

Since the Days of Joshua . . .

“And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so . . .” (Neh. 8:17.)

Joshua the son of Nun was a contemporary of Moses. Ussher's chronology places his death at 1,433 B.C. Nehemiah lived approximately one thousand later. He is thought to have rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in 444 B.C. It is incredible, almost beyond words, that God's people had neglected to properly observe the Feast of Tabernacles for one thousand years. This, however, is the obvious meaning of Nehemiah 8:17. Some scholars have tried to attack the integrity of the text rather than to admit the possibility of such a colossal oversight.

We are not to understand that Israel had not kept the Feast of Tabernacles for 1,000 years, for Ezra 3:4 specifically informs us that this feast was observed then. II Chron 7:9ff indicates that the feast was also observed in the days of King Solomon.

Nor should we assume that booths had never been used at all during the observance of this feast. Perhaps there was a “remnant” who faithfully obeyed the Lord in this regard.

The obvious meaning is that for the first time in a thousand years the people of God, as a whole, obeyed His instructions to dwell in booths, of tabernacles, during the Feast of Tabernacles. The instructions given by the Lord on how to observe this feast are found in Leviticus 23:33-44. They are so explicit that it is difficult to imagine how anyone could possibly not understand them. Note verses 41-42: **“And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month.**

YE SHALL DWELL IN BOOTHS SEVEN DAYS: ALL THAT ARE ISRAELITES BORN SHALL DWELL IN BOOTHS . . .”

The “booths” or “tabernacles” were little temporary shelters erected to remind the Israelites that this is the way their ancestors lived for forty years when God brought them up out of the land of Egypt. They were such an integral part of the feast that it was even called the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths. Yet, for one thousand years the vast majority neglected to properly observe this feast. Joshua was alive when this feast was first observed. He had lived for forty years in booths in the wilderness and knew how to appreciate the great gift of Canaan. After he died, however, apparently no one really cared.

Our amazement is intensified when we realize that this period of 1,000 years includes the period of the Judges with all of its repentance and reform. It spans the lives of Saul, David, and Solomon when the beautiful Psalms and Proverbs were being written. It includes the prophetic ministries of both Elijah and Elisha who called the nation to repentance. It also deals with the Divided Kingdom with its periods of national revival. Not even the preaching of men like Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Nahum caused the people to correctly observe one of the three major feasts of the Jewish faith. Even after the remnant returned from Babylon and the Temple was rebuilt they still didn't do it right for many years. It was not until the days of Nehemiah that the plain command of Scripture was taken seriously. Only then did the people of God dwell in booths during this feast as He had commanded them to.

This is a truth so utterly frightening and profound that it stirs our soul with amazement. It leads us to wonder how many plain teachings of Scripture we are yet to discover and obey.

It is helpful to remember that the days of Nehemiah were filled with great self-sacrifice and commitment. Their desire to obey God touched virtually every aspect of their lives. It caused them to quit charging usury to their

brethren and to avoid oppressing those whom God expected them to love. It wrought great change in their family life, social life, and business life. In the face of great danger they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in only 52 short days.

In the wake of their hard work, obedience, and submission, God gave them insight and understanding into a matter which had been neglected since the days of Joshua the son of Nun. May God help us to study His Word as they did.

Prayerfully consider these words of Samuel to the wayward King Saul: **Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrificed, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (I Sam. 15:22.)**

A Lesson from the Lowly Mosquito

3.2 k.m. off the West Coast of Florida is an island called "Seahorse Key." It is a virtual paradise for mosquitoes. It is heavily timbered, swampy, warm, and damp. In 1968 scientists began releasing thousands of amorous male mosquitoes upon the island. The influx of new mosquitoes ranged from 8,400 to 18,000 each day. At the end of the experiment 96% of the mosquito population had been annihilated.

The secret of this amazing stratagem is a sterile mosquito. Scientists produced and released insects that were normal in every way, except they could not reproduce. In the second generation of the experiment the ratio of sterile males was 3 to 1. In the fifth and sixth generations it was 100 to 1. Except for the influx of new mosquitoes which migrated to the island these insects would have been completely destroyed. In the last two generations studied reduction in fertile egg rafts was 99.4% to 99.8% effective. (Science Magazine, June 12, 1970)

Now let us try and relate these truths to Christianity. Oft repeated statistics indicate that 95% of "church members" in America never win a soul to Jesus Christ. A community of mosquitoes with this alarming sterility rate would be close to extinction. The church in America has arrived at a plateau. We must look elsewhere for dynamic examples of evangelism.

We are told that perhaps the greatest revival of all time is taking place in China. One reason for the amazing growth is that Chinese believers are reproducing. The same is true for certain countries in Africa, and Central and South America. True growth in the church is not produced by "professional preachers," but by all believers doing what Christ commanded.

The strategy of God was to give Apostles, prophets,

evangelists, and teaching pastors to train and equip the saints for the work of ministry. When this is done we will no longer be like children, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, but speaking the truth in love we will grow up into Him in all things. When the whole body is correctly joined together, and when every joint and every part is functioning as Christ intended, then we will see the increase of the Body building up itself in love. (See Eph. 4:13-16.)

The late Jim Rutherford once remarked that "The devil wouldn't mind if you baptized a thousand people, as long as they behaved like everyone else." In fact, the devil may even prefer that people become "Christians" as long as they do not reproduce.

What a diabolically clever way to destroy mosquitoes!

What a diabolically clever way to destroy Christianity!

Help Me Lord

To keep my mouth shut . . . (Ps. 141:3)

Kenneth Taylor has a boldness and special insight in paraphrasing the sacred Scriptures. His version, as you know, is known as the Living Bible. It is one of the best selling books of all time.

Typical of his ability to focus our attention on the "bottom line" is his paraphrase of Ps. 141:3 "**Help me Lord to keep my mouth shut . . .**" The King James Version is a bit more restrained and renders it: "**Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth.**"

A doctor once confessed to me that he suffered from constipation of the mind and diarrhea of the vocal cords. Unfortunately, he is not the only person on earth with this infirmity. Most of us, however, will not admit it. A rather talkative woman put it like this: "How do I know what I think about something until I have heard what I have to say about the subject."

Frequently, however, our intemperate use of the tongue is not comical. James said it was like a fire, a world of iniquity that can defile the whole body (Ja. 3:6.) He also said: "**If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain**" (Ja. 1:26.) Anything that can cancel our "religion" is a serious matter.

I have vivid recollections of working with a prospect for many weeks. I felt they were on the verge of making a decision for Christ when someone used harsh and offensive words that drove them away. Jesus loves His "little ones" more than we can imagine. He said that anyone who caused one of them to stumble would be better off to have a mill stone hanged about his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Sometimes words are like weapons to destroy those precious ones for whom Christ died. The Psalmist knew how devastating wrong

words could be and therefore prayed for God to help him keep his mouth shut. It is often a prayer which we all should pray.

