

And the Lord Laughed

(Ps. 2:4)

I am indebted to George King for an insight regarding the coming election. He said: "Even if a person comes to power who is opposed to Christianity, God can still convert him to the truth just like He did Saul of Tarsus." Touche! That's right! Imagine how happy the enemies of Christ were when Saul came to a position of power. This was a man both cunning and capable. He was at the top of his class. His credentials in the anti-Christian establishment were impeccable. They were confident that if anybody could stamp out Christianity, he could. God, however, had different plans for Saul. God had separated him from his mother's womb to be a soul winner and apostle to the Gentiles. The will of our Sovereign God could not, and cannot be canceled by any man or group of men, no matter how politically powerful they appear to be. In this regard, it doesn't matter who is elected president, God is still in control.

The Scriptures are crystal clear. God still reigns over the kingdoms of men and appoints over them whomsoever He would (Dan. 5:21.) Nebuchadnezzar learned this lesson by being driven from the sons of men and living like a beast in the midst of wild asses. Pharaoh learned this lesson by the power of plagues and the loss of his firstborn son. Uzziah the King, pompous and self-willed, was humbled by God with leprosy (II Chron. 26:18-21.) Herod did not give glory to God and an angel smote him, and he was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost (Acts 11:23.) Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, had Hezekiah shut up like a "bird in a cage." He boasted that even Jehovah could not stop him from the destruction of Jerusalem. He was wrong! In a single night an angel of God killed 185,000 Assyrian troops (Is. 37:36.)

The Second Psalm declares that God laughs at the attempts of earthly rulers to thwart His will. When all the

kings of the earth unite in a common cause to defeat the Lord's Anointed: **"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh"** (Ps. 2:4.) When the "pip squeak dictators" of earth band together to oppose God, He thinks it's funny. The Psalmist said: **"The Lord shall have them in derision."** It's like an ant attempting to intimidate an elephant, or a cockroach promising to stop a steam roller. It's funny!

This is the Scripture quoted by the apostles when the Jewish rulers tried to destroy the Jerusalem Church. They had already conspired with the Roman Government to put Jesus to death. They sealed His tomb and stationed Roman soldiers there to keep Him in the grave. They were wasting their time! They arrested and threatened the apostles, but they were wasting their time! The apostles returned to their company and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said. It was at this point that someone remembered the Second Psalm. The Holy Spirit spoke through the mouth of David, saying: **"Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ"** (Acts 4:) They were all wasting their time! God would be found true and every man a liar.

The Sovereignty of God does not remove our responsibility to vote, or to be active in the affairs of our government. This country has a rich heritage of godly men serving in public office. Obviously, God used people of similar convictions to place them in positions of power. If we fail in our duty, God will raise up deliverance from another source, but who knows but what we were brought into the kingdom for such a time as this.

The Open Church

(Review of the book by James H. Rutz)

"If you've ever felt lonely and unimportant in church, there's a good reason: You **are** alone and unimportant.

From 11 to 12 Sunday, you're just another pretty face in the crowd.

Though surrounded by others, you're cut off. Custom walls you off in your own space and silences your voice - except for song or responsive reading.

Surrounded by an audience of trainee mutes, you can find it lonely as a solo trek across Antarctica after you've eaten all the sled dogs.

The service would be exactly the same without you. You know that. Your impact on it is like an extra gallon of water going over Niagara Falls."

This is the way that Rutz begins his challenge to "open the church." He contends that for the first three hundred years of Christianity, there were no church buildings, no pulpits, and no clergy. Therefore the church experienced "open worship, open sharing, and open ministry."

"At the weekly get-together, everyone was the star of the show, everyone was needed. Spirits were lifted, problems solved, hurts healed, hearts fed, and the Lord of lords spoke to every soul." Imperial persecution only fanned the flames of evangelism. Everyone felt needed. Everyone was needed.

Then came the "triumph" of Christianity. The Emperor, Constantine, became a "Christian." Money that had been previously used to build temples to pagan deities, was now available to construct the same type of buildings for believers. Pagan priests followed the money trail and "converted" to Christianity. By A.D. 400, 80% of the Roman Empire was "Christian." Even though many of these people knew little or nothing about Jesus.

Christianity was no longer for "activists," now it was for "spectators."

This theological transformation signaled the beginning of the Dark Ages. The "priesthood of believers," was replaced by a "professional priesthood." That which had originally been the responsibility of every Christian, was now relegated to the role of specialists.

Rutz believes that our modern concept of sermonizing dates back, not to the Bible, but to John Chrysostom. His name means "golden mouth." This pagan student of rhetoric was the most promising orator in the Empire. When he converted to Christianity he helped to change the blunt style of the Hebrew prophet, into Greek oratorical skills. Those who had previously ministered around a kitchen table, now felt inadequate to speak from a professional pulpit. It would be impossible to adequately describe our modern church without frequent references to "clergymen." Archeologists, however, have studied 25,000 Christian documents and fragments from the first three centuries without finding a single reference to a "minister, priest, or pastor."

What would happen to a modern church if the "pastor" were suddenly prevented from performing his duties? In at least one church, it turned out to be a blessing. Chinese Pastor, M.Y. Chan, was singled out for punishment by the Communists. From 1961 to 1979 he was forced to spread buckets of human waste on the fields as fertilizer. His huge prison camp in Kiangsu province, had four main latrine areas. They all drained into one horrendous hell hole where he stood for six to eight hours every day in sludge that was sometimes up to his waist. Because his brethren knew of his suffering, they upheld him daily in prayer. He was not sick one time in over eighteen years. Meanwhile, his church of 300, had grown to 5,000. Chan, now 58, reports churches in twenty locations, each with about a thousand believers.

Someone has said that there is nothing so powerful as an idea whose time has come. Perhaps this is the time for the

priesthood of all believers to become a reality, and not just a slogan.

Blind Guides

". . . If the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch" (Matt. 15:14.)

A guide needs more than education, he needs vision. A dog with vision is a better guide than a blind man with a Ph.D. Jesus knew this. He knew that the religious leaders of His day were blind, in spite of their education. Jesus warned people not to follow them. When the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch. The Pharisees were blind to spiritual reality no matter how much they read the Bible.

Isaiah knew that it would be so. When he was called to prophesy (Is. 6:;) the Lord warned him that people would hear without understanding, and see without perception. This phenomenon was not limited to the time of Isaiah. Jesus said that people in His day **"fulfilled the prophesy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive"** (Matt. 13:14.) Paul remembered these words when the Jews in Rome rejected the gospel (Acts 28:25-27.) John wrote about this in the book of Revelation when he reminded the Laodiceans that they were: **"wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked"** (Rev. 3:17.)

