

Provoking Unto Love

Sixty-six Articles Designed
To Spur You On To
Love And Good Works

Boyce Mouton

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Introduction

Many people assume that an emphasis on love will mean an absence of discipline and firmness. Exactly the reverse is true. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. Those who are without chastisement are treated like bastards and not sons (see Heb. 12:6-8.)

The Scriptures teach that "The rod and reproof give wisdom; but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame (Prov. 29:15.)

It is natural to be concerned enough to be critical of those whom we love. We may not care enough about someone else's children to examine them with an analytical eye and to punish them for failure to measure up to high standards . . . but we ought to do that with our own children . . . if we really and truly love them. An undisciplined child brings his mother to shame.

Certainly the same principle applies to the family of God. Those whom we love . . . we chasten. We guard them with a jealous eye. We endeavor to protect them from actions which are careless and irresponsible. Sometimes our love requires that we say and do things which are temporarily painful. "**. . . no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby**" (Heb. 12:11.)

It is in this regard that the early Christians were admonished to "**CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER TO PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND GOOD WORKS**" (Heb. 10:24.)

The Greek word which is translated as "consider" is "katanoeo," which means to "know fully." The word "noeo"

means to perceive, think, ponder, etc. The word “kata” in front of it intensifies and strengthens the word.

Perhaps we can gain insight into the word by examining the way it is used in Acts 11:6. Simon Peter was the first Apostle of Jesus Christ to preach to the gentiles. This dramatic event was not accomplished, of course, without a great deal of deliberation and serious thought. God gave to Peter a vision in which a sheet was let down from heaven. It was full of all manner of wild beasts, birds, and creeping things. Peter was then commanded to rise, kill, and eat. Acts 11:6 informs us that Peter “considered” this vision. The experience was so profound and disturbing that we can well imagine the serious nature of his thoughts.

The word “katanoeo” is a strong word. It teaches us the way we are to “consider” or “know fully” our brethren in the Family of God. Our concern for them is not to be casual and indifferent. We are to do what we can to know them fully.

Our interest in them is for a purpose. It is to enable us to “provoke” them unto love and good works.

The Greek word translated as “provoke” is another powerful word. It is “paroxusmos.” (Para = beside, intensive, and oxus = sharp) Note the similarity with our English word “paroxysm.” This refers to a sudden attack of a disease, or perhaps a strong outburst of laughter. The N.I.V. translates the word as to “spur one another on.” This is a good translation, for it includes both the strength and intensity of the word without being negative.

We are not to “provoke” people to hurt them. Our every effort is to help others. If we do provoke someone, it is to help them. It is to spur them on to love and good works. Our sharp and pointed words are carefully chosen to avoid negative results. Our cutting remarks are to have a therapeutic value. They are to help people stay out of hell. They are to keep us from forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, and to help us grow more fervent in our exhortations to steadfastness and fidelity.

The force of these inspired instructions should not

be avoided or evaded. We should all "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works." We should prayerfully figure out a plan to stimulate those sluggish members of His Body to love and productivity.

Hopefully, this little volume of "caustic comments" will have a positive affect. It is a compilation of short lessons and essays which were written over a period of many years. I am not certain that my heart was always right when some of these sarcastic thoughts invaded my mind. I can only beg indulgence from those of you who read these words. I pray that in spite of my glaring inadequacies and imperfections, the God of all Comfort will use these words for your edification and strength . . . and ultimately for His glory!

Boyce Mouton

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As His Spirit leads

And for God's glory

You are encouraged to use this material

For the building up of His Body

And for the evangelization of the world

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

some starch in your upper lip!

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

Camel Cuisine

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Throngers and Touchers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Him.

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

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

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

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

Dollars and Noses

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

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

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

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

men thought differently than we think.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Be Ye Doers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By Comparison

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Pearl Handled Plow

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

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

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

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

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

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

That is why the countryside has never been tilled!

Want To?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A New Kind of Honesty

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

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

A DISTURBING EXPERIMENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE CRISIS WE FACE

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

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

WHOM SHALL WE IMPRESS

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

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

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

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

CHRIST KNOCKS AT THE DOOR

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

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

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

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

Advice . . . about women?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE FLOOD

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

ABRAHAM

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

ISAAC

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

JACOB

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

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

JUDAH

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

JOSEPH

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

SOLOMON

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

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

A PERSONAL ILLUSTRATION

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

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

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

GODLY WOMEN

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

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

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

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

LESSONS FROM CREATION

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

LESSONS FROM BALAAM

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

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

BOAZ AND RUTH

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

HERODIAS AND SALOME

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

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

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

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

SAMSON AND DELILAH

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

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

JEZEBEL

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

ZERESH

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

OTHERS TOO

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

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

LIKE AN OX TO THE SLAUGHTER

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

Your friend,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Boyce Mouton".

Boyce Mouton

Change and Improvement

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Little New Blood

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

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

PREACHER WITH PROBLEMS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

attitude to avoid a riot?

THE PEOPLE LOVED HIM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 a 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.

Beauty

His eyes were fixed in a trance of love the moment she stepped into the jungle path. Her black face shone like ebony in the luxuriant light of the African moon. He was almost speechless in the presence of such enchanting beauty. At least, with trembling voice and a heart throbbing with emotion he leans forward and whispers: "You are beautiful, my darling. You have the biggest lips I have ever seen in my life."

But wait! The plot thickens. While this goggle eyed Ubangi is going bananas over saucer lips, his cousin in another part of the jungle is coming unglued over another African miss because she has an elongated neck. While the Chinese maiden is binding her feet to attract a man, this African girl is stretching her neck for the same reason.

While the European Fraulein is fixing her hair and buying clothes to attract a man, her counterpart in the distant desert is tattooing her naked body with indelible ink.

Since these women of the desert wear no clothes, their "beauty" is determined by the ornate and colorful designs that are stitched into their skin.

At the same time the American miss is strapping in bulges in some places and adding them in others, another young woman in the South Seas is having a front tooth knocked out. This bloody ordeal is considered a right of passage into womanhood and no self-respecting woman in that part of the world would think of having all her front teeth. The men would all think that she looked like a monkey.

Even more sad and sinister is the sickening practice of female circumcision practiced by women of the Pokot Tribe, and perhaps also by others. In their ignorance they take a sharp stone or arrow and cut off the external parts of a young woman's genitalia.

Alexander Campbell was a well known reformer in

a previous century. This was what he wrote about the subject:

“O Fashion, thou deity whom fops, empty fops and gaudy bells adore! Thou first-born of volatility, and full descended child of vanity; thou parent of ills, of woes unheard, untold, unsung; thou scourge of pride and lash of fools; O grim-visaged tyrant! Thou swayest thy oppressive scepter over souls incalculable; thou taxest thy oppressed subjects with burdens insupportable; thine iron fangs oppress the poor and crush the needy. Thou grand foe to liberty, unappeasable enemy to independence; thy despotic countenance thunders terrors through the souls of thy victims, and fills the minds of thy dupes with pride, envy, malice, and a thousand evil passions that distract and perplex their aching hearts. In thy domain and uncircumscribed territories are heard naught but sighs and groans, but frowns and curses echoing through thy hills and resounding through thy dales. O Fashion! Thou hast slain thy thousands and murdered thy tens of thousands. Thou hast led mankind away from itself, and ignisfactus-like deceived them. Thou hast taught the female, the tender, inexperienced female, who unhappily was born thy slave and nursed in thy empire, to borrow all her dignity, all her importance from the veering figure of thy countenance; to look for all her honor, all her consequence, all her happiness from thy extrinsic airs. In thy school, she learned to value herself from the patches and daubs of art, that in vain strive to add beauty to the master-piece of nature: As well mightest thou burnish the sun, paint the lily, or perfume the roses, as attempt to add beauty to the strokes of nature. O Fashion! Thou hast taught thy daughters to value a companion from the plumage of her garb, from the perfume of her locks, her well-set hair, her sparkling comb, her glittering ring, her rosy cheek that own the borrowed blushes of an artful dye; from the thousand gew-gaws and trifles that are the niggardly refinements of thy modern hue. Thy maxim is, value the casket, and despise the jewels it contains; admire the shadow and

neglect the substance; appreciate the glare and tinsel, and depreciate the pearls of great value; adorn the outside, leave the mind a barren wild, uncultivated desert, where weeds poisonous luxuriantly grow. These, O inexorable Fashion, are but the species of ills that complete thy train and compose thy retinue."

Solomon wrote: **"As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman without discretion."** (Prov. 11:22.) Peter admonishes women to concentrate on the **"hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."** (1 Pet. 3:4.)

Certainly the Christian woman is not to be distinguished by a mad scramble for physical beauty. There is in Scripture a concept of beauty that does not change with age or culture. It does not need to be altered by every generation or refined by the latest fad. It does not wither with age or "friz out" between appointments. It is to this kind of beauty that God invites His children to pursue with diligence and treasure as gold.

"Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31:30.)

The Mathematics of Evangelism

Tom Tucker once observed that the early church grew by addition and multiplication, while today's church often "grows" by subtraction and division.