One preacher said sarcastically: "The Holy Spirit has more trouble giving the gift of silence than He does the gift of tongues." Perhaps he is right. The "works of the flesh" involve far more than sexual indiscretions. When we "bite and devour" one another with words we are not "walking in the Spirit." If we could accurately analyze every schism or heresy in the Body of Christ we would undoubtedly confirm that the intemperate tongue played a part in them all. Just as a tiny match can set ablaze a great city filled with thousands of people, so also the tongue thousands for whom Christ died.

Lord, help me to keep my mouth shut. Help me to be swift to hear, and slow to speak. Help me to follow after the things that make for peace, and the things which will edify those who believe in you. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of my mouth.

A word fitly spoke is like an apple of gold, but there are other times when it both wise and practical to say nothing at all. When such a time arrives, help me Lord to keep my mouth shut!

The Storm and the Stench

Students of the Bible have long been impressed with the study of “types” and “shadows.” Virtually every item of significance in the Christian religion is typified by something in the Patriarchal or Mosaic dispensation. Christian vocabulary receives a new significance as it is enhanced by information from the Old Testament Scriptures.

The “ark” for example is a “type” of the church. Note these interesting parallels.

- There was but one ark, and there is but one church.
- The ark was built by a divine blueprint, and so is the church.
- There was but one door to the ark, and there is only one “way” to enter the church.
- Those in the ark were saved and those in the church will be saved.
- Those out of the ark were lost, and those out of the church will be lost.
- Etc.

Someone added another similarity. “If it were not for the storm without, the stench within would be unbearable.” Touche! He has a point.

It does not take much imagination to envision what it was like in the ark. There were thousands of animals and birds cooped up in a three story barge for over a year. Every farm boy harbors indelible memories of shoveling out the barn or cleaning out the chicken house. City folks should stop by the local dairy on a damp day and see what it’s like. In some parts of the country there are huge feed lots where animals are fattened for slaughter. Those exposed to that experience can also sympathize with Noah. We used to buy eggs from a neighbor who had 5,000 hens in a single building. The heavy stench of that building literally took my breath away. Gases emitted by large amounts of waste are potent enough to be used as an

alternate source of energy.

How would you like to be on the ark with Noah and his family? When you consider the alternative, I think I would.

The Scriptures teach that it rained forty days and forty nights. In addition to the torrential downpour, the fountains of the great deep were also broken up. Subterranean oceans roared to the surface bringing death and destruction. The lightning cracked and the thunder rolled. The earth must have rocked with volcanic upheavals and cataclysmic tremors. Tidal waves lashed and a world of sinners perished beneath that foaming fury of devastation brought down upon them by an angry God.

Noah and his family were so terrified by the experience that even after the ark landed on Mt. Ararat, it was five long months before they would remove the covering of the ark and look out.

Isn't the ark an interesting parallel with Christianity? Everyone knows there are hypocrites in the church. Everyone know there are preachers like Judas in the midst of the disciples. Everyone knows there are dead beats and whiners who can make your life miserable. Everyone knows that immoral people often have their names on an official roster in someone's congregation. The stench is often so bad that some have decided to leave. The storm outside, however, makes the stench within a better alternative.

Even the apostles faced the hard reality that not everyone is everything they ought to be. The church at Sardis was dead, Laodicea was lukewarm, Corinth was corrupt, Ephesus had left it's first love, Galatia had perverted the gospel, Philippi had women who couldn't get along - virtually every congregation had the unmistakable aroma of an unpleasant stench. The storm outside, however, made the stench quite bearable.

Don't criticize the ark! It was God's instrument to save those who trusted and obeyed His word. It did precisely what God designed for it to do. Don't be critical

of the church for precisely the same reason.

Time Worship

Man is a worshipping animal. Wherever he has left the ashes of his campfire, he has also left some token of his belief in the supernatural. Each generation in each society has inevitably reached its logical extremities. When this happens, they ascribe the unknown to deity. For example, If they cannot explain thunder, they speak of the "Thunder God." Quite frequently these "gods" are represented by some grotesque image fashioned from wood, metal, or stone.

Late in the 19th century there appeared in human history one of the most unusual and paradoxical religions ever devised - the worship of time. Perhaps the origin of this cult was due in part to an over reaction to the ignorance and superstition of the medieval church. At any rate, a certain group of people, who considered themselves to be atheists, began to worship time. Time became the rationale for virtually anything they could not understand or explain. That which the Christians ascribed to God, they ascribed to time.

For example, the Bible teaches that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The time worshipers declare that God didn't do it at all, it was time that did it. When I was a young man it was "believed" that time could create the universe in about four billions years. Now the time worshipers "believe" that it will take much longer than that. Nevertheless, their creed remains intact. It doesn't matter to them whether it was four billion, or forty billion, as long as time is given the credit.

During the days of the industrial revolution the scientific community experimented with heat and power and discovered certain "laws" which are of universal application. Two such "laws" are called the first and second laws of thermodynamics.

The first law observes that matter is not now being created or destroyed. The world's most brilliant scientists

cannot create a single atom. Neither can we destroy matter. When a piece of paper is burned in a sealed container, the container weights precisely the same both before and after the paper is burned. Burning does not destroy atoms and molecules, it merely changes them from one form to another.

The second law of thermodynamics is sometimes called "Times Arrow." It observes that while the amount of matter in the universe remains constant, it is in the process of running down and wearing out. There is no such thing as perpetual motion. When we orbit a satellite, we know that at some point in time it will come crashing back into the atmosphere of earth. Science tells us that the earth has not been eternally in orbit about the sun. The stars, like so many gigantic fires, are gradually growing colder.

Time worshipers, however, are not deterred from their faith by facts of science. Given enough "time" they believe that any law of science can be overcome. That which they refuse to acknowledge as their god, is in their mind capable of the miraculous.

Certain factions in this cult "believe" that in the beginning there was a gigantic explosion which they reverently refer to as the "big bang." The very idea that an explosion could produce order is so utterly absurd that it is difficult to maintain a straight face while discussing it. Two of the biggest bangs ever witnessed on earth took place at Nagasaki and Hiroshima and neither of them produces anything orderly. The time worshipers, however, are quick to point out the "possibility" that given enough time how do we know. Just maybe out of a trillion explosions, one might see something orderly. The real secret of their faith, however, is not the explosion, it is time.

Though they would never admit it, the time worshiper worships his god with the same blind fanaticism as the ancient Canaanites who danced to the drums and sacrificed their children to the fiery arms of Moloch. It doesn't matter whether they are leaping around the camp fire in a loin cloth, or striding stoically through the moss

covered institutions of "higher learning," they are part and parcel of the same stuff.