Spiritual blindness is a serious problem. Read again the twenty third chapter of Matthew. The Pharisees compassed sea and land to make a proselyte, only to make him twofold more the child of hell than they were. They sought out the chief seats in the synagogue but in reality were a generation of vipers who could not escape the damnation of hell (v 33). Jesus said they were: **"blind guides"** (v 16). He also called them: **"fools and blind"** (v 17). They were following in the footsteps of their "blind" ancestors who killed the prophets (v 31). They were so blind that the publicans and the harlots would "see" spiritual reality before they would.

It is important to remember that Jesus said we have to be "born again" in order to "see" the kingdom of God (John 3:3). Human wisdom and spiritual vision are not the same.

At 5:00 a.m. this morning I began to apply these words to my own life. I am told that some new converts in China are performing animal sacrifices and putting blood on the doors of their homes. Since I know better than that, I felt somewhat superior. Then it dawned upon me that China is in the midst of a great revival. James Rutz in "The Open Church" tells of a Chinese pastor, C.Y. Kim, who was targeted for persecution. He spent eighteen years in prison for his faith. During that time, his church grew from 300 to over 5,000. Today they meet in twenty locations and number over 20,000. I'm not sure I am the one to "guide" such a congregation.

Wesley Stepp told of an American preacher who was trying to get the Christians of India to spend fifteen minutes a day in prayer. The translator seemed confused. They were already spending three hours a day in prayer.

I just visited Mexico a few weeks ago. I met a man with no formal theological training. Just two years ago he was a mechanic. He told me of his open air evangelistic efforts at the city dump in Matamoros. A group of Americans visited the work, but declined to participate one night because of rain. They decided to preach anyhow. When they set up for the service no one came. Undeterred, they held hands and prayed. Within thirty minutes 250 people showed up and forty made decisions for Christ. Wouldn't it be sad if we "guided" such people to be just like we are.

Isaiah predicted that Jesus would "open the eyes of the blind." This not only applies to blind men like Bartimaeus. It also applies to those of us who lack spiritual perception and understanding. Lord, open our eyes too!

"Willing" and "Doing"

"For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13)

The conversion experience is more than a radical transformation, it is a "new creation." **"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17.)**

Every "creature" formed by God has a special nature. Bears hibernate, but geese migrate. Spiders spin webs, but bees build honeycomb. Birds make nests, but foxes dig holes. Each creature has a special nature given to it by God.

The Greek verb "poieo" means to make or do. It is found 565 times in the N.T. Scriptures. The noun form of the same word is "poiema." It is the basis of our English word "poem," and is only used twice.

The first use of the word refers to the physical universe. It is found in Rom. 1:20 and is translated as "made" in the K.J.V. The physical creation is like a poem "made" by God.

The only other use of "poiema" is in Eph. 2:10, where it refers to the spiritual universe. The K.J.V. renders it "workmanship." Christians are the creative "workmanship" of God. We manifest the same type of magnificent beauty and harmony that are seen in the world of physical things. That's why God's spiritual creation is also called a "poem."

Christ is the Head of His Body, the Church. Christians are "members" of that Body. If Christ wants something to be done, He can direct the members of His Body to do it. When His will becomes ours, so does His strength. It is God that works in us, both to will and do the things that please Him. Both desire, and ability, come from God.

A similar expression is found in Col. 1:29:

"Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." II Thess. 1:11, refers to the **"work of faith with power,"** that enables the believer to complete His purpose and bring pleasure to God.

John Wesley rode more than 250,000 miles on horseback and preached over 40,000 sermons.

William Carey didn't have a high school education, yet translated portions of the Bible into 35 different languages and dialects. He did not take a furlough in forty years of missionary service.

When Charles Finney held revival meetings in Rochester, New York in 1830-31, the bars went out of business and crime was reduced by two-thirds.

Johann Sebastian Bach overcame great obstacles to write 300 cantatas. He continued to compose, even after going blind.

George Washington Carver refused to take credit for his amazing discoveries. He gave the glory to God. He believed that nature was an unlimited broadcasting system and that he had merely "tuned in" to his Creator.

The late Art Morris had a great desire to be a missionary. His speech impediment, however, made it difficult for him to be accepted. He was rejected by six different mission fields before moving to India. At the time of his death he was recognized as one of the most successful missionaries of this century.

Leslie Raymond had a great desire to sing, but was told by her voice teacher that she did not have a good voice. She prayed that God would either take away her desire, or give her ability. Today she composes music and sings beautifully.

God is an unlimited source of ideas and energy. When we become Christians the Godhead dwells in us by faith. The New Covenant is in our minds and hearts, and it is God who enables us to "will and do for His good pleasure."

We or He

There is a dramatic difference between the church that says: "We are right," and the church that says: "He is right!"

The first church is infected with a sense of pride. They say: "We have the right doctrine, the right understanding, the right name, the right baptism, and the right communion."

The second church is filled with a sense of shame. They recognize their many mistakes and their utter need of a Savior. They may feel that they are hardly right about anything. They are trying to be right, but the focus of their faith is not in themselves, but in Christ.

These two churches have a different approach to evangelism. The first has little to say about Jesus. They concentrate upon themselves. It is not enough for them to be right. They must convince others that they are right. Their evangelistic calls therefore consist of elaborate arguments to prove the correctness of their doctrine.

The second church is so busy exalting Christ that they have little time to brag upon themselves. Their confidence in Christ leaves them free to confess personal errors and inadequacy. They are convinced that even if they do err, there is still no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.

The first church looks upon others with a sense of pity and condescension. The correctness of their view is so obvious to them, they think it should be obvious to everyone. In their heart of hearts they are thankful not to be like others. When they do associate with "others," they only feel comfortable when they are teaching.

The second church is convinced that everyone is in error, and that no church can ever be saved by its own correctness. Consequently they tend to be tolerant of those who are different. When they do meet with others, they feel free to learn, as well as teach.

The first church is resistant to change. When you are right, why should you change?

The second church is free to experiment and adapt, for as long as Jesus is right, they can afford to be wrong.

The first church is characterized by fear. When you are right, there is a constant danger that some insidious influence could cause you to be wrong. This kind of church only feels comfortable behind walls. Outside of these walls they feel like people dressed in white walking in the midst of contamination and dirt. They are like the priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side when they saw a man in need.

The second church has great freedom to reach out to others. They trust in Christ, not themselves, to remain free from impurity. They are like the Good Samaritan, who risked personal contamination to help a man who had fallen among thieves.