Note these Scriptures:

- **"And there were ADDED unto them in that day about 3,000 souls" (Acts 2:41.)**
- **"And the Lord ADDED to the church daily" (Acts 2:47.)**
- **"And believers were the more ADDED to the Lord" (Acts 5:14.)**
- **"The number of disciples was MULTIPLIED" (Acts 6:1.)**
- **"And the number of disciples MULTIPLIED in Jerusalem greatly" (Acts 6:7.)**
- **"Then had the church rest . . . and were MULTIPLIED" (Acts 9:31.)**
- **"But the Word of the Lord grew and MULTIPLIED" (Acts 12:24.)**

It is important to note that the word "subtraction" is not found in the Bible, and that "divisions" are condemned as a work of the flesh.

There is something intrinsically beautiful about churches growing because they have so many "additions." **"Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Ps. 133:1.)**

When the disciples are "multiplied" we enter into a new dimension of growth. It was when the disciples were multiplied that the early church experienced it's first misunderstanding between brethren.. **"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration" (Acts 6:1.)** Rapid grow invariably

brings tension. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit enables us to forbear one another in love and helps us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Paul wrote to the Galatians that they should walk in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit would prevent them from biting and devouring one another, for the "fruit of the Spirit is love."

The works of the flesh, he continued, are manifest. Hatred turns to strife, and then jealousy. Jealousy turns to anger and factions. Factions then become formal and result in divisions. Divisions are not formed by addition and multiplication. They are formed when the works of the flesh become manifest. Divisions are formed by subtractions. **ONE CANNOT BE INVOLVED IN A HERESY WITHOUT BEING SEPARATED FROM CHRIST!**

Every living body must have a means of excreting poison. Heresy is that which removes poison from the Body of Christ. The approved cling to Jesus, and the heretics cling to someone, or something else. **"For there must also of necessity by heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (I Cor. 11:19.)**

The wicked one is described by God as "more subtle than any beast of the field." He approaches us so softly, and bandages our eyes so skillfully, that every way of a man seems right in his own eyes. Jesus once warned His disciples that those who put them to death would think they were doing God service (John 16:2.)

Many modern churches do not literally crucify others as they did in days gone by, but with the same diabolical motivation they argue and debate themselves into subtractions and division. Since the division is their own creation, they step back and admire it. Hymenaeus and Philetus were men like this. Their words, however, ate like gangrene in the Body of Christ (II Tim. 2:17.) Diotrephes was another who refused to receive the brethren and cast out of the church those who did (III John 9-11.)

We may not be able to solve all of the problems about which sincere brethren disagree, but we can at least

point out, that when brethren divide, it just doesn't add up.

Milk . . . eggs . . . and work

Lee Passwater's mother passed on this little proverb to her children. "Anybody who wants to live on this farm has got to give milk, lay eggs, or work." At first, it seems like everybody really had a choice. In reality they didn't. The only option for the children was to get busy and go to work.

That was, of course, a different generation. In those days every child was an economic asset to the family. I am told that at the turn of the century, every child represented the monetary equivalent of \$5,000 to its parents. Each child had a job to do. They would milk the cows, gather the eggs, work in the garden, harvest the crops, cook in the kitchen, and do a thousand other meaningful tasks. The work they did was not only significant, it was essential. The children actually enabled the family to survive.

Today, I am told, that the average American child represents more than a \$60,000 liability to its parents. We may WANT our children, but we do not NEED them! Economically, we would be better off without them.

Our children may be lazy, but they are not stupid. They quickly catch on that the family will survive whether they clean their room or not. The incentive to work is not as strong as it once was. The absence of meaningful work and genuine significance has helped to make suicide one of the leading causes of death among teenagers.

The church has not always understood, or helped in dealing with this problem. We have sought to lure these kids into the Kingdom with various forms of entertainment. The church with the biggest pizza party, or best ski trip, seems to have the biggest youth group. Thus we have put the peddle to the metal in an effort to outdo the church down the street. If "our concert" is better than "your concert," then the kids will hang out here instead of there.

The Scriptures do not mention rewards for "hanging

out." The Lord seems to emphasize the importance of productivity. The man with five talents worked and gained five talents more. The man with two talents worked and gained two talents more. The man with one talent did not work at all, and consequently was condemned. The branch that did not bear fruit was not covered with sparkle dust and used to decorate the mantel, it was cast into the fire.

The Lord of the vineyard is not happy when His trees do not bear fruit. He may be willing to dig around a tree and put in fertilizer. At some point, however, the tree that does not bear fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire.

The secret to doing the work of God, however, is not our strength, but his. We bear fruit when we "abide in Him." When His power abides in us we are able to accomplish exceeding, abundantly above all that we can ask or imagine.

What do you want to do for Jesus? Give milk? Lay eggs? Or work?

Death . . . and New Life

It is not at all uncommon to hear the First Century described as a time when the “church was pure.” Many dream of experiencing that “purity and power” in our own generation. We look with embarrassment on churches that die, institutions that go sour, and movements that crystalize. “If only we could restore the First Century Church,” they say, “then the church would be a perennial source of power and strength.”

Such thinking, however, does not stand up under scrutiny. Everyone ought to know that the early church had plenty of problems. The Jerusalem Church had a problem with integration. The Thessalonian Church had a problem with laziness. The Corinthian Church had more problems than most churches in our own generation. They had problems with division, immorality, court battles, marriage, idolatry, the Lord’s Supper, Spiritual gifts, the work of women, and even the resurrection. The Churches of Galatia, of all things, had trouble with a perverted gospel, etc. The churches of the First Century were not as “pure” as many people naively believe they were.

Even more shocking, however, is the obvious fact that all of these churches died. The famous churches we read about on the pages of the Bible disappeared. Where are these churches now? In Bible times they were young and healthy. In spite of their problems they did impact their world for Christ. While Paul was at Ephesus, for example, everyone in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:10.) These young healthy churches, however, began to grow old. Ultimately they went through periods of aging and stagnation, and then finally died!

Please! Let it be emphatically understood that Christianity did not die! Jesus promised that nothing would ever destroy His church, not even the “gates of hell.” The combined powers of demons and dictators will never

be sufficient to prevail against the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet, it is equally clear, that Christianity died out in Jerusalem. This, as you know, is where the church began. We cannot fault the way this church came into existence, for it was founded by inspired men under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit. But the Jerusalem church did die! The thousands of believers who were added to the Lord there also died, or were dispersed by persecution.

There is still a sense, however, in which Jerusalem is the "Mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26.) Like a beautiful tree she spread her branches and planted seeds all over the world before she died. There is a sense, therefore, in which the church in Jerusalem lives on in the lives of her children.

That which happened in Jerusalem, happened also in every other church of the First Century, with one notable exception, the church at Rome.

The Church at Rome once had a faith that was proclaimed through the whole world (Rom. 1:8.) They triumphed over Imperial persecution to become leaders of other churches in other places. Their influence came to shape and dominate the doctrines and dogmas of others.

At some point in time, however, it seems obvious that the church in Rome died. Halley's Bible Handbook (p. 872) describes one part of Roman Church history as the "Pornocracy," or "Rule of Harlots." Pope Sergius III, for example, had a mistress who filled the papal chair with paramours and bastard sons. Jesus had been dethroned in the Roman Church and the papal palace became a den of robbers. Pope John XII was said to have been "guilty of almost every crime; violated virgins and widows, high and low; lived with his father's mistress, made the papal palace a brothel; was killed while in the act of adultery by the woman's enraged husband." The "church" had died, but the corpse was not buried. The living organism established by Christ had become an institution, embalmed with political power but still putrid. Instead of blessing the world with

fresh flowers of grace and truth, it became a jewel encrusted sarcophagus filled with dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

THE TRAGEDY OF AN UNBURIED CORPSE

Eva Peron was once young and heathy. She was, as you recall, a political firebrand who was much loved by her people. She got sick with cancer and died at 8:25 p.m., July 26, 1952. She was loved so much, however, that her followers did not want her buried.

Dr. Pedro Ara, the distinguished Spanish Pathologist, was hired to embalm her in such a way that she would remain immortal. The elaborate embalming procedure took several months. When her corpse was finally put on display, so many people clamored to see her that sixteen were crushed to death and four thousand others had to be treated for injuries.

Her "presence" created such political turmoil that the head of the Argentine Intelligence Service confiscated the body with the intention of giving it a decent burial. While waiting for instructions the body was placed in the custody of Major Antonio Arandia, who hid it in his apartment. One morning before dawn he was awakened by a strange noise. He saw a shadowy figure in the doorway and assumed it was the Peronistas coming for their beloved. He grabbed his pistol and shot, only to discover that he had just killed his pregnant wife who had gotten up to use the restroom.

At this point the corpse was turned over to Col. Hector Cabanillas of the Secret Police. He decided to send her abroad until passions cooled. In September 1955, Eva's body was sent to the Argentine Embassy in Bonn, Germany. It was in a packing case marked "Radio Sets." Unknown to the Ambassador, it was kept in a storeroom until it could be placed in a coffin and sent to Rome.

In Rome the famous corpse was received by Giuseppina Airoldi, a lay sister of the Society of St. Paul.