But the most tragic aspect of time worship is seen in its utter futility. It does not comfort the infant, guide the youth, or dry the tears of the aged and infirm. It has never built a hospital or an orphanage. It has never stopped a war or brought reconciliation to those who are estranged. It cannot tell the perceptive student where he came from, or what he is doing here, or where he is going. It has no blueprints for a better world or suggestions for the salvation of society. It leaves its most ardent and enthusiastic worshipers lonely, bewildered, and afraid. It does not bring a single ray of hope to the despairing pilgrim in his desperate struggle with the monster of death. It belittles the Bible and encourages barn yard morals and hedonism. It ultimately deprives life of both its rules and values, and is perhaps the strongest incentive to anarchy in our modern world.

The god of time is blind, irrational, and uncompassionate. He is without a doubt the most illogical and deficient deity ever worshiped on earth. He deprecates the power of love and chains his own apostles in the dungeons of deep despair.

Behold, I show you a better way. Jehovah God not only created the heavens and the earth, He so loved His creation that He gave His only begotten Son to save us. God is a Spirit. Consequently, He is not only immortal and eternal, but also invisible. In order that we might understand Him, however, he condescended to become a man. He was born of a virgin in the manger at Bethlehem. His name was Jesus. He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. He was "God manifest in the flesh." In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead in a body and we can be complete in Him. This Jesus not only knows your name, and the street where you live, He has even numbered the hairs of your head. He loves you more than words can convey. The ultimate expression of His love is seen at Calvary. The Scriptures teach that in this way we

understand the love of God for us, because He laid down His life for us (1 John 3:16.) He not only died for us, but He was raised again from the dead for our justification. He ascended into heaven to wait for the consummation of the age.

When Jesus comes back from heaven He will proclaim through the universe that time will be no more. Choose you this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Nothing but Leaves

“And seeing a fig tree afar off, and having leaves, He came if haply He might find any thing thereon; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves” (Mark 11:13.)

There are many varieties of fig trees in Palestine. The fruit of these different trees varies in both color and taste. Jeremiah referred to two baskets of figs, one basket was good, and the other had “naughty figs which could not be eaten (Jer. 24:2.) He also spoke of “evil figs” (vs. 8,) and “vile figs” which were not good for food (Jer. 29:17.)

The fig trees average only about 10 to 15 feet in height though some be as tall as 25 feet. In Palestine, and other warm climates, there are two annual crops of figs. Figs growing from old wood ripen about June. The second, and more important harvest, comes from the growth of new wood and is ready in August. The summer foliage is thick and provides a very dense shade. Nathanael, and many others, sought refuge from the summer’s blistering heat by sitting under a fig tree (John 1:48; Micah 4:4; Zec. 3:10; etc.) By December the leaves are gone and the trees remain bare until about March. Jesus once said, **“Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh” (Matt. 24:32.)** Tiny figs develop in conjunction with the new leaves and are called “taksh.” Occasionally these are shaken from the trees when they are no larger than a cherry. These are like the “untimely figs” mentioned in Rev. 6:13. Even though they are small they are sometimes gathered and sold in markets.

The 11th chapter of Mark depicts our Savior’s life just a few days before Calvary. Rising from his bivouac near Bethany, He made His way toward the temple. Seeing a fig tree in the distance He sought fruit to sustain and refresh Himself for the day’s work. The sap was

flowing and the leaves seemed impressive. There was, however, nothing there but leaves. There were no remnants of last year's harvest clinging to its limbs, neither was there small fruit with the promise of production for the future. The tree was barren of fruit.

A short time before Jesus had explained to His disciples the necessity of national repentance (Lk. 13:1-10.) The Galileans slaughtered by Pilate were no different from the rest of Israel. The eighteen who perished when the tower of Siloam fell were representatives of the rank and file who dwelt in Jerusalem. There Jesus said "Repent or perish!" Straighten up or face the consequences. He then proceeded to talk about a fig tree that was barren for three years. The Lord of the vineyard determined to wait only one more year for signs of productivity. If no improvement was noted, the barren tree would be removed from cumbering the ground. Divine judgment would consign it to the flames of the garbage dump where other useless things were discarded.

Now, in the shadow of Golgotha, Jesus saw another opportunity to teach His disciples the impending doom of the Jewish state. He called out so that His followers could understand, "**No man eat fruit of thee forever.**" There would be no more grace, no more time, no more opportunities, no more personal attention and care. The day of grace was over and the day of judgment had come.

Such a dramatic incident ought to be impressed upon every mind. God will not always be satisfied with "promises." Somewhere between the cradle and the grave the disciple of Jesus must bear fruit, or be rejected. The Lordship of Jesus Christ is not acknowledged by what a man says, as much as it is by what he does. Someday Jesus will say, why did you call me Lord, Lord, and not do the things that I command? Why did you produce only leaves, and no fruit?

Only a Symbol?

Certainly baptism is a symbol, but did I hear you say "only" a symbol? Did I hear a tone in your voice indicating that baptism is some irrelevant option in the Christian life that you can either accept or reject? My dear friend, please think again about the biblical importance of this sacred command which you speak about so lightly.

The idea of being dipped was nothing new to the devout Jew. Naaman, for example, dipped seven times in the Jordan River to be cleansed of his leprosy (II Ki. 5:14.) Jewish priests dipped in a great pool known as the "molten sea" before entering into the temple (II Chron 4:6.) This same passage also makes reference to ten smaller lavers which were for other washings pertaining to the burnt offerings. A person cleansed of leprosy was to "wash" before they were permitted to return to the camp of Israel (Lev. 14:8.) The book of Hebrews refers to the Judaism as a religion of meats and drinks, "divers washings," and carnal ordinances.

When John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus Christ he preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3.) The Pharisees rejected the counsel of God against themselves by not being baptized of John (Lk. 7:30.) Jesus, on the other hand, was baptized because He said it was necessary to fulfill all righteousness (Matt. 3:15.)

Christian baptism, however, was not only for the devout Jew. It was for "all nations" and it was to be practiced unto the "end of the world."

Please reverently read again the words of Jesus in what we call the "Great Commission."

"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. God ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: And lo I am with

you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:18-20.)

I respectfully point out that the commandment to be baptized is the only commandment in the Bible which is given in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and also of the Holy Spirit. The words “in the name of,” mean, “by the authority of.” (See Acts 4:7.) How dare anyone deprecate the will of Godhead by flippantly saying it is “only a symbol.”

The book of Acts is replete with examples of how seriously the early disciples followed the instructions of Jesus to baptize believers.

