quite frequently to destroy. The daughters of Moab, for example, brought death to 24,000 Hebrew men in a single day.

LESSONS FROM BALAAM

Let us pursue the story about the daughters of Moab a bit further. Balaam, you recall, was a wayward preacher who "loved the wages of unrighteousness." He tried three different times to get God to curse the Hebrew people, but God wouldn't do it. Balaam therefore conceived a diabolical plan by which the Hebrew men would curse themselves. Rev. 2:14 informs us that Balaam taught eh Moabites to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. The thousands of Hebrew men who died because of fornication, did not die by accident. They were "trapped." The Greek word translated as "stumbling block" is "skandalon." It refers to a "snare" or "trap," and is also the basis of our English word "scandal." Their fornication, as we said before, was not an

accident. The women of Moab were used as bait to trap the men of Israel. When you are tempted to commit fornication it probably won't be an accident either.

BOAZ AND RUTH

Let's take a break from all this bad news and consider a beautiful story with a happy ending. The story of Boaz and Ruth. While Boaz was nonchalantly going about his business of winnowing barley at the threshing floor, Naomi was instructing Ruth on how to get the unsuspecting Boaz to be her husband. There are at least five parts to this crash course in feminine charm that are mentioned in the Bible: viz. (1) Her bath (2) Her perfume (3) Her clothing (4) Her timing (5) What to say when she snuggled up to his fee. Ruth graduated from the course with her MRS. Degree, Boaz was delighted, and they all lived happily ever after. It is to be profoundly regretted that all the schemes of women are not so innocent and beautiful.

HERODIAS AND SALOME

Take, for example, the scheme of Herodias and Salome to murder John the Baptist. Herod was busy with plans for his birthday party and was totally unaware of the sinister and sadistic conversation taking place in the "smoke filled room" between two conniving women. His innocent little orgy seemed to be going quite well. Herod and his cronies were glutting themselves with food and wine. As their drunken guffaws echoed through the room, Salome began her seductive dance, just like her mother had instructed her. If I were an artist, I would picture Herod like a goggle eyed idiot with slobbers drooling down his bewhiskered chin.

You know the story. Amidst the fantasies and delusions of taking Salome to wife, the big buffoon made his infamous pledge to grant anything she requested - even

unto the half of his kingdom. TOUCHE! Within the hour the head of John the Baptist was presented to Herodias on a platter. Tradition tells that the fiendish old hag, Herodias, continued to profane the dead prophet by poking a bodkin into his noble tongue.

I think it was Rudyard Kipling who wrote: "The female of the species is more deadly than the male." If you have a choice, fight the lion, not the lioness; the drone and not the honey bee; and Herod instead of Herodias.

SAMSON AND DELILAH

Samson was the strongest man who ever lived, but in retrospect, it seems that Delilah was far more dangerous. Samson had the brute strength to kill a thousand Philistine warriors with the jaw bone of an ass. Delilah, like the black widow spider, possessed the poisonous mechanism to destroy her lover. Though Samson died long before the advent of television, he still had that special "manly" interest in war and sports. He seemed so preoccupied with the rugged adventures of manhood, that he placed little significance in the constant questions and strange behavior of that beautiful creature from the valley of Sorek.

Gather around dear brothers for this story exposes us to an important lesson. The world's most powerful man is about to be destroyed by a soft body and a sharp tongue. The Scriptures teach that she "pressed him daily." Solomon described this tactic as a "continual dropping." Like a dripping faucet, or a leaking roof, she drove him to distraction. Like the proverbial Chinese water torture she continued to "drop" her words until poor Samson was "vexed unto death," and told her "all his heart." Sometimes when I think of Samson it makes me ashamed to be a man.