She was told that the body was that of an Italian widow named Maggi who had died in Argentina. The remains were taken to a cemetery in Milan where they were to remain buried for sixteen years..

Meanwhile, back in Argentina, terrorists continued to kill in her name. Bombs exploded like firecrackers on the anniversary of her death. Signs appeared everywhere screaming, "Where is Eva Peron's Body?" "Give Back the Body of our Beloved Señora!" Former President Pedro Aramburu was kidnaped and murdered in a vain attempt to make him tell where the beloved body was hidden.

When the word was out that the terrorists were coming to Italy, the body was exhumed on September 2, 1971. The Argentine Government received the cooperation of the Italian, French, and Spanish Governments, and the body crossed national borders without being discovered.

After spending the night in a Perpignan garage, the body was driven to Spain, and then escorted by two car loads of Spanish police for the final 450 mile lap to Madrid.

Several notable witnesses were present when the lid of the casket was finally opened, There was Juan Peron himself, his new wife Isabel, and the embalmer, Dr. Ara. "Her" hair was wet and dirty. The stainless steel hairpins were so rusty they crumbled in your fingers. One fingertip was broken off, and one ear was slightly bent. There were a few minor cracks in her plastic coating, but otherwise she was the same as when first buried in 1955.

The famous corpse remained in Madrid until the Perons came back to power, and Juan himself had passed away. Isabel, then President of the country, sent a chartered jet to retrieve the body. Eva's body was escorted by Isabel's Social Welfare Minister, and a mystic who claimed to be in daily communication with the angel Gabriel.

They were met at the airport by a dozen bodyguards carrying machine guns. The body was rushed to lie in state in the crypt of the Presidential Chapel by the body of Juan himself, who had just died.

While this story is incredibly pitiful and sick, it is also quite instructive. When Eva died she lost control of her own body. Without her permission it became a tool of others to do with as they pleased.

JESUS DID NOT RUN FROM DEATH

Jesus did not run from death, nor did he allow his earthly remains to become a tool of Satan. He said: **“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24.)** Jesus was perfectly content to die, and for His earthly body to disappear. In fact, He said it was “expedient” or “necessary” for Him to go away. His departure would make it possible for the Holy Spirit to come and do His marvelous works.

Satan delights in anything that detracts from the Sovereignty of God. Remember, he disputed with Michael the Archangel about the body of Moses (Jude 9.) Apparently the Devil wanted control. He wanted to get his hands on that body and use it as a tool to do his own wicked work. A plastic coated grain of wheat has no power. It can be displayed, used or abused, by whoever has possession of it. Until it is planted in the earth, however, it abides alone! It is only when that grain of wheat is given over to God that it manifests the power of new life. When the seed is planted, it loses its own identity. It seems to be destroyed by the corrosive elements of earth. It seems to disappear. When it dies, however, by the power of God it produces much fruit.

Jesus did not run from death for He knew in advance the power of His resurrection! Remember, it was Jesus who created all things. Nothing came into being that He did not create (John 1:3.) On the third day of creation He made living things and ordained that they reproduce after their kind (Gen. 1:11-12.) Every living thing would produce “seeds” for the perpetuation of it’s existence. When seeds do not fall to the ground and die, they abide

alone. If all seeds refused to die, the life they represent would be doomed to extinction. For this reason no man had to take the life of Jesus, He gave it (John 10:18.)

The germ of life within a seed is invisible until it is planted. The most powerful microscope cannot discern that spark of life hidden within a seed. Nor can that life be manifest, or transferred, without the death of the seed itself. This truth speaks to the very essence of Christianity. If any man wants to follow Jesus, He must take up a cross and die.

THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL

The Apostle Paul had a great deal to say about his own death and the power of God. Please prayerfully consider these following verses:

- **“For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:19-20.)**
- **“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14.)**
- **“Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.” (1 Cor 15:36-38)**
- **“I die daily” (1 Cor. 15:51.)**
- **“For me to live in Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21.)**
- **“But what things were gain to me, those I**

counted loss for Christ" (Phil. 3:7.)

- **"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 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. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: (Rom 6:3-8)**

These, and other Scriptures, indicate that Paul considered himself to be dead, and that this death to himself, was the key to experiencing the power of the resurrection.

A REMARKABLE EXAMPLE

Crosses by both intent and design are not convenient. Neither are they just to sing about, they are to die upon. Those who "die" that Christ might live, give eloquent testimony which is worthy of our consideration.

Consider, for example, the story of a denomination that deliberately died. They formalized the death of their own religious organization by writing THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF THE SPRINGFIELD PRESBYTERY. It was dated June 28, 1804.

Here are a few excerpts from this remarkable document:

"The Presbytery of Springfield, sitting at Caneridge, in the county of Bourbon, being through the gracious

Providence, in more than ordinary bodily health, growing in strength and size daily; and in perfect soundness and composure of mind; but knowing that it is appointed for all delegated bodies once to die; and considering that the life of every such body is very uncertain, do make and ordain this our last will and testament, in manner and form following, viz:

- *Imprimis - We will that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the body of Christ at large; for there is but one body and one spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.*
- *Item - that our name of distinction, with its reverend title, be forgotten, that there be but one Lord over God's heritage, and his name one.*
- *Item - We will, that our power of making laws for the government of the Church, and executing them by delegating authority, forever cease; that the people may have free course to the Bible, and adopt the law of the spirit of life in Jesus Christ. . .*
- *Item - We will, that the people henceforth take the Bible as the only sure guide to heaven; and as many as are offended with other books, which stand in competition with it may cast them into the fire if they choose; for it is better to enter into the life having one book than having many to be cast into hell.*
- *Item - We will that preachers and people cultivate a spirit of mutual forbearance; pray more and dispute less; and while they behold the signs of the times, look up, and confidently expect that redemption draweth nigh . . ."*

These few quotes provide insight into the minds and hearts of these godly pioneers. They acted with great courage. One major reason for the demise of their denomination was their burning desire to promote unity in

the Body of Christ. Their historical roots reached back to the great Cane Ridge Revival of 1801. The wonderful unity of that revival experience was already being tarnished by disputes and disagreements. Several new denominations had already been formed. Someone said that the revivals often go from **man**, to **movement**, to **machine**, to **monument**. The courageous decision of the Springfield Presbytery enabled them to avoid becoming a heartless machine, or a lifeless monument.

LET US NOT RUN FROM DEATH

Both of my grandfathers have been dead for years. They lived in a world of horse-drawn vehicles, and homes that were lighted by candles and kerosene lamps. They served their generation and fell asleep. They would find it difficult, if not impossible, to relate to or understand the complex problems of our own generation.

Reason compels me to acknowledge that I too will serve my generation and fall asleep. I am already feeling a bit uncomfortable in the digital computerized world around me. The next generation will be served far better by my children than by me. Yet, my children will probably never reach their full potential while I am alive. I still find it difficult not to frown over their shoulders when they do something differently than I would do it.

There is, of course, a sense in which my life, and my faith, will continue in the lives of my descendants. At the same time, there is also a very real sense in which I will need to die. Not only will my body be worn out, but my ability to adapt and serve will also wither like a winter leaf.

The time has come for us to cease running from death. Death has no sting for those who believe in Jesus Christ. Death is not the end of life for us, it is the beginning. Through death, Jesus destroyed that one who has the power of death, that is the Devil. And He has delivered us who through fear of death were all of our life

times subject to bondage. The grain of wheat that does not die abides alone! When it falls into the ground and dies, it brings forth much fruit.

That which is true of an individual, is also true of congregations and denominations. Churches also grow old and die. They also lose their ability to adapt and be relevant. Such churches should be honored and not ridiculed. We should offer to them the same appreciation and respect which we give to our parents sitting in a rocking chair and staring at their feet. Growing old and dying is a part of life.

It needs to be emphasized that truth never changes. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Any truth taught by our parents transcends time. It is only the ability to communicate and apply that truth that is generational.

THE BEST IS YET TO COME

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of heaven was like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal. Quietly, and inexorably, the whole was leavened. In the same way the life of Jesus is quietly and inexorably filling the world. No earthly power can possibly stifle or retard the growth of His Body.

It has been said that the greatest revival of all time is taking place today in China. In spite of persecution, poverty, and problems which seem insurmountable, the church in China has been estimated to have between 55 and 100 million believers.

Similar revivals are also taking place in other parts of Asia, Africa, and Central and South America. It seems that the greatest growth is taking place in those parts of the world where the institutional church is the weakest.

Jesus said: **“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”**

When we “die,” God can replace the putrid nature

of our old life with the fragrance of Springtime and flowers. While outwardly we perish, inwardly we can be renewed every day. Death does not end all, it is the gateway to new power and new life.

“Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” (Eph 1:15-23)

Self Destruction The Devil's M.O.

Every criminal has a certain "modus operandi." When he, or she, commits a crime, they invariably leave behind some distinguishing trademark. Career criminals may commit different crimes in different parts of the country, but their "M.O." remains the same. It is as distinct as their fingerprints. Try as we may, we cannot escape from ourselves.

The ultimate criminal, of course, is the devil. Jesus said that he was a liar from the beginning, and also a murderer. He is subtle and diabolically clever. He is fierce, cruel, and cowardly. There may be many similarities in the crimes which he commits, but "self destruction" is always a part of his modus operandi.