- On the day of Pentecost, Peter commanded: **“Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit . . . then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:38-41.)**
- Converts in Samaria were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12.)
- The Ethiopian eunuch stopped his chariot and was baptized by the road side (Acts 8:38.)
- Peter said of Cornelius and his household: **“Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit was well as we? (Acts 10:47.)**
- Lydia and her household were baptized (Acts 16:15.)
- The Philippian jailer and his household were baptized after midnight (Acts 16:25-33.)
- Saul of Tarsus was commanded to **“arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16.)**

These early believers did not consider baptism “only a symbol” which could be casually disregard because it was unpleasant, or inconvenient. EVERY EXAMPLE OF

BAPTISM GIVEN IN THE SCRIPTURES INDICATES THAT BELIEVERS WERE BAPTIZED THE SAME DAY, OR NIGHT, THEY CONFESSED THEIR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST!

- Baptism is associated with the forgiveness of sins and salvation (Acts 2:38; 22:16; I Pet. 3:21, etc.)
- Baptism is associated with the receiving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 5:32; 19:1-7.)
- Baptism is associated with putting on Christ (Gal. 3:27.)
- Baptism is associated with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:1-11.)
- Baptism was considered a source of unity among believers (I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4-6.)

A man by the name of J.W. McGarvey wrote many years ago. *"When I was in Palestine, if I could have found beyond all doubt the very sepulcher of Joseph, in which the Savior was laid away, where he lay so still until the resurrection morning, I would have prized the sight of it above all that I saw. I would have been glad to go in and to stretch myself on the same bare rock floor, to have some friend roll a stone to the mouth of it, that I might realize by imagination my Savior's burial. We can not do that. We are not permitted to do it. But in this ordinance of baptism we are allowed to do the next thing to it. Laid down in the watery grave in obedience to His command, we allow the water to close above our heads, and then as though we were dead, we are lifted by the strong arm of the servant of God out of that cold grave and we start to walk in a new life as He started in a new one when He arose from the dead."*

How utterly beautiful: **"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4.)"**

Baptism is described in the Bible as an appeal to God for a clear conscience (I Pet. 3:21.) It permits the believer to immediately transmit his faith into action.

Remember! We do not demonstrate the Lordship of Jesus only by what we say, but also by what we do! (Matt. 7:21)

The only regret you will ever have about Christian baptism is that you didn't do it sooner. It is the only thing in the wide range of our commitment to Christ that we do but once. We continue to believe. We continue to repent. We continue to confess. We continue to pray. We continue to walk in newness of life. We are, however, baptized only once. There is **“one lord, one faith, and one baptism”** (Eph. 4:5.)

Baptism is not a “work” which you do in order to merit salvation. It is something you submit to. It is something which someone else does to you. It is only one of many things which are the Bible associates with obedience to Christ and a right relationship with God.

Don't ask “Do I have to be baptized?” Say rather: “What doth hinder me to be baptized” (Acts 8:36.)

Jonah, and the Power of Prejudice

It seems obvious to me that Jonah was a real person. In II Kings 14:23-25 we have his name, his home, the name of his father, the substance of his prophecy, and also its fulfillment. We know the time in which he lived, complete with the name of the king who was reigning, and the number of years he was king.

Second, I believe that Jonah's legendary experience with the sea monster was not just a "fish story." I believe it happened just as the Bible says that it did. Jesus made reference to Jonah and the monster that swallowed him on a variety of occasions (Matt. 12:28-41; 16:1-4; Luke 11:29-32, etc.) A wicked and adulterous generation was seeking for a sign, but the only sign Jesus promised was the sign of the prophet Jonah. As Jonah was three days in the sea monster, Jesus would be in the heart of the earth for three days.

Most people are familiar with the gist of the story. Jonah was called to preach to the people of Nineveh, but decided to disobey God and flee to Tarshish. After three days in the belly of the sea monster with weeds wrapped about his head, a reluctant Jonah did what God had called him to do.

In some respects, Jonah was a man of rare courage. When their ship was beset by storm he told his companions: **"Take me up and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you"** (Jonah 1:12.) He was apparently not afraid of death. Perhaps also, he was not afraid to preach to the Ninevites. He didn't want to preach to them for another reason. **HE WAS PREJUDICED AGAINST THEM!**

When Jonah at last arrived, he cried out: **"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."**

At this point the people of Nineveh believed God

and repented in sack cloth and ashes. When God saw their works, that they had turned from their evil ways, He granted them a stay of execution.

At this Jonah was exceedingly displeased. He prayed unto the Lord and said: **"I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in m country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live"** (Jonah 4:2-3.)

In language so plain that it cannot be understood, Jonah announced to the world that his prejudice meant more to him than his life. He would rather die than see the Ninevites saved!

There is an old joke about the transplant patient who requested the brain and heart of a bigot. When asked why, he said: "I would like a brain that had never been used, and a heart that had never had to suffer." Touche! Jonah seems to have fit the bill.

S. I. McMillen, in his book, "None of These Diseases," devotes an entire chapter to the "High Cost of Getting Even." We may die of bleeding ulcers, or a stroke. We may suffer a wide variety of illnesses from colitis to coronary thrombosis. We may be thrown overboard in a raging sea to be eaten by sea monsters, but we will not give in to help our enemies.

McMillen states, *"The moment I start hating a man I become his slave. I cannot enjoy my work any more because he even controls my thoughts . . . even vacations cease to be a pleasure. It may be a luxurious car that I drive along a lake fringed with the autumnal beauty of maple, oak and birch. As far as my experience of pleasure is concerned, I might as well be driving a wagon in mud and rain . . . the man I hate hounds me wherever I go. I can't escape his tyrannical grasp on my mind. When the waiter serves me porterhouse steak with French fries,*

asparagus, crisp salad and strawberry shortcake smothered with ice cream, it might as well be stale bread and water . . . the man I hate will not permit me to enjoy it. The man I hate may be many miles from my bedroom; but more cruel than any slave driver, he whips my thoughts into such a frenzy that in inner spring mattress becomes a rack of torture."

Maybe all the bigots and prejudiced people in the world should spend a few days giving indigestion to a sea monster. No! It didn't change Jonah's mind either, but it sure did help the people of Nineveh!

The Leader

He was obviously a natural leader. He was tall, straight, and a mass of solid muscle. His skin was bronzed by the sun. His jaw was square. His shoulders were back and his countenance was rugged and strong. Complete confidence exuded from him like ever widening circles of influence from a pebble cast into a quiet pool. He had a tinge of grey about his temples which only served to enhance his image with an aura of wisdom. His booming voice rang with authority and we had every confidence that he was a guide without equal.