JEZEBEL

I don't think that Elijah would have scoffed at the words of Kipling. He stood barrel chested and confident before the prophets of Baal, but he fled like a rabbit before the wrath of Jezebel. The infamous, Jezebel, gave new meaning to the word, "vicious." She was the woman who planned the blasphemous murder of Naboth. When the diabolical plot was conceived in her wicked heart she told her whining husband, Ahab, to "arise and eat bread and let thine heart be merry" (I Ki. 21:7.) It kind of gives you "goose bumps" to think of someone planning a murder with a merry heart. This, however, is precisely what Jezebel did. If she was the only woman in the world with the capacity to be mean, we wouldn't have much to worry about. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

ZERESH

Mordacai didn't have much to fear from an impotent old drone like Hamaan. It was his wife, Zeresh, who wanted to put the stinger to him. Hamaan's famous gallows are actually a tribute to the treachery of his wife. The Scriptures teach that the gallows were her idea, and not his. When she finally goaded her husband into proceeding with the murder, she followed the example of Jezebel and said to Hamaan: "go thou in merrily" (Esther 5:14.)

OTHERS TOO

It wouldn't hurt for every young man to form a mental picture of the old woman, Athliah, busily slaughtering the children of the royal family. Or what about that frail little woman who busted open the head of Abimelech with a friendly mill stone. Or what about the manly Adonijah being lured to his death by the beauty of Abishag. Probably we ought to take a long, long look at Sisera. He was terrified by a warrior like Barak, but like most men, he wasn't afraid of women at all. So when the

little home maker served him milk, and gave him butter in a lordly dish, he soon forgot his troubles. With tender hands she carefully covered him with a warm mantle. With her soft voice she soothed him to sleep - which incidentally proved to be his last. Upon that occasion, the "defenseless" member of the "weaker" sex made a permanent impression on the mind of Sisera. She fastened his head to the ground with a tent peg (Judges 5:21.)

LIKE AN OX TO THE SLAUGHTER

Every man, at some point in time, will encounter the blithering idiot who brags about taking advantage of some "dumb blond." Such might not be the case at all. Sometimes I wonder if Samson ever caught on. I mean after his eyes were gouged out and he was fettered in brass and grinding grain like an animal.

Prov. 7:22-23 describes the sad plight of a man "void of understanding," who is lured into immorality. The seductive woman "forces" him with the flattery of her speech, and: **"he goeth after her straitway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life."**

The "icing on the cake," so to speak, is that Solomon himself, who wrote these inspired words, allowed his own wives to seduce him away from Jehovah to serve other gods (I Ki. 11:4.)_

CONCLUSION

Well fellas, I guess I'll let it go at that. I feel kind of like the hound dog strutting home after barking at the evening train. I haven't changed a thing, but it sure makes me feel good to get it off my chest.

And I haven't touched the hem of the garment either, so to speak. I wanted to tell you about Lot and his

daughters, and poor little innocent Bathsheba. I thought it might be helpful to watch Abigail in action, and see how easy it was for her to handle her husband, and then get married to the king. I wanted to reflect with you on Esther and Ahasuerus . . . or the helpless little widow who snookered the judge who didn't fear God or regard men.

Well, I guess it wouldn't have done any good anyhow. Most of us men are already experts on handling women, aren't we?

I've been a little reluctant to sign my name to all these things. First of all because I thought someone in the local citizenry might try to have me committed, but most of all because I didn't want my wife to know. Then it dawned on me that somehow she would find out no matter no matter how hard I tried to hide it.

So, I guess I'll just stand up and take it "like a man."

Your friend,



Boyce Mouton

Change and Improvement

A friend once said: "It is impossible to have improvement without change." How obvious! How utterly simple! Why didn't I think of that? It is possible to have change without improvement, but it is impossible to have improvement without change.

It is quite common for change to be accompanied by fear. Our first day at school, for example, was probably a memorable occasion. We may have approached it with fear and trepidation. We probably would have preferred to stay home where things were familiar and non-threatening. Be it ever so humble, there is no place like home. Most of us went to school anyhow, and now we are glad we did.

The same type of fear is almost always associated with major changes in our lives. How vividly I recall the day I left for college. My mother's tears were mingled with my own. It was a day of transition. I would never again enjoy the same type of parental security that I had experienced during those formative years of my childhood. Sad though it was, it would have been sadder still to have stayed at home. When I dared to risk the pain of change and separation I was exposed to new possibilities and new horizons. There can never been improvement without change, and that painful transition was an essential ingredient to my future development.