Remember the man whom Jesus men in the country of the Gadarenes? The demons who possessed him were many. Consequently they were named "Legion." The man himself was naked and cut himself with stones (Mark 5:5.) Why would anybody try to destroy themselves? The answer, of course, is that is standard operational procedure for the devil. He always gets people to try and destroy themselves. When Jesus cast out the demons, they were permitted to enter into a herd of swine. Touche! The devil did it again! Even the swine destroyed themselves.

We should not be surprised that Judas put his neck in a noose and jumped off a cliff. We should not be surprised that Adolf Hitler, Jim Jones and David Karesh also killed themselves. Self destruction is to be anticipated for those who are dealing with the devil.

Not every devotee to the devil has the "privilege" of putting a gun barrel in his own mouth. Mussolini, for example, was killed by a group of partisans who shot him down like a dog and hung him up by his heels. Comrade

Trotsky had a "friendly" visit from a fellow communist who buried a hatchet in his brain. Jezebel was thrown from an upper window and eaten by the dogs. Wicked Hamaan was hanged on his own gallows, etc. All who follow the devil are destroyed, only those who live long enough enjoy the privilege of self destruction.

Herod killed James with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the people he tried to do the same for Peter. This wicked man received the just recompense of his reward, however, and was eaten of worms and died (Acts 12:23.) It is said in Scripture that the angel of the Lord smote him with this fatal affliction. There is a sense, however, in which the death of Herod is a tribute to the treachery and deceit of the devil. Herod's conduct insured his own destruction.

It is remarkable how many illnesses and injuries are self inflicted. Take, for example, the untimely death of men like Howard Hughes and Elvis Presley. They were both rich and famous, but destroyed themselves through the use of drugs. Others smoke themselves to death, or drink themselves to death, or eat themselves to death. The common thread in these crimes against nature is self destruction, the devil's M.O.

Venereal diseases are another manifestation of the devil's handiwork. Again we see the paradox of self worship becoming self destruction. Those who seek only their own gratification wind up without the ability to enjoy anything. Unfortunately, they also destroy a lot of innocent people at the same time they are destroying themselves. AIDS for example, not only infects the promiscuous, but also their wives and children.

Christians are commanded to come out from the world and be separate. Our citizenship is in heaven. We are only strangers and pilgrims on this earth. Sometimes the devil goes after us like a roaring lion, and other times like a slithering serpent. In either instance, however, he is the "destroyer." The devil is not omnipotent, or omniscient, but he is supernatural. He is smarter than we are, and

more powerful than we are. Our only hope for victory against him is by the power of Jesus Christ our Lord. We are sheep in the midst of wolves. Let us therefore, stay close to the Shepherd. Let us hear His voice, and follow where He leads!

Others May . . . You Cannot!

If God has called you to be really like Jesus, He will draw you into a life of crucifixion and humility, and put upon you such demands of obedience that you will not be able to follow other people, or measure yourself by other Christians, and in many ways He will seem to let other good people do things which He will not let you do.

Other Christians and ministers who seem very religious and useful may push themselves, pull wires, and work schemes to carry out their plans, but you cannot do it, and if you attempt it, you will meet with such failure and rebuke from the Lord as to make you sorely penitent.

Others may boast of themselves, of their work, of their successes, of their writings, but the Holy Spirit will not allow you to do any such thing, and if you begin it, He will lead you into some deep mortification that will make you despise yourself and all your good works.

Others may be allowed to succeed in making money, or may have a legacy left to them, but it is likely God will keep you poor, because He wants you to have something better than gold, namely, a helpless dependence upon Him, that He may have the privilege of supplying your needs each day out of an unseen treasury.

The Lord may let others be honored and put forward and keep you hidden in obscurity, because He wants to produce some choice, fragrant fruit for His coming glory, which can only be produced in the shade. He may let others do a work for Him, and get the credit for it, but He will make you work and toil on without knowing how much you are doing, and then to make your work still more precious, He may let others get credit for the work which you have done, and thus make your reward ten times greater when He comes.

The Holy Spirit will put a strict watch over you, with a jealous love, and will rebuke you for little words, and feelings, or for wasting your time, which other Christians

never feel distressed over.

So make up your mind that God is an Infinite Sovereign, and has a right to do as He pleases with His own. He may not explain to you a thousand things which puzzle your reason in His dealings with you, but if you absolutely sell yourself to be His love slave, He will wrap you up in a jealous love, and bestow upon you many blessings which come only to those who are in the inner circle.

Settle it forever, then, that you are to deal directly with the Holy Spirit, and that He is to have the privilege of tying your tongue, or chaining your hand, or closing your eyes, in ways that He does not seem to use with others. Now, when you are so possessed with the Living God that you are, in your secret heart, pleased and delighted with this peculiar, personal, private, jealous guardianship and management of the Holy Spirit over your life, you will have found the vestibule of heaven.

(Author unknown)

The Inalienable Right of the Ignorant

**“And if any man will be ignorant, let him be ignorant . . .” 1
Cor. 14:38**

Man was made in the image of God. We are not robots or puppets, we are decision makers. We even have the right to be wrong. We can eat forbidden fruit as did Adam and Eve. We can betray Jesus like Judas. We can murmur, complain, and speak great swelling words of vanity against the Sovereign of the Universe.

God, of course, can take care of such rebellious people. He has the power to deliver the godly out of temptation, and reserve the unjust for punishment. (II Pet. 2:9.) In the meanwhile, however, He has given instructions to the church. We have an obligation to our fellow Christians. If they commit fornication, we are to deliver them to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that their spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (I Cor. 5:5.) If they are “disorderly” and do not work, we are to “withdraw from them (II Thess. 3:6.) If they cause divisions, they are to be marked and avoided (Rom. 16:17.) If they are heretics, they are to be warned twice and rejected (Tit. 3:10.) If they are only ignorant, however, they are to be politely left alone.

Someone once said: “I would rather keep my mouth shut and let people think I am ignorant, than to open it up and remove all doubt.” Such persons usually have a rather benign influence on others. They quite often come to church and cause no trouble. They usually select a back pew or balcony seat and quietly wait for the benediction. As long as they are allowed to be ignorant, they do not break furniture, shout obscenities, or divide the church. Should they suffer a brain ache, or mental charlie horse, however, all bets are off. Paul dealt with such people at

Corinth. He reminded them, that if any man thought himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, he was to acknowledge that the things which he wrote were commandments of the Lord. If any one, however, deliberately chose to be ignorant, Paul recommended that they be allowed to remain ignorant.

We must emphasize, of course, that God doesn't want us to be ignorant. He wants us to be wise concerning that which is good, and simple concerning that which is evil (Rom. 16:19.) We should not be ignorant of the devil's devices (II Cor. 2:11.) We should not be ignorant about those who have fallen asleep (I Thess. 4:13.) We should not be in darkness about the Day of His return (I Thess. 5:1-2.) But if any man makes a deliberate decision to be ignorant, even God will not intervene!

It would indeed be wonderful if the world was filled with logical and literate people with a great desire to learn. Such, however, is not the case, and never will be. Just as there will always be the poor, there will also always be the ignorant. If we instruct them with meekness, God may give them repentance (II Tim. 2:25.) If we treat them with love they may grow up to the place where they want to learn. If they do not grow up, however, don't stir them up to some work of the flesh, let them be ignorant.

It is inevitable that some seed will fall on rocky soil. Perhaps you have heard of the man who only combed his hair twice a year because it was so painful. Some people seldom think for the same reason. Should these people confess Christ and be baptized, that may represent the apex of their spiritual growth and development. God may ultimately choose to reject them for being barren and unfruitful. That, however, is His decision, not ours. We certainly should have compassion on the ignorant (Heb. 5:2.) We should be longsuffering toward all (I Thess. 5:14) But if any man will be ignorant, let him be ignorant!

Almost everyone has heard of a church that divided over some trivial matter like the size of a classroom, or the color of a carpet. Such divisions are a testament to what

ignorant people can do when they get angry. We may be well advised to leave them alone. Let them be ignorant. Let them sleep on and take their rest.

Not everyone, of course, need be left in ignorance. Some can be provoked to love and good works. Others can be raised from the dead like Lazarus. Yet it is both Scriptural and practical to leave some people to their ignorance. May God give you the wisdom to apply His words: "If any man will be ignorant, let him be ignorant!"

I Can Do That!

David Kelley recently sent a study that convinced me that I am more like the apostles than I thought I was. Quite frequently we see these men as so super spiritual that we could never do what they did. As I was reminded of these scriptures, however, I kept saying to myself "I can do that!"

For example, Jesus said they were fools and slow of heart to believe the prophets (Lk. 24:25.) Such a thought made me feel right at home. One day as they were traveling, they forgot to take provisions. Zounds! I said, "I can do that!" On another occasion they tried to cast out a demon and failed (Mk. 9:18.) Then they criticized a man who did cast out demons because he didn't follow them (Mk. 9:38.) Hey! I'm starting to feel right at home.