There were about 200 of us who gathered around the campfire for our final instructions. Early the next morning we would be off on the journey of a life time. Our excitement was so thick you could slice it with a knife. We closed the evening with prayer, but hardly anyone could sleep. A million stars combined their magnificent beauty into a canopy of confidence that God was not only upon His throne in the heavens . . . He was also enthroned in our midst.

The next morning we were up at the crack of dawn. The smell of bacon frying over an open camp fire was as invigorating as the cool morning air. In a matter of minutes our breakfast was over, the camp was in order, and we were eagerly standing behind our leader in single file. Someone remarked that this was the way the Indians used to travel before the white man came to corrupt their ways. Such a thought was spark enough to ignite some of our own wild imaginations.

Then with a dramatic gesture of his hand, our leader beckoned for us to follow. Without a word he plunged into a thick tangle of briars and weeds. My initial reaction was one of shock and amazement. There was an open path in plain sight where it would have been quite easy to travel. Why didn't we take that path, I wondered? Then, embarrassed by how utterly naive I was, it dawned on me

that our leader was obviously teaching us tenacity and strength. "No pain, no gain." Why didn't I think of that before?

Sure enough, this was the pattern for our travel through the whole day. We would walk right by a sturdy bridge and plow straight through an icy mountain stream. We were returning to the basics of nature and living like the animals who roamed that area centuries before we were even born. When we came to a ravine, no attempt was made for an easy descent. Boldly we would tumble down incredible distances fully confident that by the end of the day we would be stronger and better for not giving in to the path of least resistance. Each adversity seemed only to harden our resolve with new courage and confidence.

Within a few hours, virtually all of us had suffered a wide variety of minor injuries. Interestingly enough, however, no one seemed to complain. We were learning our lessons well. We were bearing our burdens like a badge of honor. A scratch on the face, a cut knee, or a twisted ankle were small sacrifices to make in exchange for the tremendous lessons we were learning. Like Olympic athletes, we know that the discipline of agony is a requisite to victory.

Throughout the long hard day our leader remained resolute, confident, and firm. Occasionally he would call out words of encouragement to help those who were beginning to waver. Periodically, we would experience spontaneous eruptions of song as we sought to keep anyone from turning back or quitting early. Our voices echoes through the dark valleys and bounced back to us with a beautiful resonance that cheered our hearts and invigorated our steps.

Who would have dreamed of the disaster that was about to befall us? As the sun made it's exit in the Western sky, seventeen people plunged to their death over a jagged cliff. They were holding hands to keep from getting lost in the dark. Without hesitation our leader had walked briskly over the precipice, and sixteen others followed before the

chain of firm grips could be broken.

In the investigation which followed, we found the real reason why our leader had taken us through such hardships throughout the long day of travel. We also found out belatedly why he, and sixteen other people had perished.

Our leader was blind!

He Looks Just Like His Father

Bald? No teeth? Blotchy complexion? Pot belly? Legs that are skinny and crooked? Misshapen head? "Yes," you say, "he looks just like his father."

Such a description may fit some of us rather well, but for the most part we must charitably observe that the newborn infant only faintly resembles his parents at birth. Sometimes, it is even difficult to pick out the proper child in a maternity ward. We may have ears like an Airedale and a nose like a Collie, but usually these features do not blossom to maturity in our children for several years. It takes time for them to develop the idiosyncrasies and peculiarities which constitute the hallmark of our family tree.

In a similar way, the newborn Christian is not fully developed and mature when they are "born again." Their resemblance to God, however, ought to become more evident with each passing day. The new Christian may be spiritually crippled, or retarded. His tottering ways may cause us grief and trouble. But if God is his Father, he is our brother. Fraternity is based upon paternity. Our brotherhood is based upon His Fatherhood.

Most of us are not anywhere near the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Yet Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren, because we have a common Father (Heb. 2:11.)

The human infant is among the most helpless and dependent creatures in all the earth. A baby calf will be walking in a few minutes, and capable of independent living in a few months. Not so with the human infant. It will be many years before they are capable of surviving without help.

Perhaps God created us this way to give us spiritual wisdom and understanding. Those who are "born again"

need years of spiritual nurturing. They did not come forth from the womb of the Spirit as mature Christians we no need of discipleship and training. They are to desire the sincere milk of the words like newborn babes. They are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The writer of Hebrews wanted to tell them about Melchisedec, but could not. They were unskillful in the Word or righteousness. They needed milk, and not strong meat. Those who are mature have had their senses exercised to discern good and evil (Heb. 5:10-14.) The Bible word translated as "exercised" is the word from which we get "gymnasium." Just as our children need exercise to grow physically, new converts also need exercise in order to grow spiritually.

No one admires the dead-beat dad who slips in and out of the back in order to father a child. Yet, I suppose, we have people who are just as irresponsible in a spiritual sense. The Great Commission is fourfold. It involves going, making disciples, baptizing, and continuing to teach. It is not enough to only partly obey these commands of Christ.

Paul said he was like a father to the Corinthians. They may have 10,000 instructors, but not many fathers (I Cor. 4:15.) He had more than a profession attitude toward them, he loved them like they were his own children. As such, he was willing to do whatever it took for them to develop their full potential in Christ.

He wrote in similar fashion to the Thessalonians. This time he described himself as a nurse, gently nourishing and caring for her children. He was willing not only to impart to them the Gospel, but his own soul also (I Thess. 2:3-8.)

His words to the Romans are even more dramatic."I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 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: Who

are Israelites . . . (Rom. 9:1-4.)

Let us follow after the things which make for peace,
and the things that edify one another, so that our brethren
can grow up to be just like our Father!

Stillborn

Ed Baker has made an observation which is both simple and profound. “A baby,” he said, “may have a perfectly natural birth and yet not live.” The transition from the mother’s womb involves breathing. If for some reason a newborn baby does not breathe, it will die.

The analogy to the world of the Spirit is quite obvious. It is altogether possible to deliver a convert through the steps of salvation only without having spiritual life. **“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom. 8:9.)** The Holy Spirit is not an accessory or option, He is an essential part of the Christian life.

When Paul arrived at Ephesus he found twelve men who knew only the baptism of John. John’s baptism, as you know, was by immersion. It was also described as a “baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3.) Paul did not ask them about their baptism, he asked them about the Holy Spirit. **“Did you receive the Holy Spirit since you believed” (Acts 19:2.)** When he realized they knew nothing of the Holy Spirit, he inquired about their baptism. They had received the baptism of John, but not Christian baptism.

John’s baptism differed from Christian baptism in at least four ways.

- John’s baptism was only for Jews, but Christian baptism is for all nations.
- John’s baptism was only practiced a short time, but Christian baptism is to continue until the end of the world.
- John’s baptism was upon the authority of God, but Christian baptism is also upon the authority of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. A Jew today could receive John’s baptism and still believe that the Messiah was yet to come.
- John’s baptism had no promise of the Holy Spirit,

but Christian baptism does (Acts 2:38.)