The first church is like the Pharisee who prayed: **"God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."**

The second church is like the publican who **"would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."**

Jesus is right! He said: **"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I overcame, and am set down with the Father in his throne."**

Holy Places

Of the five duties incumbent upon the devout Mohammedan, one is a pilgrimage to Mecca, the birthplace of their prophet. Most of the pilgrims will pause to fill their flasks with the "sacred" water of the well of Zemzem. This is alleged to be the very well where Hagar obtained water for Ishmael. Thus the Mohammedan has his holy cities like Mecca, Damascus and Medina. The ancient Incas had their sacred city of Cuzco, the Jews have Jerusalem, the Catholics have Rome, the Mormons have Salt Lake City, and the Hindus have Benares on the banks of the Ganges. Each of these religions is diverse from the others, yet they do have at least this one thing in common. They have a common affection for religious relics and sacred cities.

Christianity is unique in this regard. Christ venerated no holy places or holy things, only holy people. He taught His followers that they were citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20,) and that they had no continuing city anywhere on earth (Heb. 13:14.) He predicted that the Jewish temple would be so completely destroyed that one stone would not be left upon another that would not be cast down. At the same time He promised that the gates of hell would never prevail against His church. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well that the time was coming in which true worship would not be on Mt. Gerizim, or in Jerusalem, but in spirit and in truth (John 4:23.) True worship is not distinguished by WHERE you worship, but HOW.

It is interesting to note that in the midst of a society that reveled in religious architecture, the early Christians had no "church buildings" at all. They merely met in facilities which were already there. In Jerusalem they met in the temple and from house to house (Acts 2:46.) The church in Corinth was hosted by a man named Gaius (Rom. 16:23.) In Ephesus they met in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9.) During periods of persecution the

church in Rome met for worship in the catacombs. Somehow, the early church evangelized without erecting special buildings for the purpose of worship.

Neither did they venerate, consecrate, or dedicate holy places for the worship of Christ. It was centuries later that someone decided that Palestine was "holy" and decided for fight crusades to gain control of it. At about the same time the "church" was deciding that many other things were holy too. The graves of the martyrs were rifled and their bones were sold for large sums of money. Someone claimed to have the coat of Jesus at Treves. Another claimed to have the "holy shroud" at Turin. The swaddling clothes were supposed to be at Aachen, the sponge at the Basilica of St. John Lateran, the point of the lance in Paris, and the rest of it in Rome, etc., etc., etc.

John Calvin thought he had been kissing the arm of St. Anthony but it turned out to be a stag's bone. What he thought was the brain of St. Peter turned out to be a pumice stone: He continued: *"It is almost incredible how the world has been cheated. I can mention three foreskins of our Savior's circumcision, fourteen nails exhibited for the three driven in the cross, three robes for Christ's seamless garment over which the soldiers cast lots, three spears by which our Savior's side was pierced, five sets of linen cloths in which his body in the tomb was wrapped . . ."* (Phlip Schaff p. 486.)

Someone said that unrepentant man will either change his life, or change his theology. We should not be surprised, therefore, to discover that the church turned to "holy things" during the Dark Ages. At a time when religious leaders were void of spiritual life, they concocted something which was counterfeit.

The "New Covenant" of Christ is not like the "Old Covenant" of Judaism, or like any other religion on earth. When we invite Jesus in, He write His laws in our minds, and in our hearts. He and the Father make their "abode" within us and our bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit. Whatever we do in word or deed we do it all in the name of

the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father through Him. He has promised never to leave us or forsake us, and God will be found true though every man is a liar.

Don't worry about holy things and holy places, but as it is written: **"Be ye holy, for I am holy" (I Peter 1:16.)**

Be Slow to Speak

(James 1:19)

The first chapter of James deals with five important issues relating to the Christian Faith: (1) Viewing our trials (vss. 2-4;) Securing wisdom through prayer (vss. 5-89;) The uncertainty of riches (vss. 9-11;) Facing temptation (vss. 12-18;) A description of true religion (vss. 19-27.) It is important to remember, however, that each of these five issues, as well as the remainder of the book, are intrinsically related to the whole fabric of Christianity. The Christian life is not many natures, but one nature which manifests itself in many ways.

It is significant to note that James associates the Christian character with a disciplined mentality. If we are to be the "first fruits" of His creation, or "patterns" worthy of emulation by others, we cannot succumb to the shallowness of a reactionary mentality. We, therefore, to be swift to hear, but slow to speak, and slow to wrath.

Someone has observed that the human tongue is the only thing that grows sharper with constant use. Another has quipped, "We spend the first few years of our lives learning to talk, and the rest of it learning to shut up." The words which once were difficult to pronounce can become so easy to say that we even talk in our sleep. Without a proper discipline, each one of us can fall prey to the habit of talking before we think, or putting out tongue in motion before our brain is in gear. A doctor described the problem in medical terms. He said it is "constipation of the mind and diarrhea of the vocal cords." Another classic example of the same problem is the motor mouth who said: "How do I know what I think about it until I have heard what I have to say about the subject."

Such a philosophy, however, is so contrary to the Spirit of Jesus that James went on to say: **"If any many seemeth to be religious and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is**

vain.” A straight furrow is not plowed by accident. It is the result of careful planning and discipline. Jesus wants us to plow straight. He wants us to be disciplined. The perennial blabbermouth obviously lacks discipline. Their inability to control their tongue reflects a serious inner deficiency. Jesus said “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” The undisciplined mouth, therefore, is an indication of an undisciplined heart. James considered this condition so serious that it could render our religion as “vain.”

The simple prescription to help us solve this problem is to be “slow to speak.” If we will only pause before expressing ourselves verbally, the Holy Spirit will have an opportunity to deal with and subdue those stubborn vestiges of our carnal nature.

Each of us has weak spots where we are vulnerable to take that verbal shot from the hip. It may be some special aggravation at work or school. It may be some chronic domestic problem which has threatened the happiness of our home. It may be an exposed nerve regarding a church relationship, or matter of theology. Whatever it is, however, the Holy Spirit implores us to be “swift to hear, and slow to speak.” When we are slow to speak, we will also be slow to wrath. Both Scripture and common sense remind us that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

The essence of Christianity is to love. When we love our neighbor as ourselves, we are fulfilling the law and the prophets. One positive step we can take in the direction of Christ like love, is to be slow to speak. Paul put it like this: **“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. Th is I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”** (Galatians 5:14-16.)

The Guidance of God

Many people in the broad framework of Christendom have little or no deliberate contact with God. They do not study His Word. They do not commune with Him in prayer. They do not regularly worship. They exist on an animal level oblivious to His providential care in their lives. They have never been "led of God" to do much of anything. Such terminology sounds strange and foreign to their ears. Their interest in Christianity involves no dramatic change in either their thinking, or their conduct. Their association with the "church" is like their association with a lodge or fraternal order. Unfortunately, the "service club" concept of Christianity leaves little room for the Holy Spirit to shape and direct their lives.