Then there was the time the Samaritans refused them hospitality and they wanted to call down fire from heaven and destroy them (Lk. 9:54.) Or what about the time they rebuked those who brought little infants to Jesus (Lk. 18:15?) Or what about the time they didn't understand Jesus and were afraid to ask (Mk. 9:32?) By this time I'm starting to think: "Hey! I'm apostolic timber" after all."

Then there are those many references to "fear" in the apostles. They were afraid in a boat (Lk. 8:25.) They were afraid on a mountain (Mk. 9:6.) When they saw Jesus walking on the water and were afraid (John 6:19.) When Peter saw the wind and waves he also was afraid (Matt. 14:30.) On the way to Jerusalem they were "amazed and afraid" (Mk. 10:32.) After the resurrection they didn't say anything to any man because they were afraid (Mk. 16:8.) Maybe all of us are more like the apostles than we thought we were!

The apostles disputed among themselves about which of them was the greatest (Mk. 9:34.) On another occasion they were moved with indignation against their brethren (Matt. 20:24.) They criticized Mary for her

generosity (Matt. 26:8.) They also had wrongful indignation against her (Mk. 14:4.) They slept while Jesus prayed (Lk. 9:32.) They fled at the time of His arrest (Matt. 26:56.) They refused to believe the testimony about His resurrection (Mk. 16:11.) At the time Jesus gave them the Great Commission, some still doubted (Matt. 28:17.)

Please consider these words of Scripture: **"And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples: and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named apostles" (Lk. 6:12-13.)**

The apostles of Jesus were carefully chosen after a night of prayer. He selected men who were quite ordinary. In fact, they were just like us. We can identify with their lives. We can do many of the things they did, and we can also understand their fears and frustrations.

But wait! There were also other things which the apostles did. They denied themselves and took up a cross. They left their homes and went into all the world to preach the Gospel. They were constantly in danger, and most died as martyrs. They had thousands of converts and many remarkable answers to prayer. Is it possible that we can do these things too?

Yes we can! Apostolic power came from Jesus. These men would have been total failures on their own. That's why Jesus commanded them not to try it by themselves. He said to **"wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4.)** He promised them: **"But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you . . ." (Acts 1:8.)**

This same power is available to us today. **"And now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us. Unto Him be glory in the church . . . (Eph. 3:20-21.)**

Out of Control

Ben Merold said recently at a Church Growth Seminar: "All good growth will be out of control." Zounds! I thought. He's right!

Everyone knows that nothing is out of control to God. That's obvious! Ben evidently meant that all good church growth is out of man's control.

He further explained that in the course of teaching hundreds of students on the graduate level, he required many research projects. One such project involved studying church records. The students discovered that every six to nine years the average church experienced numerical growth. When the church tried to "control" this growth, however, it disappeared. It is not at all uncommon for some churches to stay the same size for decades. One reason for such lack of growth, involves control. Our efforts to control church growth is an indicator that we have more confidence in ourselves than we do in God.

Let's consider an example straight from the Bible. Suppose you are a part of a congregation of 120, and you had 3,000 converts in a single day. This, as you know, is precisely what happened to the church in Jerusalem. Can you not appreciate the level of discomfort this would bring to the average church board? Things would be out of their control. How would they protect their original little group from false teaching? Such a large influx of new believers would be seen as a grave danger to true doctrine. It would be the tail wagging the dog. In such a large congregation, people would be teaching without any man's approval or credentials. Even with twelve inspired apostles on the scene, such numbers are demonstrably unmanageable by man.

The problem of control was magnified, however, by the fact that these 3,000 new converts were evangelistic. Once again the fear of false teaching rears its ugly head. How can a conscientious board member tolerate anything

so out of control? Soon their number was 5,000 men (Acts 4:4,) and probably not one had even received a Baptismal Certificate. Based on today's mentality, many board members would be forced to resign as a matter of conscience. Since things were out of their "control," they would automatically assume that apostasy was inevitable.

It has been estimated that the Jerusalem church had grown to over 20,000 before they saw the need of deacons. And then, of all things, they only appointed seven. We have congregations today with only a hundred members that have this many deacons. These men in the Jerusalem Church, however, were not appointed to control, but to serve.

Then the problem of control by man was made even more difficult by persecution. Stephen was stoned and these thousands of uncontrolled believers were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. From the human standpoint, the situation was manifestly unmanageable. Fortunately, Jesus never lost control of anyone or anything. No matter where believers were, or what problems they faced, Jesus was in control. It is a great relief to remember that the Head of the Body is not separated from the members of His Body.

Perhaps the greatest church growth ever is taking place in modern times. The Iron Curtain is down, and an evangelistic fervor is sweeping Eastern Europe and Russia. Parts of Africa are aflame with evangelism. Only a few short years ago there were hardly any Christians in Korea. Now the biggest churches in the world are there. The evangelism of China is even more exciting. Some have estimated that there are more evangelical Christians in China than in any country on earth. Just as in the First Century, this amazing growth has been out of control. The wind blows where it wants to. We can hear the sound, but we cannot tell where it comes from, or where it is going. This is precisely the illustration that Jesus used to describe those who are born of the Spirit.

The Big Bang?

(Condensed from an article by F. W. Schnitzler in Chalcedon, Aug. '95)

The Ancient Egyptians believed the god Osiris brought life to the Nile river valley through an annual ritual of copulation. The Greeks explained life by a bizarre combination of gods, nymphs, cyclops, and minotaurs. The Romans believed their beginning involved Romulus and Remus. These, as you know, were the twin sons of the war-god Mars and one of the virgin-priestesses. Modern Americans have their own mythology. It is known as "The Big Bang Theory."

The very idea that a gigantic explosion can produce order is quite comical. We were forced to such nonsense, however, by the theory of evolution. Science "had to" come up with "evidence" for an evolving universe.

One theory devised to meet this need was the "Big Bang." It was proposed in the mid-1920's by Edwin Hubble. He peered through his telescope and saw "redshifts." Based on this information, he assumed that our universe was expanding. Next, he theorized that the universe was once together, and then exploded. This, he concluded, produced life as we now know it. This gave to science what seemed to be a "rational" alternative to God. Though the theory is totally absurd, it gained rapid acceptance in the scientific world. Consider, for example, two of the "biggest bangs" ever witnessed by man. These occurred at Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The very idea that these gargantuan explosions produced order is intellectually bankrupt. It is as outlandish and laughable as the mythology of the ancient pagans. Nevertheless, it is accepted with religious fervor and zeal by many in our modern world.

Have you noticed, however, that science books become outdated quite quickly? Each generation arrogantly assumes it has arrived at "truth," only to be

laughed at by others a few years later.

This may be happening to the Big Bang Theory before our very eyes. William Tift, an astronomer at the University of Arizona, has been collecting data for more than two decades. His information leads him to conclude that our universe may not be expanding. It is reported that the Astrophysical Journal grudgingly published his revolutionary discoveries. His first redshift paper was: "Discrete States of Redshift and Galaxy Dynamics." Though they could not dispute his data, neither could they endorse his conclusions. The scientific community is apparently as prejudiced as the rest of society.

Discover magazine reported recently that the universe is much younger than generally assumed and that we have "too little mass, and too little time" for the Big Bang Theory to be true. The Washington Post Weekly Edition, reported that 90% of the cosmos seems to be missing: "That is, the total amount of matter we can see - in the form of stars, dust and miscellaneous debris - simply does not contain anywhere near enough mass to hold itself together in the shape of galaxies or clusters of galaxies."

David Weinberg, an astronomer at Ohio State University admitted, "If these results are confirmed, we theorists will be in trouble. We really have no good ways of explaining these observations."

Gresham Machen summed it up beautifully:

"There is an ultimate mystery before which the knowledge of the wisest man is dumb. The presence of that mystery is revealed to different men in different ways. Certainly it is not obscured one whit by modern achievements, for the widening of the circle of human knowledge only increases the periphery of dreadful contact with the unknown. And even within the little circle of knowledge, mystery touches us at a thousand points."

Deadheads

The fans and followers of Jerry Garcia are known as "Deadheads." His band, as you know, was called "The Grateful Dead." The Washington Post said it was a "band that emphasized freedom." The New York Times said they embodied "psychedelic optimism."

Wolfgang and Lisa Von Nester are "Deadheads." They are counted among the thousands of nomadic followers of Garcia who roam the country displaying their "freedom," and "psychedelic optimism." On June 2, they abandoned their three year-old son at a San Bernardino mall. Wolfgang explained: "I figured that without food and without money and without diapers to put on his butt what else could I do." Your heart will be touched to know that Wolfgang "walked away in tears." Like faithful "Deadheads," however, Wolfgang and Lisa dried their tears, and found enough money for bus tickets to a Grateful Dead concert in San Francisco. Then they met a truck driver who helped them get back home to Maryland. There they boasted of abandoning their son and took a nature hike on the Appalachian Trail. It was here that a sheriff's investigator detained Lisa on a 1993 warrant. It seems that she had failed to show up in a child support case involving her four other children.