Physical birth is indeed a miracle. Ecclesiastes 11:5 reminds us that we don't know how or when the spirit enters into a child in it's mother's womb. Neither do we understand all about the Holy Spirit in the process of conversion. Physical life is not merely mechanical. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Apparently, however, he had only one son. His son, Rehoboam, was born before Solomon began his reign. We know this because Solomon reigned forty years, and Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign.

Later Solomon would write in Ps. 127:1 **"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it."**

The need for humility is even more necessary in the world of the Spirit. We can cry out Lord, Lord, and still be rejected. The Sovereign of the universe discerns the thoughts and intents of our hearts. He detects hypocrisy which the rest of us have no way of knowing about or understanding. Ananias and Sapphira were in church every Sunday, and seemed to be contributing quite generously. God, however, who judges the secrets of men's hearts knew that they were hypocrites.

It is not our responsibility to judge Ananias and Sapphira, or anyone else. To their own master they will stand or fall. We are to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith. We are to prove our own selves (II Cor. 13:5.) Don't you know that Jesus Christ is within you, unless you are reprobates?

The Holy Spirit is also Sovereign, but has promised to come into our hearts when we ask Him to (Lk. 11:13.)

Why not ask Him in today?

Famine

“ . . . and there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass’s head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove’s dung for five pieces of silver . . . ” (II Kings 6:25.)

The famine in Samaria was almost indescribable. As the king passed by upon the wall he found two women quarreling. The subject of their controversy was cannibalism. As difficult as it is for us to imagine, these women were so hungry that they had decided to eat their own children. By prior agreement the women had determined to boil and eat both of their babies. One woman, however, ate her neighbor’s child and then hid her own. That’s what the quarrel was all about.

Symbolic of the famine was the fact that nothing really edible remained. Under normal conditions an Israelite would never eat a donkey, for it was an unclean animal. In times of famine, however, they ate anything. Even the head of an ass brought 80 pieces of silver in the city of Samaria.

At the same time we are told that a fourth part of a cab of dove’s dung brought five pieces of silver. Some think that dove’s dung was a kind of pulse, or pea, which was native to the area. Keil and Delitzsch, however, state in their commentary that “The expression may be taken literally, since dung has been known to be collected for eating in times of terrible famine . . . ” A cab was a unit of dry measure which equaled about two quarts. Most of us think we would never stoop that low, but then, we’ve never been in a famine.

The prophet Amos predicted a different kind of famine: **“Behold the days come saith the Lord God that I will send a famine in the land, nota famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11.)**

The word famine occurs 96 times in the Authorized Version of the Bible but the idea is found many more times than that. For example, the word "dearth" is found 8 times, hunger 24 times, hungry 30 times, etc. As terrible as it is to be without bread and water, intellectually we know it is even worse to be without the Word of God. The later, as you know, can result in eternal death.

When Samuel was a child the Scriptures teach that the Word of the Lord was "precious" in those days (1 Sam. 3:1.) It was a rare thing in those days for God to speak to man. This made His Words all the more valuable.

Our pilgrim forefathers were said to have paid as much as a wagon load of corn for the privilege of borrowing a Bible for a few hours. The Word of the Lord was precious in those days.

A short while after the Iron Curtain came down, black market Bibles were bringing \$100 each in Russia. They had been without the Word of God for over 70 years and His Words were precious in those days.

Gospel preachers have been put to death in Communist China for possessing and teaching the Word of God. There are many countries in our modern world where the Word of God is very precious.

Market forces are said to determine value. If there is a big supply, and not much demand, items become cheap. Perhaps that is why the Word of God is so inexpensive in America. There is a big supply and not much demand. Most church members usually have several Bibles scattered around the house, and sometimes don't read any of them. Most church buildings in America have a stack of unclaimed Bibles which people have left behind and never bothered to claim. The Word of God doesn't seem to be very precious to us.

It's hard for most Americans to imagine a famine of the Word of God. It was also hard for ancient Israel to think that way too. Note these words from Ezekiel 33:30-33 as they are translated in the Living Bible:

"Son of dust, your people are whispering behind

your back. They talk about you in their houses and whisper about you at the doors, saying. 'Come on, let's have some fun! Let's go hear him tell us what the Lord is saying!' So they come as though they are sincere and sit before you listening. But they have no intention of doing what I tell them to; they talk very sweetly about loving the Lord, but with their hearts they are loving their money. You are very entertaining to them, like someone who sings lovely songs with a beautiful voice or plays well on an instrument. They hear what you say but don't pay any attention to it! But when all these terrible things happen to them - as they will - then they will know a prophet has been among them."

A preacher friend wryly observed: "dove's dung is what you have left after the dove has departed. When the Holy Spirit no longer adds His blessings, things fall apart in a hurry. The Body without the Spirit, is dead!

The famine in Samaria was over in a single day. The prophet of God declared that **"by tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria"** (II Ki. 7:1.)

God is the Source of Abundant Life. He is the Bread of Life. He is also the Water of Life. He offers us a glorious invitation: **"All things are ready, come to the feast."**

The great feast enjoyed by the people of Samaria came through the invitation for four leprous beggars. They discovered what God had done and could not hold their peace. The dreary city that once was filled with death and gloom, came alive with abundance and joy. The arch pessimist who said it couldn't happen, as you know, was trampled at the gate.

To God be the glory! Let's pray that the dove will never depart and that we shall never experience a famine of the Word of God!

Retreat From Reality

High in the mountains of Northern Mexico is a little community of deeply religious people. They are not native Mexicans, but have historical roots that reach back to Europe, and most do not speak Spanish. Today they number about eighty families, and are living in six different "camps."

The flow of their migration took them first to the U.S. and then to Canada. With the outbreak of World War II, they retreated to the mountains of Mexico. Each move seemed to be calculated to avoid worldliness and conflict. When they perceived trouble in Europe, they retreated to America. When they perceived trouble in America they retreated to Canada. When they perceived trouble in Canada, they retreated to Mexico.

The area where they are now settled is almost like the end of the world. It is both inaccessible and unproductive. It is hard to imagine that anyone would ever decide to live there by choice. A nearby rancher told me that the land was so poor that it would take 75 acres to support one cow and her calf.

The worldliness and trouble they "perceived" may not seem like trouble to you at all. While I was there, for example, I was told of about a problem of worldliness in a family with eight children. The father, of all things, had purchased a bicycle for one of his sons. The pastor was so troubled by such worldliness that he made a special trip on horseback to demand that they get rid of it.