The same principles are also applicable to the church. Even in the church there can be no improvement without change. Perhaps this is one reason why the Scriptures say so little about methodology. The Body of Jesus Christ spans the globe and also the centuries. To meet the needs of all people in all time it must remain sensitive and flexible to the age and culture where providence has placed it.

The church that will not change, will not improve. Their greatest victories will always be in the past. They will gather and reminisce about the "good old days." While

times have changed . . . they have not! They are like senile people staring at their feet and muttering of days gone by. Progress will seem to threaten their security. New ways of doing things will be rejected for the familiar past. It is easier to bury a talent in the ground than to face the rigors and discipline of a world in transition.

Jesus spoke of new wine and old skins, of new cloth and an old garment. He insisted that the two were not compatible. His disciples would dare to abandon 1,500 years of sacred tradition for the flow of living water. Living water by definition cannot be stagnant. The constant flow of living water produces a freshness conducive to life and productivity.

The transition of the disciples from the old to the new was made much more desirable by the simple fact that Jesus was with them each step of the way. He promised never to leave them or forsake them. He would be with them until the end of the age.

These same promises are also for us. He is the Good Shepherd, and His sheep follow in His steps. We do not fear when we are close to the Shepherd. May God give us guidance as we struggle to know and do His will!

A Little New Blood

Sometimes, for the best interests of everyone concerned, it is expedient to dismiss a preacher and get a "little new blood" in the pulpit. Now, to illustrate this point I have selected an actual "case history" of a congregation that is fairly well known in the brotherhood. Their action, or perhaps we should say, their failure to act, ought to teach us something.

The congregation I have in mind was established some time ago in a large metropolitan center. New families were moving in every day, yet up to that time, we had virtually no work in the entire area. The importance of a successful church in such a strategic location cannot be stressed too heavily. If we can get something impressive started it will frequently change the complexion of evangelism in the entire area.

PREACHER WITH PROBLEMS

Please do not misunderstand what I am trying to say when I am brutally frank about this preacher's problems. I do not do it as a "nit picker" or a "faultfinder," but simply to bring up some truths which I hope will be helpful in the field of evangelism. This particular preacher was definitely not cut out for a big city church as I understand it. Why didn't the church dismiss him and get someone who was? This is what I mean by getting a little new blood in the pulpit.

Most of us naturally shrink from such unpleasant realities, but let me briefly outline several particulars which all seem to point stubbornly to the same unpleasant conclusion.

- **His personal appearance** - I don't want to use the word "ugly" because I think it harsh and unkind, but this preacher just did not have a pleasant appearance. Someone will perhaps object that we

should blame God for that and not the preacher. Yet there is a sense in which the official board is responsible for getting the right person for the right job. In a large metropolitan center where a man is expected to mix with people of all incomes, it is next to imperative that he be a preacher who meets the public well. From the part of his hair to the shine of his shoes, he should be someone whom the whole congregation can be proud to call their pastor.

- **His sermons** - This man, by his own admission, was not much of a speaker. Experience will sometimes enable men to overcome this fault but this particular preacher had no desire to be an eloquent speaker. Now, how would you feel in a situation like this? Don't you think it would be better for a man like this to work with a small congregation, or perhaps in a foreign country? Most of us enjoy a little humor, a little eloquence, and some interesting illustrations mixed in with our Scripture. This man, however, didn't seem interested in preaching the kind of sermons we like to hear.
- **No schedule** - In a big city where people have appointments, commitments, and grueling work schedules, it is important to stick with the "start on time and out by nine" philosophy. This preacher, however, seemed unable or unwilling to conform to a time schedule. You never knew when you were going to get out. In an area where you are competing with every form of recreation and amusement it's not difficult to imagine something like this really hurting attendance.
- **Part time attitude** - In various cities where his man had been, he had sought part-time employment. He seemed to have some sort of an aversion to the full-time ministry. Some might see in this attitude a reflection on this man's faith, or upon his dedication, or both. Now I ask you, how can a

church grow when a man has this attitude? Wouldn't it be better to explain to him that there are a lot of part-time churches in the world and encourage him to find a place where he would fit in?