Someone has observed that a rocket does not need guidance, until it blasts off. Neither do we. As long as we are content to be bound firmly to earth, there is little or no need for divine guidance. Someone sarcastically observed: "If the Holy Spirit were immediately withdrawn from our lives, our churches, and our organizations, we would continue on in life just as we always did." Most of us find ourselves to have made so much "provision for the flesh" that we grieve and reject the Spirit. It is only when we remove the cables and "blast off" that a guidance system is needed. This concept is not some extraneous addition to Christianity, it is an essential ingredient to the faith. It is only those who are led by the Spirit that are the sons of God (Rom. 8:14.)

Guidance is not needed for anything, or anyone, that is stationary. The servant of Abraham provides an interesting example of this principle. He was commissioned to return to the old country and fetch a wife for Isaac. His instructions seemed scanty and inadequate. He went as far as his human judgement could take him, and then God guided him. Man's extremity is

God's opportunity. The servant recognized the hand of God and said: **"I being in the way, the Lord led me"** (Gen. 24:27.) In the course of his journey he received divine assistance which he would not have received back home. It was only when he was moving that God guided him.

Our human nature cries out for a maximum of planning, and a minimum of risk. God often calls us to take a maximum risk with minimum planning. Abraham went out not knowing where he was going (Heb. 11:8.) We can become sons of Abraham by faith in Christ Jesus. The Hebrew people were guided by a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. They went where God guided them and survived on daily rations. If they gathered more than a day's provision of manna it bred worms and stank. I Corinthians 10: refers to them as our examples. We too are strangers and pilgrims in a strange land. We too are guided by God to our ultimate reward.

The Scriptures teach that the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. The Apostle Paul was such a man. There are many references to the guidance of the Spirit in His life. He was constantly being led, guided, forbidden, or directed by the Spirit. Note however, that much of this guidance came while he was "in the way." He was guided to Timothy in the vicinity of Lystra and Derbe. He was forbidden by the Spirit to go to Asia or Bithynia. He met Luke in Troaz where he received a vision of a man from Macedonia. As he was moving, he was being guided. A stump does not need a steering wheel. It isn't going anywhere. If we are not going anywhere, we don't need guidance either. We may sing "where He leads me I will follow," but most of us plan to stay right where we are.

The expression "open door" occurs a number of times in the Bible (Acts 14:27; I Cor. 16:9; II Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3; etc.) Paul seems to have had a lot of open doors and opportunities to witness for Christ. His life was characterized by many thrilling adventures and alacrity. The same type of excitement and thrills are also available

to each of us who are willing to get moving. Most doors, however, are not opened until someone knocks.

Jesus said it like this: **“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh is hall be opened”** (Matt. 7:7-8.)

The Middle of the Road

*The middle of the road is the place where I walk
Where no doctrinal danger can be.
It's quite lonely out here, for my brethren I fear,
Are not as discerning as me.
They turn to the left, and they turn to the right,
And extremists on both hands are found.
But the middle of the road is my safe abode,
And I stay on my way heaven bound.
While others may stray in their pendulous ways,
And turn from the one right direction.
An accurate goal is the theme of my soul,
And I modestly maintain perfection.
The way that is straight has but one narrow gate,
And I know that it's waiting for me.
For I humbly accord with the Way of the Lord,
And abandon all error, you see.
This terse little verse is quite popular now,
and it's message the multitudes know.
For it suits to a tee every person, you see,
Whatever direction they go.*

The Scriptures teach that every way of a man is right in his own eyes (Prov. 21:2.) St. Francis of Assisi felt led of God to give away all his possessions. He even gave away his clothing and presented himself naked to the Bishop for Christian service. Oral Roberts felt led of God to own many things worth many millions of dollars. Both men seem to have made great contributions to the cause of Christ. As we reflect on the great variety within the framework of Christianity several biblical principles seem obvious.

First, the church is described as a Body. Each member of the Body has a different function to perform. These different functions, or abilities, come from the Holy Spirit. Some members of the Body are like an eye, and

others like an ear. Each member is different, but necessary. By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body (I Cor. 12:13.) We are to endeavor to keep the unity created by the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Second, we must be careful about judging others. To their own master they will stand, or fall. One man believes that he may eat all things, and another who is weak only eats herbs. Let every man be full persuaded in his own mind, but let him not be judgmental about the conduct of others. We must follow after the things that make for peace, and the things wherewith one may edify another. (See Romans 14:)

In the third place we must recognize that not everyone is right, and some mistakes are fatal. **“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12.)** We must warn them that are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, support the weak, and be patient toward everyone (I Thess. 5:14.)

Finally, we must remember that we are saved by the righteousness of Christ, not our own. After we have done everything we understand God wants us to do, we are still unprofitable servants. No matter how hard we try, all of our righteousness is still like filthy rags.

When we are clothed in His righteousness alone, we will be faultless before His throne. Jesus is the “Way.” Let us endeavor to be in the center of His will!

The Heresies Among You

“For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you” (I Cor. 11:19.)

The word “heresy” comes from the Greek word which means “choosing” or “choice.” It occurs but nine times in the New Covenant Scriptures, viz: Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5; 24:14; 26:5; 28:22; Gal. 5:20; I Cor. 11:19; and II Pet. 2:1. Five of the six times the word is used in Acts it is translated as “sect” in the K.J.V.

It is interesting to observe that even heresies can perform a useful function in the Body of Christ. Our Scripture text teaches that it makes manifest those who are approved. The approved cling to Jesus and thus are made manifest. Those who are not approved will cling to someone else, or something other than Jesus.

Every living thing must have a way of excreting poison. In the human body we have boils, bowels, kidneys, sweat glands, etc. When a foreign object like a splinter, penetrates our body, puss is formed to help expel it. Every living thing needs a system to expel poison.

The Body of Christ is no exception. Paul made reference to Hymenaeus and Philetus whose words ate like “canker” or “gangrene” (II Tim. 2:17.) Heresies provide a way for men like this to be separated from the Body. They are characterized by the works of the flesh: hatred, strife, jealousies, wrath, factions, seditions, and heresies. The works of the flesh are manifest. The absence of the Spirit is obvious. The approved cling to Jesus and the rest cling to someone else, or something else.

The Christian faith is personal, nor propositional. Paul said that he knew “whom” he believed, not “what” he believed (II Tim. 1:12.) Jesus is the Shepherd of the sheep and the Cornerstone of the Building. He is our peace Who has broken down the middle wall of partition and made us one. There is no other foundation for Christian unity (I Cor.

3:11.)

The apostles provide an interesting example of the way Christ can unite those who otherwise might not have anything in common. Simon the Zealot, for example, hated publicans. Matthew, his fellow apostle, was a publican. These men were different politically, and probably belonged to different sects in Judaism. The Good Shepherd called both to follow Him. As they converged on Christ they also became closer to one another.

Judas, the betrayer, was different from the other apostles. Something else meant more to him than Jesus. How sad!