Garcia was a "free spirit" in his own right too. He dropped out of school in 1959 and enlisted in the army to get away from his family. Nine months later he was dishonorably discharged. He grew a goatee and began hanging around the "music scene" in Palo Alto. He became part of a group known as the Warlocks. The group included Garcia, Bob Weir, and "Pigpen" McKerman. Pigpen was famous for his messianic live performances of "Turn On Your Lovelight." Unfortunately, he died of liver damage in 1973. Naturally, as a part of the free spirited sixties, the Warlocks did large doses of LSD. The name,

"Grateful Dead," came from a British ballad that told of a ghost finding peace through human help. Garcia's "free" lifestyle, however, began to catch up with him. In 1985 he was busted for doing coke and heroin. In 1986 he came out of a diabetic coma with his brain so scrambled that he forgot how to play the guitar. In 1992 he collapsed from exhaustion and had to cancel tour dates. His health problems with heroin were compounded by smoking, obesity, an enlarged heart, and congested lungs.

Carolyn Buff, a news aide for the Washington Post, has been a Deadhead for seven years. Not long ago she wrote: "Every time there is a scare that the Dead may stop touring, I find myself worrying about those lost souls who know nothing else but the parallel world of the Grateful Dead." These "Deadheads" are such devoted followers that they will beg for tickets crying, "I need a miracle." If that fails, they will kick down fences, throw bottles, and crash gates to attend a concert.

Garcia was nearing the end of the trail. He was struggling to make a go of his third marriage. He was looking forward to the wedding plans of his oldest daughter. He was also planning a fall tour, but the monkey was on his back and wouldn't let go. In desperation he checked in at the Betty Ford Center at Rancho Mirage, Calif. He checked out on Aug. 1, his 53rd birthday. A week later he checked in at a small private clinic. At about 4:00 a.m., Wed. Aug. 9, 1995, a counselor walked by and noticed that Garcia had stopped snoring.

President Clinton eulogized the dead singer on MTV. He said that Garcia had "a great gift. And he even wound up putting out that line of ties. He had great ties. I would go around wearing Jerry Garcia ties and giving them away to people. So I was very sad when he died."

I'm said too! I'm not only sad about Jerry Garcia, but also for his thousands of fans. When the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch!

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. The name is derived from the Greek "Hermes" who was believed to be the messenger of the gods. His magic wand had the power to close the eyes of mortals, to cause dreams, and to wake the slumbering. The word is now applied to the way we read and understand the Bible. The subject is indeed relevant, for our "hermeneutic" determines both our life style and our eternal destiny.

This was brought vividly to mind by the story of Randy and Vicki Weaver in the August 28th, NEWSWEEK. They were married in 1971 and were in the process of experiencing the "American Dream." They lived in the nicest house on the block, and owned a Mustang, Corvette, and Triumph. They became ashamed, however, of their hedonistic lifestyle, and moved to the wilds of northern Idaho. The reason for this abrupt change was their "hermeneutic."

They called themselves legalists, because they believed the Bible was the literal word of God. Based upon their understanding of Scripture, they concluded that the forces of the Soviet Union, the U.S. Government, and Jewish bankers, were ready to strike against the American people. A passage from Ezekiel was read: "Son of man, (Christian Americans,) set they face against Gog, (the grand conspiracy,) . . . And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord God." Randy collected an arsenal of weapons and slept with a loaded pistol under his pillow.

As you know, this hermeneutic resulted in the death of his wife, Vicki, their son, Samuel, and a Deputy Marshal, William Degan. The bizarre and bloody confrontation at Ruby Ridge also resulted in a shakeup in the F.B.I., and a \$3.1 million settlement to Randall Weaver, and their three surviving children

The people of God have always had their own

"hermeneutic." Quite frequently, it has been wrong. When Jesus was placed on trial, for example, the irreligious Roman ruler was about to let Him go. Pilate brought Jesus out to the people and declared, "**I find no fault in him!**" The Jews, however, had been studying the Bible. They answered: "**We have a law, and by our law he ought to die . . .**" (John 10:7.)

Please fine tune your focus on this remarkable situation. Jesus was "God manifest in the flesh." It was His Holy Spirit that inspired the writing of the Bible. The Jewish people had been given the Bible. To them pertained "**the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises**" (Rom. 9:4.) They not only studied the Bible, they committed large portions to memory. They wrote it on the door posts of their homes, and bound it around their foreheads. They counted the "jots" and "tittles," of the Law and claimed to reverence God in all they did. Yet, they interpreted the Bible in such a way, that they crucified the Author of the Bible.

When Jesus was upon the earth, it was the "common people" who heard Him gladly (Mk. 12:37.) They didn't need to split theological hairs or debate the meaning of a Hebrew verb. They simply followed Jesus! The word "theology," literally means the "Word of God." The theology of the common people was therefore quite simple. It was Jesus! Jesus was their theology. They simply followed in His steps, and did what He wanted them to do.

The word "creed," comes from the Latin "credo," which means, "I believe." The oldest creeds are the most simple. "Jesus is Lord," for example, is a Biblical creed (I Cor. 12:3.) Later creeds were larger and more complex. By the time of the Reformation, the creeds were so complicated that it was necessary to write commentaries to explain them. This period was characterized by religious wars, fought by factions in the "Christian faith." Let's return to the simple hermeneutic of the First Century, and simply focus on following Jesus!

Creatures or Creator

"Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator . . . (Rom. 1:25.)

Our value system provides an interesting index to our worship. We "worship," that upon which we bestow "worth." The book of Romans warns of those who worship and serve the "creature," more than the "Creator." They place more "worth" upon the earth, than the God who created it. Such people, of course, are pagans! When they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, neither were they thankful. Because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, He gave them over to a reprobate mind and perversion.

I thought of this recently while reading a column by Chuck Shepherd in the Super Express, Aug. 30, 1995. Raphael Dale Rodriguez, of Van Nuys, Calif., was charged with beating his girl friend and strangling her pet rabbit. He could be fined \$1,000 for beating his girl friend, but \$20,000 for strangling the rabbit. A similar story came out of Oklahoma City. Two police officers were in trouble, one for beating his girl friend so severely that he ruptured her ear drum, the other for kicking a cat at the airport. Beating a girl carries a maximum penalty of 90 days in jail. Kicking a cat could get you five years.

Mobsters have seen the handwriting on the wall and tried to cash in on the earth worship craze. Salvador Avellino, Jr., who recently pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges in the murder of two haulers, was responsible for the most famous trash barge in history. In March 1987, he loaded one in New York with 3188 tons of trash and sent it to Mobro, North Carolina. Since he was new in the business, he did not make prior arrangements. This oversight raised fear that the shipment was contaminated with hazardous waste. It was refused!

The news media picked up the story and followed

the barge to Louisiana, Mexico, and the Bahamas. The illusion was created that there was no place on earth left to deposit trash. Finally, the trash was returned to New York and burned in an incinerator. Actually, there is plenty of room for trash. Clark Wiseman, a professor of Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington computes that a single tract of ground 30 miles square would be sufficient to handle trash for the entire U.S. for a thousand years.

According to the July, 1995, *READER'S DIGEST*, even the need to recycle is a myth. They say:

"Curbside recycling doesn't pay. It costs residents and local governments hundreds of millions of dollars more than can be recouped by selling the sorted trash. It can require hugh new fleets of collection trucks that add to traffic congestion and pollution. And landfill space, in the nation as a whole, turns out to be both plentiful and extremely cheap."

Adam and Eve were placed in a Garden and commissioned to "dress and keep" it. Certainly, godly people have always sought to be good stewards of all the resources God has placed at their disposal. Godly people, however, put God first, and pagans do not. This is a definite line of demarcation. Pagans worship and serve the creation, more than the Creator.

The "New Age" movement is nothing new. It is merely paganism repackaged for the Twentieth Century. It exalts the creation, and deprecates the Creator. It protects the baby seal, but aborts baby children. It celebrates the lions right to kill because it is "nature." It denies the human's right to hunt as cruel and abusive. It places more value on a tree, than a job, or a person. It lectures society about morality, while wallowing in personal immorality. Truly, God has given them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not convenient.

Exercise!

". . . exercise thyself rather unto godliness" (I Tim. 4:7.)

I am indebted to Tony Evans for pointing out to me the obvious. Joining a health club doesn't make you healthy. Physical fitness does not result from joining up and paying dues. You have to exercise in order to be healthy!

The application to the spiritual is equally obvious. Paul told Timothy to refuse old wife's fables, and exercise himself unto godliness. Bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable unto all things. Godliness helps us both in this world, and also in the world which is to come.

Almost everyone has seen expensive exercise equipment gathering dust in a forgotten corner of someone's garage. Slim and trim people demonstrate this type of apparatus every day on television. They make it look easy. They smile as they show us how to make those ugly pounds vanish like a vapor. Joining health clubs, and buying expensive contraptions, however, doesn't make us healthy. No one can be truly healthy without exercise. Unfortunately, exercise isn't easy. Exercise requires energy and effort. Exercise demands self denial. There is a price to pay, other than money, for physical health.

Thousands of people join the church each year to gain spiritual health. Some may even buy a Bible, or subscribe to a Christian magazine. Our good intentions are to be commended, but hell will be full of people with good intentions. Good intentions are not enough! There is no way to have spiritual health without spiritual exercise.