- **Too many irons in the fire** - A shrewd board will secure a man whose hopes, dreams, plans, and aspirations will revolve around that one local congregation. You've seen ministries, I'm sure, where a preacher is always seeking to help "other" congregations. That was the situation here. There were tens of thousands of prospects right under his nose and yet he was still praying for and writing to other cities and congregations. There may be nothing wrong with this, but it is difficult to conceive of such a man building a truly great church.
- **No records** - This came out during a discussion on baptism when it became evident that he wasn't even keeping a record of those whom he had baptized into Christ. As far as I have been able to find out he wasn't keeping any other records either. It is difficult for us to understand such inefficiency or to explain it.
- **No building program** - I could understand this if he were preaching to aborigines in the wastelands of Australia, but we are talking about a big city. In the big city many prospects thrive on religious architecture. Yet, after two whole years there was no building program and not one soul was even looking for property.
- **Negative preaching** - One of the last thing this fellow did in town was to stir up some permanent animosity between the church and some of the moneyed business people in the area. A little look into his past revealed that he had experience the same, or similar problems elsewhere. Even when a matter of right and wrong is involved, isn't it wise to have a man who can be "positive" enough in his

attitude to avoid a riot?

THE PEOPLE LOVED HIM

I think it safe to assume that most of us wouldn't want the above mentioned preacher, and if we had him serving with us, we would give some serious thought toward asking for his resignation. In spite of everything, however, this congregation loved the preacher and hated to see him go.

Perhaps we can learn something from this - especially when you consider that this well known congregation was established about A.D. 50 in the city of Ephesus. Their preacher was none other than the apostle Paul.

In a day and age when many people seem to think that a "little new blood in the pulpit" is the cure for every congregational ill, it might not be a bad idea to open our Bibles and give some serious thought to how our congregation would vote on the apostle Paul.

First, you might have some difficulty explaining to Paul what a trial sermon was, and when he arrived to deliver it you might be shocked by the way he looked. He had been beaten, stoned, tortured, and scarred until his enemies chided him because his bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible (II Cor. 10:10.) I think it fair to observe that Paul was not much of an orator. He described himself as "rude in speech" (II Cor. 11:6.) He made a deliberate decision not to rely upon excellency of speech or men's wisdom (I Cor. 2:1-5.) He would not understand our "time- clock" attitude toward Christian worship. Remember, for example, that at Troas he preached until midnight, and beyond that continued to talk until morning (Acts 20:7-11.) This single consideration would probably bar the greatest apostle of all from a position in most "loyal" pulpits across America.

Paul would probably not agree to give up his secular employment. At Ephesus, he not only supported himself,

but went one step further and even supported them that were with him (Acts 20:34.) I grow a little embarrassed when I realize that the apostle who labored more abundantly than they all would be labeled in the language of modern Christians as a "part-time minister."

I would prefer that someone else explain to him that he was responsible for 90% or more of the public teaching of the church, and that he should be careful how much he was "absent" from the pulpit. The man who was pressed daily with the care of all the churches (II Cor. 11:28,) might not understand being limited to one or two "Revival Meetings" each year.

Nor would it be easy to stir him to enthusiasm about a building program. Paul was no doubt aware of the great crowds who were awed by the temple of Diana there in Ephesus. He was familiar with the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Apparently, however, his whole concept of Christianity was divorced from man-made shrines or buildings. Historically there were no church buildings at Ephesus, or anywhere else, until generations after the apostles were dead. The argument, "We'll never grow until we get established in our own building," would therefore probably not be too weighty with him.

Paul couldn't remember just whom he had baptized (I Cor. 1:16,) and seemed to have a knack for stirring up riots. At Ephesus he taught so strenuously, "They be no gods which are made with hands," that he endangered the business of those who made pagan shrines. Luke informs us that this business brought them "no small gain" (Acts 19:24,) and that pagan books valued at 50,000 pieces of silver had already been publicly burned (Acts 19:19.) You can therefore understand why the "whole city was filled with confusion" (Acts 19:29,) and why we would prefer to have a less controversial minister.

I get the rather uncomfortable idea that Paul really wouldn't "fit in" in any church I know. But before we smile sympathetically and dismiss Paul's strange and "unorthodox" way of doing things, we should acknowledge

that during the two years he was at Ephesus **“all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10.)**

Who knows? Perhaps we could learn something from this after all?