Let us follow the example of men like Paul. He wrote: **“I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God”** (I Cor. 2:2-5.)

They Shall All Have Their Part

“And all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” (Rev. 21:8.)

God is the ultimate in truth. God will be found true though every man is declared a liar. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh (I Tim. 3:16.) He also is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6.) Those who are partakers of God's nature speak the truth in love and do not lie to one another (Col. 3:1.) Those who lie betray their parentage. The devil is the father of all falsehood and the origin of all opposition to the truth (Jn. 8:44.)

The purpose of a lie is to create a false impression, or deceive. The devil began the process of deception and his children perpetuate it. Eve was deceived by a lie. Cain told a lie to try and avoid guilt for the death of his brother (Gen. 4:9.) Jacob told a lie to deceive his father and steal his brother's blessing (Gen. 37:31-32.) Gehazi lied for wealth (II Ki. 5:22-27.) Annanias and Sapphira lied for prestige (Acts 5.) Joseph's brothers lied to conceal their own wickedness in selling their brother as a slave (Gen. 37.) Jesus Christ was crucified because of lies. Solomon said there were six things the Lord hated, and seven that were an abomination to Him. Lying was second on the list (Prov. 6:17.)

It is regrettable that lying, the very antithesis of God, has become so acceptable. Many young people develop the habit of lying to get grades. They copy someone else's homework and sign their own name to it. They cheat on exams and salve their conscience with the lie that everyone does it. They lie to their parents about their dates, and lie to their dates about their parents.

Some say the children have learned to lie at home. Parents often tell children to answer the phone and say they are not home. Similar lies are told to the I.R.S., paper

boys, bill collectors, preachers, business associates, neighbors, relatives, and other people too numerous to mention. Paradoxically, it seems that our children have come by their lying "honestly."

Words, as you know, are vehicles of communication. They display outside, what we are like inside. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A tree is known by its fruit, and so are we. A deceitful tongue is indicative of a deceitful heart.

Those who are born of God are partakers of His nature. For this reason we do not need to swear by heaven or earth or anything else. We simply say "yes" or "no." We do not need to say anything else for the primary focus of our lives is to please God and not man.

There was a time when almost everyone told the truth. It was the nature of society for a man's word to be taken as truth. As men became more devious, his word was not accepted without a handshake. Then it became necessary for him to sign a paper. Then it became necessary for the signature to be notarized. Even after all of this, a great many people still lie.

We should not forget that God is Truth, and all liars shall have their part in the lake of fire and brimstone which burns for ever and ever.

The Clergy

Webster's Unabridged Dictionary defines "clergy" as "men ordained for religious service, as ministers, priests, etc., collectively."

Most Americans are familiar with the term "clergy." We have seen "clergy parking" and "clergy apparel," and we have heard of "clergy conferences," and "clergy discounts."

Though the Scriptures do not make a distinction between "clergy" and "laity," it is, nevertheless, important to honor our spiritual leaders. Please consider these Scriptures:

- **"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: Whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation" (Heb. 13:7.)**

- **"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17.)**

- **"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the laborer is worthy of his reward. Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (I Tim. 5:17-20.)**

- **"Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Gal. 6:6.)**

- **(Regarding Epaphroditus) "Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such**

in reputation: because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me" (Phil. 2:29-30.)

- Etc.

While it is important to honor our spiritual leaders, we can do so without dividing the Body of Christ into "clergy" and "laity." Such distinctions are contrary to the genius of Christianity and were never made by Christ, or His Apostles. The New Testament Scriptures never make a distinction between clergy and laity!

Let us attempt to place the concept of clergy in a Biblical and historical perspective. Please consider:

THE AGE OF THE PATRIARCHS

The word "patriarch" refers to rule by fathers. In the infancy of the world, the fathers served as prophet, priest, and king. For example, Abram was a patriarch. God spoke to him, therefore he was a prophet. Abram built altars and made sacrifices, therefore he was also a priest. But Abram was also a king. He could command his household to go to war, or even sacrifice his son on an altar without asking anybody. Thus we see that Abram, the patriarch, was prophet, priest, and king.

Upon the death of the patriarch, these responsibilities were assumed by the firstborn son. Throughout the age of the Patriarchs, the firstborn son was special in the eyes of God.

THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD

In the third month after the children of Israel were delivered from Egyptian bondage, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. At this time God expressed His desire to make His people into a Kingdom of Priests.

"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed,

and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6.)

The time, however, for a "kingdom of priests" had not yet arrived. Neither was Israel "an holy nation." In a few short days Israel would be naked before a golden calf in an idolatrous orgy. The people needed a schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ and thus prepare them for the ministry of priesthood. Therefore God ordained the tribe of Levi to serve as priests until the fulness of time would come. The Scriptures state explicitly that the Levites were to take the place of the firstborn.

"And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine . . ." (Nu. 3:12.)

The same truth is repeated in Nu. 3:41; 3:45; 8:16, etc. The Levitical Priesthood was not the ultimate aim of God, but it was a necessary step toward that goal. At a future time, the ministry of Jesus would create that long awaited "kingdom of priests, and holy nation."

Not all Levites, however, could serve as priests. This privilege was reserved for an exclusive elite from the family of Aaron. Aaron, of course, was a Levite. He, and his sons were set apart by a special service of consecration (Lev. 8:). They were commanded to wear special clothing (Ex 28:1-43.) In addition to these genealogical restrictions, no one could serve as a Levitical priest who had any physical deformity (Lev. 21:18-21.) No priest was allowed to shave the edges of his beard, or make any cuttings on his flesh (Lev. 21:5.) Neither could he marry a widow, divorcee, nor prostitute (Lev. 21:7,13,14 etc.)

The Levitical priesthood was a temporary, but still

an integral part of worship during the Mosaic Dispensation.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

As we said before, God expressed His desire that His people be a "kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" in the days of Moses (Ex. 19:6.) This grand design became reality in the days of Jesus. Jesus was born in the "fulness of time." Jesus made the priesthood of believers possible! Jesus said to the Samaritan woman:

"The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: For the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24.)

True worship was, and is, in "spirit" and in "truth." True worshipers do not have to journey to Jerusalem, or anywhere else, to worship God. Every true believer is a priest and can worship at any time and any place. This truth is repeated often in Scripture.

"Ye also as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 2:5.)

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:9.)

"And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father" (Rev. 1:6.)

"And hast made us unto our God kings and

priests": (Rev. 5:10.)

Etc.

When Jesus died, the veil of the Temple was rent, and the Holy of Holies became accessible to all believers. In fact, the Scriptures encourage us to enter boldly into the holiest by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19-20.)