I visited that family. They owned about fifty acres. Their willingness to work hard, and a primitive irrigation system, enabled them to survive. The father appeared in home made bib overalls which were soiled from the day's work. He began to converse in Spanish. His name was Cornelio. His wife, I was told, had never learned to speak Spanish.

Cornelio did not own a tractor, but would have been

permitted to own one providing it had steel wheels and lugs. This restriction was to prevent him from going into town and being corrupted by the world. These people were not going into all the world to preach the Gospel, they were retreating from the world. They seemed to be doing everything within their power to achieve total isolation from the world.

In my mind's eye, I can still see the faces of Cornelio's children. There was such an absence of emotion, that they almost seemed to be waxen in appearance. The day was hot, and they were clothed in black. The girl's dresses dragged in the dust. I was only there for a short while, but still the absence of a smile or laughter was quite obvious.

Cornelio did own a small diesel generator. It didn't work. If it did, however, he would only be permitted to use the electricity to do work. An electric light bulb in the house, for example, was considered too worldly.

It is not my intention to belittle, or make fun of these sincere people. I must, however, take strong exception to their philosophy of retreat. In Ephesians 6: and I Thessalonians 5: we are told about the Christian's armor. We are fully equipped by God to face the devil and force him to flee. He that is within us is greater than he that is in the world. When we rebuke the devil, he will flee. **THERE IS NO PROTECTION, HOWEVER, FOR OUR BACK. WHEN WE RETREAT, THERE IS NO ARMOR TO PROTECT US!**

Jesus did not retreat from the harsh realities of earth. He ate with publicans and sinners and showed them a better way. He sent our His disciples to do the same. He told us we were light to a world of darkness. He commissioned us to be the salt of the earth. The power of salt to do it's work of preservation is only experienced when it penetrates the mass.

Let us not retreat from reality, but penetrate and preserve this world for Jesus Christ!

Advice to a Christian Writer

With reference to charging for what you have written, it seems to me quite appropriate that you do so.

First, with the state of the economy such as it is, the royalties you receive will help alleviate some of the financial hardship you have previously described.

Secondly, your unique personal experiences are a marketable item. They are not only interesting, but also inspirational. Properly managed, your personal testimony could conceivably make you a wealthy man.

In the third place, it is obvious that you have done a great deal of research and study. Since the "laborer is worthy of his hire," you ought to be reimbursed. You should feel free to charge, not only for your efforts, but also for mileage which you have traveled in the course of your ministry.

Finally, your ability to write is obviously a gift from God. If God did not intend for you to receive the full benefit of this gift, perhaps He would not have given it to you at all.

It probably would not be appropriate for me to offer specific advice regarding how much you should charge for your services. After a while you will learn where to send your manuscripts to receive to most money.

Certainly, legal procedures are also appropriate. Once you obtain legal protection for what you have written you are in a position of control. You can decide who can reproduce your writings and for how much.

You should also be aware that there are professional agents available who understand the science of marketing you to the public. They will not only find outlets for your writing, but can also arrange for personal appearances for the highest honorarium. Quite candidly, may I say that a number of people are getting paid large sums of money who have much less to offer than do you. If you can secure an agent, it would certainly be in your

best financial interests to do so.

In closing, Luke, it is probably too late to copyright your "Gospel," but before you mail your "Acts of the Apostles" to Theophilus, I suggest that you get a good attorney.

Ask Counsel at Abel

“ . . . they were wont to speak in old time, saying, they shall surely ask counsel at Abel: and so they ended the matter . . . ” (II Sam. 20:18.)

Abel was a city in Northern Palestine a few miles west of ancient Laish (or Dan,) and nine miles south of Ijon. It was apparently a city so renown for its wisdom that it became a proverb in ancient Israel to “ask counsel at Abel.” The NIV renders the passage: **“Get your answer at Abel, and that settles it.”**

We gain an insight into the practical nature of their wisdom in association against King David.

Perhaps a bit of history will help us to appreciate their wisdom. The rebellion of Absalom was over, but it had been stopped at a terrible price. Absalom, as you recall, was killed while hanging by his hair from an oak tree. At the same time, however, there was a great slaughter of 20,000 men (II Sam. 20:7.)

No sooner had this rebellion been stopped than a man of “belial” named Sheba, started another rebellion. It is described in II Samuel 20. This rebellion was of such magnitude that the Scriptures record: **“every man of Israel went up from after David and followed Sheba . . .” (Vs. 2.)** David knew the situation was serious and said: **“Now shall Sheba the son of Bichri do us more harm than did Absalom” (vs. 6.)**

When the army of Judah, which was loyal to David, pursued Sheba he fled to the north and took refuge at Abel. Joab, the leader of David’s army, had his men begin the siege of the city. They cast a bank against it and began battering down the wall.

At this point in time, a wise woman within the city called for a conference. She wanted to know why Joab was being so hasty? Surely there must be a simple solution to this problem. There was! A short time later they tossed Sheba’s head over the wall and the war was over. Joab

blew the trumpet and everybody went home.

Any time you can fight a war with only one fatality you are approaching optimum efficiency. Especially when the dead man is a man of "belial" or "wickedness."

David that they were going to have a big problem. He was wrong. The "Gordian Knot" of political turmoil was unraveled by a single stroke of the sword. There was no need for thousands of people to die, or for the city which was like a "mother in Israel" to be battered into the dust and destroyed. The whole matter hinged on the head of one rebellious individual. When his head was removed, a healing process began to take place in the nation.

The manner in which the head of Sheba was delivered to Joab is also worthy of our admiration. If the people of Abel had opened their city gates, a war could conceivably have broken out by accident. When tempers were taunt, and the fever of war approached a frenzy, there was no reason to risk any kind of face to face encounter. Under such circumstances, any intemperate word or action could conceivably have escalated into a full fledged conflict. They just chopped off his head and tossed it over the wall. Touche! It was over!

One cannot help but wish that the wisdom of this ancient city was available in our modern world. This year thousands of people will die because a few intemperate and rebellious people are fanning the flames of hatred and war. They hide behind their walls and spew their venomous propaganda to naive and cooperative members of the press. From the safety of their political refuge they send out their stooges to do their dirty work.

I cannot help but believe that it may not be necessary for thousands of people to die. It may not be necessary for dozens of cities to suffer the bombs and bullets of revolutionary terror. It may not be necessary for wars to continue ad infinitum.

Perhaps, just as simple a solution could settle the matter today, just like it did in the days of ancient Israel. In those days an entire revolution was stopped by a single

stroke of the sword.

When you pick up the morning paper and see so much discord and confusion, perhaps it is time for us to "ask counsel at Abel."