I met a man in Iowa some years ago who brought his jogging clothes to church. It was "only" a couple of miles home, and he "enjoyed" the exercise. "For two years," he said, "I hated jogging." He forced himself, however, to do it anyway. His discipline paid off. After two years of painful exertion, he crossed a threshold. The pain

was gone. He was on a "runner's high." There was a sparkle in his eye, and a spring in his step. He was alive with energy. He was vibrant and enthusiastic. That which he once dreaded, now became the focus of joyful expectation. Exercise had become an exhilarating experience!

The same is true with spiritual exercise. The first couple of years you read the Bible, it too may be painful and difficult. There will be words you don't understand, and concepts which seem foreign and strange. With enough exercise, however, the study of Scripture can become exhilarating. The Bible is filled with exceeding great and precious promises that are waiting to be discovered.

Prayer too, may also be boring and mechanical at first. After exercising yourself unto godliness, however, prayer can empower you to mount up with wings like an eagle. Prayer has the potential to enable you to run and now grow weary, and to walk and not faint (Is. 40:31.) It can enable you to do exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think (Eph. 3:20.)

I'm sure you see the principle. Discipline is an integral part of discipleship. If you want to follow Jesus, you have no alternative. You must deny yourself daily, and take up a cross. What Jesus began to do in the body, The Body continues to do in Jesus. Let's deny ourselves, and start exercising!

A Famous Prayer

Joe Wright, minister of the Central Christian Church in Wichita, ignited a storm of protest by offering this prayer before Kansas legislators.

"Heavenly Father, we come before You today to ask Your forgiveness and seek your direction and guidance. We know Your word says 'Woe to those who call evil good,' but that is what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and inverted our values.

We have worshiped other gods and called it multiculturalism.

We have endorsed perversion, and called it an alternative lifestyle.

We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery.

We have neglected the needy and called it self preservation.

We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare.

We have killed our unborn and called it 'choice.'

We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable.

We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self esteem.

We have abused power and called it political savvy.

We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression.

We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.

Search us, O God, and know our hearts today. Try us and see if there be some wicked way in us. Cleanse us from every sin and set us free.

Guide and bless these men and women who have been sent here by the people of Kansas, and who have been ordained by You to govern this great state. Grant them Your wisdom to rule, and may their decisions direct us to the center of Your will. I ask it in the name of Your Son, the Living Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen!"

Rep. Delbert Gross, a Democrat from Hays, went to the microphone and said: "I have never heard in 10 years as divisive, sanctimonious, self-serving, self-righteous and overbearing a prayer as I have heard this morning. The man of the cloth who spoke this morning did this body a disservice."

Reps. David Haley, from Kansas City, and Sabrina Standifer from Wichita, both Democrats, followed Gross to the microphone and said: "I took umbrage at the prayer we had to suffer through this morning." That pastor "can do that in his own church, where maybe they worship snakes," but it wasn't appropriate in the Kansas House. "It was blasphemous and it was ignorant."

Gross and Haley said they were upset that the prayer equated laziness with welfare and suggested that tolerance of other creeds and cultures was the same as worshipping false gods.

The comments of these Democrats are now a part of the House's public record. None of the Republicans went to the microphone, but Rep. Tony Powell, a Wichita Republican who worships with the Central Christian Church said: "I'm glad to see our liberal friends advocate censoring prayer as the answer to our problems."

(Condensed from releases by the Associated Press, and Harris News service)

Some People Are Wrong!

The Fourfold Gospel, by J. W. McGarvey, lists these Samaritan traditions. They believed that:

- Paradise was on the summit of Mt. Gerizim
- Adam was formed of the dust of Mt. Gerizim
- Adam built his first altar on Mt. Gerizim
- Seth reared his first altar on Mt. Gerizim
- Mt. Gerizim was the Ararat on which the Ark

rested

- Noah built his altar on Mt. Gerizim
- Abraham attempted to offer Isaac on Mt. Gerizim
- Abraham met Melchizedek on Mt. Gerizim
- Here was the real Bethel where Jacob received

his vision

Consequently, the Samaritans built a temple, and worshiped on Mt. Gerizim. The Samaritans, however, were wrong! Jesus said so! He said to the Samaritan woman: **"Ye worship ye know not what" (John 4:22.)** The Samaritan apostasy can be traced all the way back to Jeroboam the son of Nebat. I Kings 15:26-33, and other passages tell us that Jeroboam fabricated a false religion to save his own kingdom. Lies and falsehood were therefore woven throughout the whole fabric of Samaritan worship. No matter how you slice it, the Samaritans were wrong!

I thought of this while reading an article by George Will in the Feb. 19, 1996 NEWSWEEK. It seems that Dr. Yosef A. A. Ben-Jochannan delivered the Martin Luther King memorial lecture at Wellesley College. Though he is not a scholar of Egyptian language or civilization, he was advertised as "a distinguished Egyptologist."

Dr. Ben-Jochannan offered the Afro-centrist's charge that Greek civilization was stolen from Africa. He said that Aristotle acquired his philosophy by plundering the library at Alexandria. Mary Lefkowitz, a scholar of antiquity, asked him how this could be since, (1) The library was not

built until after Aristotle's death, and (2) there is no historical evidence that Aristotle ever went to Egypt.

The good doctor said he "resented the tone of the question." Several students accused Lefkowitz of racism. When she further dared to question that Socrates, Hannibal and Cleopatra were Africans, she was told that her attitude was "McCarthyite in its intolerance."

At the risk of being politically incorrect, we must face the fact that some people are just wrong. Two plus two is not nine. If every person on earth signed an affidavit that $2+2=9$, it would still be wrong. Truth is not a subjective feeling, it is an objective reality.

Adolf Hitler popularized the "big lie" tactic. He theorized that public opinion could be swayed by an advertising blitzkrieg. He operated on the assumption that no matter how big the lie, it could and would be believed, if it was repeated often enough. He fooled all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time. Fortunately, however, he didn't fool all of the people all of the time. His lies and deception have been sanitized by the light of truth. Consequently, even in this day of political correctness, it is still safe to vilify Hitler. His name is synonymous with evil in the modern world.

Take heart! There is hope! Truth may seem dead today, but someday it will rise again in triumph. Every generation has to rewrite the "truths" of science. Their "truths" blossom and wither like the seasonal flowers. The Truth of God, by contrast, is eternally the same. Someday the universe will acknowledge that God is true and every man a liar. Someday, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. The fact that He is always right is the source of our eternal hope!

The Country of the Blind

(Condensed from a fiction classic by H. G. Wells)

Long years ago a handful of Peruvian families became isolated in the wildest waste of the Ecuadorean Andes. They were trapped in a beautiful valley, with sweet water, rich pasture, and all their hearts could desire.

A strange disease, however, caused all of their children to be blind. The process developed so slowly that they hardly noticed their loss. They memorized every part of their little world and when the last sighted person died, their race lived on.

Fourteen generations later, a mountaineer slipped on the snow and fell a thousand feet to a rocky precipice from which he could see their valley. Though badly shaken, not a bone was broken. Carefully he made his way to the throat of a gorge and beheld a sunlit meadow with clusters of stone huts. Each home had a door, but no windows.

He had heard legends about the Valley of the Blind and boldly approached three men carrying pails on yokes. They curiously felt all over his body and expressed grave concern over his eyes. They were bulged out, with fluttering lids.

He was taken to elders with concern that his senses were imperfect. These blind men could hear the beating of a man's heart at a dozen paces. They could distinguish one another by the sense of smell as easily as a dog. They were concerned by his irrational references to the meaningless word "sight."

The eldest blind man explained how the world began. He meant, of course, their valley. At first, it was only an empty hollow. Then came inanimate things, without the gift of touch. Then llamas, and a few other wild creatures. Apparently birds were considered to be angels as they could be heard, but never touched. Then came

man. Time, they said, was divided into warm and cold. It was, of course, best to sleep in the warm and work in the cold.

An old proverb declares that in the land of the blind, the one eyed man is king. Such, however, was not to be. Each time the pilgrim tried to show them the value of sight, he was thwarted. Once, for example, he saw Pedro coming. He was easily seen, but beyond the sense of hearing or smell. "In a few moments," he predicted, "Pedro will be here." Instead, Pedro turned his steps and went in the opposite direction. Again they laughed and mocked this thing called "sight."

Finally he fell in love with a young maiden. She was not highly esteemed, because her closed eyes were not sunken like everyone else's. The young men, however, expressed grave concern that a man with diseased eyes would corrupt their race. The elders expressed a similar fear that the fluttering of his eye lids placed his brain in a state of constant irritation. For the marriage to be consummated, these "bulges," which irritated the brain, would have to be removed.

On the last day, before surrendering his sight to blind surgeons, the lonely pilgrim beheld the morning like an angel in golden armor. He meant to go to a little meadow and look at flowers until the hour of his sacrifice would come. Instead, however, he began to climb. He dared to cross over the wall that surround their little world of darkness. Instinctively he clawed his way upward. Throughout the long day he braved the hazards of the steep cliffs and dangerous gorges. When sunset came, he was bruised and bleeding in many places. His clothes were torn, and his limbs were aching. He was alive, however, and he could see. He lay down under the cold stars with a smile on his face. He had escaped from the Valley of the Blind, where he thought he could be king.