EVERY BELIEVER IS TO MINISTER

A special priesthood, with special garments, was not the ultimate aim of God. God wanted to create a spiritual kingdom that would be like a body. This kingdom became a reality in the church of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Head, and every believer is a member of this Body. The gifts God gave this body were designed to equip every member for ministering.

"And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ . . . " (Eph. 4:11-12.)

As we have said, there was no distinction between clergy, and laity. Every Christian was to minister for the building up of the Body.

- Every Christian preached Christ (Acts 8:4.)
- Every man was given a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3.)
- Every man received a gift (I Pet. 4:10.)
- Everyone was given a work (Mk. 13:34)
- Every branch was to bear fruit (John 15:2.)
- Everyone was given talents according to his ability (Matt. 25:15.)

- Everyone was given grace (Eph. 4:7.)
- Everyone contributed according to his ability (Acts 11:29.)
- Everyone is to please his neighbor for his own good (Rom. 15:2.)
- Every man's work will be made manifest (I Cor. 3:13.)
- Every man will give account of himself to God (Rom. 14:12.)
- Etc.

BIBLICAL USE OF THE WORD "CLERGY"

Our word "clergy" comes from the Greek word "kleros." It means "to cast lots, or choose by lot." After Judas fell away, for example, two men were put forward to take his place. They cast lots to determine which one God had chosen, and the "lot" fell on Matthias (Acts 1:26.) The word translated as "lot" in this passage is the Greek word "kleros."

Young's Analytical Concordance lists thirteen uses of the word in the New Testament Scriptures. In the Authorized Version it is translated once as *heritage*, twice as *inheritance*, twice as *part*, three times as *lot*, and five times as *lots*.

It is important to understand that every Christian is chosen by God. Consequently, every believer is a part of the clergy. This is expressly stated by Peter in I Pet. 5:3. The elders were not to lord it over GOD'S HERITAGE. The word translated as "heritage" is the Bible word for clergy. God chose all of us! We are all his "heritage" or "clergy."

The word "laity" comes from the Greek word "laos," which means "people." In Scripture, the people of God are the clergy, and the clergy are the people of God.

Philip Schaff speaks to this point in his HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, Vol. II, page 124.

"In the apostolic church preaching and teaching were not confined to a particular class, but every convert could proclaim the gospel to unbelievers, and every Christian who had the gift could pray and teach and exhort in the congregation. The New Testament knows no spiritual aristocracy or nobility, but calls all believers 'saints,' though many fell far short of their vocation. Nor does it recognize a special priesthood, as well as universal kingship of believers. It does this in a far deeper and larger sense than the Old; in a sense too, which even to this day is not yet fully realized. The entire body of Christians is called 'clergy' (kleroi,) a peculiar people, a heritage of God."

CHURCH HISTORY

The people of God did not immediately lose their privileges as priests of God. This tragic loss came gradually over many years.

Schaff states that Tertullian (160-220) was the first to claim sacerdotal, or priestly privileges for the Christian ministry. He still claimed to believe, however, in the priesthood of all believers.

During the third century the term "priest" was applied directly to Christian ministers. A special, elite class of priests was emerging. Jesus spent most of His time with the common people (Mk. 12:37.) He chose common folk as His apostles. By means of the Holy Spirit, these common people were empowered to do uncommon things. They were not "officers" in an organization. They were members of a Living Body. Unfortunately, the spiritual Body of Christ was becoming a carnal organization. At the same time, a special "clergy" was developing which would reverse the plan of God. They would proclaim themselves priests, and deny to common people their privilege ministering.

The fourth general council at Carthage (A.D. 398,) prohibited "laymen" from teaching in the presence of "clergymen" without their consent.

The fourth canon of Nice directed that a bishop should be instituted and consecrated by at least three bishops of the province. Chrysostom lamented that bishops were not chosen because of their spiritual fitness, but because of "noble birth, or great wealth, or consanguinity and friendship." Consequently, the priesthood became increasingly degenerate. By the time of Sergius III (A.D. 904) the priests were said to be ruled by harlots. This period of history is called the "pornocracy" and lasted until A.D. 963.)

The Council of Florence (A.D. 1439,) formally sanctioned seven sacraments. They were: baptism, confirmation, extreme unction, the Lord's Supper, penance, marriage, and ordination. The priest was an integral part of every sacrament. The people of God were again in bondage to a priesthood. They were taught that the priest stood between them and God. Consequently, they needed the priest in order to be saved. Since, in their eyes, he held the power of salvation and damnation, he was called "Reverend." This indicates that he was feared by the people. For the record, the word "reverend" is only found once in the Bible (Ps. 111:9.) In this passage we are informed that God "sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is His name." God is to be revered, not man!

During the Dark Ages, the people of God were dominated by an ungodly priesthood. That is one reason why the age was so dark. John Foxe documents the death of thousands of believers in his book, CHRISTIAN MARTYRS OF THE WORLD. One famous martyr was William Tyndale. He was strangled and burned at the stake on October 6, 1536. His was killed for the "crime" of translating the Bible into the English language.

THE REFORMATION

The "Dark Ages" ended with the "Reformation." Surely God was involved in this period of enlightenment. While Martin Luther is generally given credit for leading the reformation, he was only one of many that God used. John Wyclif, for example, is known as the "Morning Star of the Reformation." He was the first man to translate the Bible into the English language. Wyclif wanted the Bible to be in the hands of the common man, a concept that was greatly opposed by the clergy of his day. Wyclif died December 31, 1384, almost one hundred years before Martin Luther was born. Though he died a natural death, he was later condemned as a heretic. His bones were dug up and burned forty-four years after his death, and his ashes were cast into the River swift.

Jesus has never been a Shepherd without sheep, or a King without subjects. In every age He has directed the lives of His people, and orchestrated human history. He is still doing so today!

The Reformation certainly started the pendulum going back in the right direction, but the task has not yet been completed. The concept of the priesthood of all believers is still an undiscovered truth for many people. In Luther's day a movement was born to "protest" against the excesses of the clergy. Unfortunately, most Protestant churches still maintained an unbiblical distinction between clergy and laity.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

God is the Great "I Am." He is "now," or eternally present in every generation.

Today God is accomplishing many miraculous things around the world. The Iron Curtain is down and millions in Eastern Europe and Russia are accepting Christ. Some believe the greatest revival of all time is taking place in Communist China. Similar movements are springing up in other Asian countries, Africa, Latin America, etc. Many,

if not most, of these gifted Christian leaders around the world are not classified as "clergyman." Yet God is using them in a mighty way.

Several years ago God called coach Bill McCartney to start a movement of Promise Keepers. The fact that he is not classified as a "clergyman" did not matter to God, and should not matter to us. For we, being many, "Are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:5.)

The Body of Christ is most powerful when every member is ministering. **THAT INCLUDES YOU!** Please prayerfully consider that God may be calling you to some special work for His glory.