Thoughts on Celibacy

Some time ago I spoke with a young man who was planning to become a Roman Catholic Priest. He gave up those plans, however, and got married. "I wish," he said, "that the Church would be honest about celibacy. The primary reason for it is not morality, but property."

He had a point. During the Dark Ages the Roman Catholic Church became very wealthy. In A MANUAL OF CHURCH HISTORY, by Albert Henry Newman, Vol. I, pages 461-462, we read: "*As feudalism had added vastly to the territorial possessions of the church the Crusades confirmed the church in the possessions of the territory already acquired and gave an opportunity for acquiring enormous additional wealth. Many an enthusiastic crusader, to make his salvation doubly sure, bequeathed his entire estate to the church in case of his failure to return. Many in starting needed ready money, which the church was prepared to furnish on good security. Thus the church came to possess about 1/3 of the real property of Europe.*"

At the risk of being offensive, we must point out that during the Dark Ages the morals of the clergy were at an all time low. The midnight of the Dark Ages has been called the "Pornocracy." Philip Schaff, in his HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, Vol. V, p. 806, quotes Jacob de Vitry. "*Fornication among clergyman was considered no sin. Loose women paraded the streets and, as it were by force, drew them to their lodgings. And if they refused, the women pointed the finger at them, crying 'Sodomites'.*"

Even many of the popes kept mistresses, and fathered illegitimate children. As long as there was no legal marriage, however, or legal heirs, the vast holdings of the clergy remained the property of the church.

The December, 1969 READER'S DIGEST confirmed this truth in an article titled "Why Priests Marry"

by Edward B. Fiske: *"In the early church, marriage was the normal state for clergy. St. Peter was married, as were almost all of his fellow apostles, and about 40 of the early popes. In Eastern Orthodox churches - as in Eastern Rite Roman Catholic churches - priests have always been permitted to marry before ordination. From the beginning, however, celibacy was an honored ideal . . . and in the year 1139 it was made a binding law. The creation of a celibate class provided assurance that church lands, often held by priests in their own names during the Middle Ages, would not pass into the hands of their relatives . . ."*

Martin Luther got married, and fathered six children. When he died his property was distributed to his wife and children who were his legal heirs. The church would never have permitted this. They would, however, have permitted Luther to father the same six children by the same woman, as long as he did not get married. He would have had to pay a fine for each illegitimate child, but would not have had to leave the priesthood.

The above referenced article in the READER'S DIGEST indicates that 2,500 priests left the church in 1968 alone, and 40% were married within the year.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with marriage. Marriage is honorable in all (Heb. 13:4.) There is something wrong, however, with doctrines that "forbid" marriage (I Tim. 4:1-4.) The ultimate irony, however, with reference to church leaders and marriage, is that what the church has forbidden, the Scriptures require (I Tim. 3:1ff.)

Another Elders Meeting?

Are you going to have another elder's meeting tonight?

Yes.

This is the third meeting you've have this week. Why don't you stay home and play with the children?

...

It's about that preacher isn't it? Why don't for just forget about him and spend some time with your family?

We are doing the Lord's work, and that has to come first.

But your meetings are always so late.

This is a busy time of the year and when you accept responsibility for the congregation of God's people you have to be willing to pay the price.

Well, as far as I'm concerned, the congregation of God's people will somehow survive if you take a little more time with your family.

I promise, next week I'll be home every night.

Not all of the elders have come to these meetings. I know that for a fact because I got together with some of the women this afternoon.

I cannot in good conscience shirk by own responsibility, just because someone else does.

If you won't stay home because of the children, why don't you stay home because of me? It's been a long time since we've spent any time alone together.

This meeting is very important . . . I'm sorry . . . I have to go!

I won't be waiting up!

I understand.

Good night Caiaphas . . . I'll see you in the morning!

In Secret Have I Said Nothing

“Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort, and in secret have I said nothing” (John 18:20.)

Benjamin Disraeli published his novel “Coningsby” in 1844. In that work he wrote, “So you see, my dear Coningsby, the world is governed by very different personages from what is imagined by those who are not behind the scenes.”

Certainly this is true of the political world. We elect men to every level of government who sometimes have little or no influence over the course of events around them. Congressmen, for example, may naively think they are going to eliminate government waste. Once elected, however, they invariably vote to perpetuate the government handouts they once criticized. It is not easy to do away with a program that is providing millions of dollars and thousands of jobs for your own district.

A good case can be made to show that the course of the Revolutionary War was directed from Europe, and not America. Sometimes the world’s most powerful men deliberately avoid publicity. During the days of our Civil War, for example, the House of Rothschild financed both sides. The North was helped through August Belmont, and the South through the Erlangers, Rothchild’s relatives. Such information, however, was not the stuff out of which headlines are made.

One reason why some men avoid publicity is because their deeds are evil. The men who wanted to crucify Jesus, for example, could not stand the glare of open debate or public scrutiny. There were too many anomalies and inconsistencies in what they did. They had to meet at night where false witnesses could be suborned, and cross-examination could be avoided.

Jesus, by contrast, said nothing in secret. He met

openly in the synagogues and the temple. He placed His message before His critics that they might interrogate Him in public. Those who love darkness rather than light cannot follow such a course of action.

It is disturbing to see that churches are sometimes governed by powerful forces that operate behind the scenes in secret meetings. With the passing of time, some people inevitably accede to positions of power and influence. They may have, for example, inherited or earned large sums of money. People with money have ways of getting things done, both in society, and in the church. In some congregations the wife of a wealthy board member may have more to say about the future of the church than the man who stands in the pulpit.

Sometimes the views of these powerful people are so well understood in the church that they are like unwritten laws beyond which it is not wise to transgress. These views, of course, are not grist to be ground out in public. In public, this nonsense would vanish like a vapor. So these unwritten laws are conceived in secret, repeated in secret, and implemented in secret. Does this sound like the Sanhedrin or what?

I know of people who have decided to buy a new car, a new farm implement, or a piece of ground, only to have their banker say "No!" Those who pay the piper call the tune.

So also in churches. Those who control the purse strings are in positions of power to hire and fire, manipulate and direct, orchestrate and control. It is sad to say that sometimes this is done under the table and in the shadow of spiritual darkness.

Again, I remind you that Jesus said nothing in secret. He was and is the "Light" of the world. That Light shined in the darkness and the darkness could not prevail against it. Light has nothing to fear. Even a tiny candle need not retreat before a cave full of darkness. Even a little light will cause darkness to flee.

Jesus told His followers that they too were the light

of the world. He told us to let our light shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16.)

Those who are the children of light are destined to dwell forever in a land where there is no darkness, and no night. Neither will there be any secrets. Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now we know it part, but then we will know fully, even as also we are fully know.

Let us be like Jesus, and determine to say nothing in secret.