There is a point to this parable, can you see it?

Rewriting Romans

It is obvious, by comparison with the emphasis of our modern age, that the book of Romans needs to be rewritten. By modern standards, it is too "generic" and misses many important issues that we would have addressed.

First, Paul should have said something about the sins of Nero. This cruel despot ordered the murder of his mother, his brother, and his first wife. His second wife died from his own personal abuse. His life was characterized by unbridled indulgence of every kind. Later he would set fire to Rome and blame it on the Christians. Later he would put thousands of Christians to death, and order the execution of Paul himself. Nero was cruel, despotic, and immoral. Obviously, by modern standards, his sins should have been pointed out. Perhaps Paul could have made a difference in the politics of ancient Rome if only he had made an issue of the sins of Nero. With a little encouragement, the Christians may have even overthrown his ungodly despotism, and installed a Christian democracy like we would have wanted them to.

Second, Paul said nothing about the abolition of slavery. There was a time, in Italy, when three out of every four people were enslaved. Our modern movie, *Spartacus*, reveals some of the problems with slavery in ancient Rome. From our perspective, an "anti-slavery" movement was obviously needed. From our perspective, Paul missed a golden opportunity to make slavery an issue.

Then there were the twin problems of pornography and prostitution. Both were rampant in Rome. Some became prostitutes, as you know, in service to their pagan gods. Pornography was everywhere, and plays for the public were so vile and vicious they would even shock an audience in our own degenerate age. We need to ask ourselves this question. Why didn't Paul make an issue out

of pornography and prostitution?

Divorce was also in epidemic proportion in ancient Rome. Led by the dissolute example of corrupt politicians, multiple marriages were the order of the day. Another golden opportunity was missed to outline a strategy for divorce recovery groups and single parents. You see, another important issue failed to find expression in the book of Romans.

Then, there was the ugly monster of substance abuse. It too had taken its cruel toll among the inhabitants of Rome. Alcohol and drugs had strewn the city with a wreckage of human debris that seems to have been totally overlooked by Paul.

Neither did he say anything about eating disorders. The old "feather down the throat" trick was proverbial in ancient Rome. Deranged people, with appetites out of control, would glut and vomit on a daily basis. Why didn't Paul address this important issue?

Abortion, infanticide, and child abandonment were also common. Professional slave traders would scour the city dump in search of abandoned babies. These poor children, if they lived, would never know the joy of freedom. Or consider the Coliseum. It was a major source of entertainment for the citizens of ancient Rome. Massive unemployment led to increased paternalism as the government tried to keep the rabble entertained. Both animals and men, died by the thousands to satiate the sadistic desires of ungodly people. Why didn't Paul address this issue in his letter to the Romans?

A candid consideration of Christian literature in our own day reveals that we focus on a great many "issues." It is equally obvious that Paul didn't! This leads to the conclusion that Paul needs to learn something from us, or we need to learn something from him.

Obviously, Paul was right! His letter saw to it that the main thing was to keep the main thing the main thing. He did it once. Let's do it again!

A Stork or an Ostrich

Job said: "Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee . . . (Job 12:7.) Obviously, there are some lessons in life which we can learn from such creatures. Consider, for example, the stork and the ostrich.

The Hebrew word for "stork" comes from the root word meaning "constant, loving, and loyal." In Palestine the stork became a symbol of parental loyalty and love. Perhaps this is the reason for the famous fable about storks bringing little children into the world. Every parent could profit from the examples of loyalty and faithfulness of many creatures created by God.

The "ostrich," however, was not a good parent. Maybe we could learn something from her too. In Lamentations 4:3 the Scriptures accuse the daughters of Israel of being "cruel like the ostriches in the wilderness." **"Even the sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness."**

Even more explicit are the words of Job regarding how the ostrich treats her eggs. She leaves them in the earth unmindful that someone might step on them, or that a wild beast might crush them. **"She is hardened against her young ones as though they were not hers . . . God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding" (Job 39:15-17.)**

Today we speak of people as: "wise as an owl," "sly as a fox," or "strong as an ox." In ancient times there was a similar expression: "more foolish than an ostrich." Great collections of tamed animals and birds date back beyond 2,000 B.C. so it is possible that Job may have had tamed ostriches living around his tent.

The ostrich is by far, the biggest living bird. An adult cock may stand eight feet tall and weigh 300 pounds. It can run 50 miles per hour. It does have a reputation,

however, for stupidity. Many picture the ostrich with its head buried in the sand oblivious to reality. Some think that one of the Hebrew words for "ostrich" comes from the root word for "greedy." Ostriches do have the habit of swallowing inedible objects which sometimes proves fatal.

Remember that we are dealing with a statement of Scripture: **"GOD HATH DEPRIVED HER OF WISDOM, NEITHER HATH HE IMPARTED TO HER UNDERSTANDING."** The reason for this harsh assessment is because of the way that the ostrich treats her young. First of all she does not take proper care of her eggs. She leaves them in the dust oblivious to the fact that these unguarded unborn babies might be destroyed. Furthermore: **"She is hardened against her young as though they were not her's: her labor is in vain without fear." (Job 39:16)**

Perhaps God deprived the ostrich of wisdom for a purpose. Maybe He wanted to give all women in every generation an example to avoid. It is irresponsible and dumb not to care for an unborn baby. Today, as you know, mothers are killing 1.5 million babies in the womb each year by means of abortion. Multiplied thousands of other babies are born defective because of the selfish and irresponsible way their mothers have chosen to live. At least the mother ostrich, with her head in the sand, is not destroying her unborn baby with alcohol, drugs, or venereal disease.

Storks are not the only parents with virtue, and ostriches are not the only parents who are stupid. Most parents can be both virtuous and stupid. Hopefully, we will learn something from the beasts and fowls that will help us, not only here, but hereafter. Nobody's eyesight has been impaired by looking on the bright side.

The Curse of Ritualistic Religion

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matt. 23:15.)

The degenerative effect of Jewish religion is obvious. Each new generation of converts became progressively worse. When Moses received the Law on Mt. Sinai the people were bad. When Jesus was born they were worse. The first High Priest was bad, and it was downhill from there on out. By the time Jesus was on trial the High Priest was perhaps the most corrupt person in the entire nation. Yet, the religion they espoused, and the rituals they observed, were divinely ordained. These laws, as you know, were not intended to make man righteous. They were a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith. Worship by rote and ritual is debilitating.

God has always intended to make us free. He even described His own rituals as a prison (Gal. 3:23), weak and beggarly elements which kept us in bondage (Gal. 4:9), shadows and not reality (Co. 2:17), death and not life (II Cor. 3:7). He never intended us to be restricted by ritual forever. He always wanted us to have the freedom to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. He has redeemed us from the curse of the law. He has brought us into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Max Lucado in his book **"AND THE ANGELS WERE SILENT,"** tells the story of Hans Babblinger. He lived in Ulm, Germany in the sixteenth century. He wanted to fly. He made a pair of wings and ascended the Bavarian Alps. Strong updrafts are common in the region. On that memorable day he amazed his friends by soaring safely to the ground.

When the king came to town the local Bishop wanted to impress him. He prevailed upon Hans for an exhibition of flying. This time, however, they did not ascend the high Alps. They chose instead to fly in the lowlands from the bluffs of the Danube. It was a poor choice. Without the dynamic lift from the mountain breeze, Hans fell like a rock to the river below. The next Sunday the embarrassed Bishop proclaimed from the pulpit that "Man was not meant to fly." Hans put his wings away and never tried to fly again.

The Cathedral at Ulm is now empty. Most of its visitors are tourists who have traveled there in an airplane.

It was at about this time that Galileo Galilei devised a thermometer and a telescope. He became intoxicated by the thrill of learning. He challenged the traditional views of the church and espoused the teaching of Copernicus. He believed that the earth revolved around the sun, and not vice versa. On April 12, 1633 he was brought before a church tribunal and forced to kneel down and recant his views. He was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment. He died on Jan. 8, 1642. His church had succeeded in keeping him from ever tasting another breath of fresh air and freedom.

God is not the Author of confusion. He can be trusted to orchestrate and direct the members of His own Body. It is not necessary for finite man to become a Messiah in order for the church to be saved. One Savior is sufficient. Jesus has already promised that the gates of hell will never prevail against His Church.

Solomon said: "Go to the ant . . . consider her ways and be wise" (Prov. 6:6-8.) The ant has no "guide, overseer, or ruler" and yet the ant hill is a model of order and design. If man should attempt to organize an ant hill, he would only interrupt the flow of God's creative design.

Every attempt to create or promote worship by means of rote and ritual, is as irrational and unnecessary as attempting to organizing an ant hill.

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.

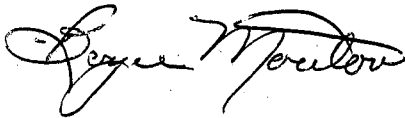
Finally, we must always give God the glory for those things which He has accomplished through us. Herod was a great orator, but he did not give glory to God. This is precisely the reason why he died (Acts 11:21-23.)

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

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