Everlasting Sermonizing

Many years ago a reformer by the name of Alexander Campbell bemoaned the haphazard and irrational way that some preachers attempt to teach the doctrine of Christ. He wrote:

"This everlasting sermonizing! What good is in it? It resembles nothing that is rational in all the compass of thought. A.B. professes to teach arithmetic; he get a class of forty boys from 12 to 15 years old, we shall say. He tells them to meet once a week and he will give them a lecture or a sermon on some important point in this useful science.

The first day he lectures on the cube root for an hour. They sit bookless and thoughtless, heedless, and perhaps often drowsy, while he harangues them. He blesses them and sends them home, to return a week hence. They meet. His text is arithmetical progression. He preaches an hour, dismisses as usual. The third day of the meeting up come vulgar fractions: the fourth, rule of three; the fifth, addition; the sixth, notation; the seventh, cube root again, etc.,

Now in this way, I hesitate not to say, he might proceed seven years and not finish one accountant. Who ever thought that a science or an art could be taught in this way? And yet this is the only way, I may say, universally adopted of teaching the Christian religion. And so it is that many men have sat under the sound of the gospel, (as they call it,) for forty years, that cannot expound one chapter in the whole New Testament. And yet these same Christians would think it just to prosecute by civil law that teacher who would keep their sons four or five years at English grammar or arithmetic, and receive their money, and yet not one of their sons be able to expound one rule in syntax or arithmetic. . .

People can never be taught the Christian religion in this way of sermonizing. Public speeches may be very

useful on many occasions; but to teach a church the doctrine of Christ and to cause them to understand the Holy Scriptures, and to enjoy them, requires a course essentially different from either hearing sermons, or learning the catechism."

Electric Candles

Some years ago it was my happy lot to meet a citizen of Lebanon. His English was impeccable and his bearded face added to the wealth of interest and fascination that I had with everything he had to say. His image was enhanced by the fact that he was fluent in four or five different languages. Our conversation was both animated and jovial. We spoke on a variety of themes ranging from history and politics, to the tangled thickets of religious controversy.

Suddenly he began to reminisce about his home in Beirut. He leaned back his head and called out the shrill Moslem prayers which echo down the streets of his home town every three hours. In that day they were tape recorded prayers broadcast by means of a P.A. system from the roof of every mosque. He then began a rather elaborate description of the church right next door to his house. "In fact," he said, "the wall of our home was also the wall of the church." He spoke of the ringing bells, the constant flow to confessional, and the perennial light of candles. Impulsively he slapped his knee and said: "You're not going to believe this, but the church doesn't use candles anymore. It was too much trouble. Now they use electric candles. All you have to do is pay your money and flip a switch. In a few minutes the lights go out automatically."

He said I wouldn't believe it, but I'm sad to say that I did. I have never personally seen a modern Muslim punch a button for tape recorded prayers, or a contemporary Catholic do penance with the flip of a switch, but I believe that it does happen. In fact, I have seen the same type of laziness and commercialism in many American churches as well. We are a part of the "now generation." We have instant pudding, instant coffee, instant tee, why shouldn't we also have instant religion? We can heat and cool our homes with a flip of the switch. We can do our laundry with

a flip of the switch. Why shouldn't we also have forgiveness with a flip of the switch?

Rodney Reyman once told of a woman in Reno, Nevada who went "church shopping." The church she selected, she said, had the best deal on salvation of any church in town.

I don't know what she was promised or what church she selected, but I do know there is no short cut to salvation. The way to heaven is already straight and narrow. A straight line is the shortest distance between two points. The "Way" is Jesus. He is the only Mediator between God and man. His way, however, involves self denial. He said: **"If any many will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:24-26.)**

Most of what we do in the modern American church is intended to be convenient. The pews are cushioned and the chapel is conveniently heated and air conditioned. The services, if at all possible, begin and end at a convenient time. We feel it is a real advantage if we have convenient parking and a convenient way to get in and out of the church building. Crosses, however, are not convenient. The challenge of Jesus makes it clear. No cross, no crown!

There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end of that way is death. Taking up a cross seems to lead to death, but in reality leads to everlasting life!

Instead of flipping a switch, let's take up a cross!

A Most Valuable Asset

Rick Warren, in his book *The Purpose Driven Church*, states that the most valuable asset that people can give to the church is TIME. The Scriptures also concur that time is valuable and have a great deal to say about the brevity of life. The Psalmist compared life to a "dream" (Ps. 73:20,) and "sleep" (Ps. 90:5.) and a "tale that is told" (Ps. 90:9.) Solomon said it was like a "shadow" (Eccl. 6:12,) and James compared it to a "vapor" (Ja. 4:14.) Job thought life was like a "flower" (Job 14:2,) and Peter compared it to "grass" (I Pet. 1:24.) A wise woman reminded David that life is like "water spilled upon the ground" (II Sam. 14:14,) and Isaiah said it was like a "shepherd's tent" or "thread cut by a weaver" (Is. 38:12.) At the age of one hundred and thirty, Jacob told the Pharaoh that his days had been "few and evil" (Gen. 47:9.) Yes, time is indeed a most valuable asset.

Rick's church, the Saddleback Church, has experienced remarkable growth. They began with one family and grew to over 10,000 in just fifteen years. At the same time they planted twenty-six other churches . . . and they did it all without even owning a building. Rick believes that one reason they have experienced such growth involves time management. The growth of his church gives his insights a certain credibility.

Two thousand years ago Paul admonished the Ephesians to "redeem the time" because the days were evil (Eph. 5:16.) Today, his inspired words are perhaps even more relevant. In spite of all our contraptions to save time, we have less free time than ever. The Roper organization discovered that people have less discretionary time now, than they did in the 1970's. In 1973, for example, the average American had 26.2 non-committed hours each week. By 1987 the hours of leisure time had dropped to 16.6. Now we have even less leisure time than we did in 1987.

Unfortunately, the church has lagged behind in understanding the value of time. Since many people value money more than time, let us translate hours and minutes, into dollars and cents. If each minute was a dollar, we would have \$1,440 each day. At the end of the day our money would be gone and no balance could be carried over. By the time we spend 1/3 of the day, or \$480 in sleep, and the same amount in work, we have only \$480 left. Some of this will have to spend in eating, travel, and personal care. Other valuable moments will be spent caring for and repairing our many time saving devices. As we said before, our generation seems to have less discretionary time than any other.

Rich charges that "A common mistake made by many churches is to take their brightest and best people and turn them into bureaucrats by giving them more meetings to attend." We wouldn't think of wasting the Lord's money, but seem to care little about wasting the Lord's time.

Saddleback has attempted to avoid this error by empowering decision makers to implement their own decisions. They do not separate authority from responsibility, but trust the same people with both. Consequently, decision making responsibility is only given to people who are committed to ministry. While others argue, they act. The Saddleback church has seventy-nine ministries that are empowered to "do" what others merely "discuss." This efficient use of time not only keeps more people in productive ministry, but also minimizes opportunities for conflict.

Jesus was born in the "fulness of time." He died as a young man and completed his earthly ministry in only three short years., He left us as example that we should follow in His steps. He had time to pray, time for the sick, time for teaching, but no time for that which was useless and unproductive.

Benjamin Franklin said: "Dost thou love life, then do not squander time, for that is the stuff that life is made of."

This remarkable phenomenon called time arrives simultaneously to every inhabitant of earth. The genius does not have more time than the mentally retarded. The industrious person does not have more time than the sluggard. The rich do not get more than the poor. The big church does not have more time than the little church. Everyone, and every church, has the same amount of time.

What we accomplish, and what our church accomplishes, is to a large extent a reflection on the way we use our time.

Credentials

Every parent knows the value of credentials. We have had doors slammed in our faces because we didn't have the right papers. We have seen others pass us by because they had credentials that we didn't have. This is one reason why most parents encourage their children to get a good education. Even the prestige of the college you attend may make a difference when you are looking for a job.

In this regard it is important to remember that the credentials that we value so highly, mean absolutely nothing to God. God is not impressed by our human achievements. In fact, our earthly credentials may actually be a spiritual liability. God has consistently chosen to do mighty things through common people. His strength is made perfect in our weakness. He has deliberately chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. God does not want any flesh to glory in His presence (I Cor. 1:27-29.)

PETER AND PAUL

Consider the credentials of Peter and Paul. They were at opposite ends of the educational pendulum. In the Jewish community, Paul had impeccable credentials. He was born of the tribe of Benjamin, and circumcised the eighth day. He was trained at the feet of Gamaliel and taught according to the strictest tradition of Hebrew Law. He wrote to the Galatians that he advanced in the Jewish community beyond those of his own age. He was at the "top of his class." He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees.

Peter, by contrast, had no credentials in the Jewish community. As far as we know he had no formal education. He was a common man. He was merely a

fisherman. He was from Galilee, and consequently would be held in contempt by the sophisticated Jew. Remember the amazement at Pentecost when they heard Galileans speak in other languages. Peter's thick Galilean accent was evident. The night before Calvary he tried in vain to hide his heritage. Cursing and swearing he sought vehemently to deny where he was from, but his speech betrayed him. Everyone knew he was from Galilee.

Because Paul had credentials to the Jews, that's where we would send him. Credentials are so important to us that we would consider Paul the ideal candidate to evangelize the Jewish community.

Because Peter was a common man with no credentials, we would send him to the gentiles. We would endeavor to minimize his lack of credentials by placing him among other people with a similar background.

God doesn't think the way we think! His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. His ways are higher than our ways. Our Omniscient God did things the opposite of the way we would do them. He sent Paul to the gentiles, and Peter to the Jews (Gal. 1:8, Acts 26:17, etc.) Paul even considered his Jewish credentials as garbage. They were, in some respect, a liability. He wrote that the things which he counted as gain to himself, were a loss for Christ (Phil. 3:7.)

MOSES

Moses is another example of a man whose credentials got in the way. He apparently thought he could deliver his Hebrew brethren by the power of his own wit and wisdom. He was the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He had political power. He had credentials accepted throughout all of Egypt. Stephen said that he "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds" (Acts 7:23.)

At the very height of his power, Moses risked it all to save his people. He killed an Egyptian, because he

supposed that his brethren would understand that God by his hand would deliver them, but they understood not (Acts 7:25.) Moses failed! He became a fugitive and lived in the land of Midian for forty years. During this time he was a shepherd.

Because Jesus described Himself as the "Good Shepherd," we think very positively about shepherds. It was not so in Bible times. The Scriptures teach that every shepherd was an abomination to the Egyptians (Gen. 46:34.) No occupation could have been more humbling to Moses, or offensive to the Pharaoh. We would never assume that a shepherd could have any positive influence on an Egyptian leader. Perhaps this is why God chose to do it that way.

Moses had another obstacle to overcome. When he lived in Egypt, he was "mighty in words and deeds." After forty years in Midian, however, he was no longer fluent in the Egyptian language. His earthly credentials were reduced to nothing.

Someone said: "The main thing is to see to it that the main thing is the main thing." The "main thing" in the universe is God. Nothing must ever detract from His glory. When Moses was well educated and powerful, God was not the center of his focus. He gained the victory, however, when he had nothing to depend on but God.

God gave him the victory, and Moses knew it. Notice the focus of his victory song: "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him" (Ex. 15:1-2.)

Moses discovered that anything that detracts from God must be avoided. Not even an altar to the Lord was to be made of "hewn" stone (Ex. 20:25.) Any tool used on the altar would pollute it. Moses realized that anything "we" did, we would admire. Human achievement invariably detracts from our focus on God.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

It is exciting to realize that God can do great things through anyone who will let Him. David, for example, was such an unlikely candidate to be king that his family left him in the field to tend the sheep. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks upon the heart (I Sam. 16:7.) In spite of his many faults, God made David into a mighty king. God can also use you, regardless of your earthly credentials!

The Church of Jesus Christ is like a gigantic body with many members. Most members of His Body are common folks. Not many wise, and not many mighty, and not many noble are called (I Cor. 1:26.) However, some of the most influential people on earth have given their lives to Jesus Christ. Regardless of your earthly circumstances, remember that God can use you if your heart is right. Prayerfully consider the following advice regarding earthly credentials.

First, we should recognize that greatness in the Kingdom of heaven is different from earthly greatness. Jesus said that the greatest were those who became like a little child (Matt. 18:1-4.) David's mighty men gained status by their earthly accomplishments, but Christians advance by humility.

Secondly, the church must guard against giving preferential treatment to those with earthly credentials. We will be judged by the way we have treated the "least" of Christ's brethren (Matt. 25:31-46.) We must not defer to the person with gold rings and goodly apparel (Ja. 2:1-4.) Human credentials are not a mark of spiritual growth and development.

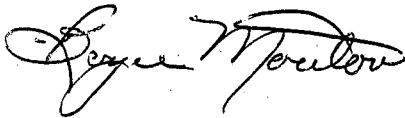
Finally, we must always give God the glory for those things which He has accomplished through us. Herod was a great orator, but he did not give glory to God. This is precisely the reason why he died (Acts 11:21-23.)

Paul said it beautifully:

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (I Cor. 2:1-5.)

Thank you for taking time to read from this book. May the Spirit of Christ help you to provoke one another to love and good works.

Your friend,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Boyce Mouton", written in a cursive style.

Boyce Mouton