
Facing Reality

Just suppose that you were God! Suppose that more than anything else you wanted your creation to love you and to love one another. Just suppose that everything you tried to teach them they turned into rituals which totally missed the goal. Just suppose you decided to divest yourself of majesty and become a man because you wanted to show them in person what you had been trying to tell them all along. Just suppose you gathered about you a little group of peasant folk who didn't have the strong prejudices of the highly programmed theologians. Suppose you taught them a way of life that transcended legal obedience to a written code. Just suppose you died on a cross so that men could see what love was really like. Just suppose that even then many people would never understand. Just suppose . . .

A Look in the Mirror

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way and straitway forgetteth what manner of man he was . . . (James 1:23-24).

There is an old story about the woman who came to her minister deeply troubled by the sin of vanity. "My beauty is the

problem," she declared. "Everywhere I go men stare at me with lust and women glare at me with envy."

"I have good news for you," replied her minister, "you're not vain . . . you're crazy!"

Most of us are suffering from a certain degree of the same problem. No matter how ugly we are we still possess the capacity to look in the mirror and then forget what manner of person we saw.

A woman at her "vanity" mirror probably will not have the super self image she will later experience while resting on a pillow or strutting down the street. She may have the beauty and charm of a mare moose and still be able to straitway forget what manner of person she really is. In her dreams she may become the "belle of the ball" or a beautiful princess with eager suitors clamoring for her attention.

Men too may pause to flex their muscles and admire their own reflection. Though he may be shaped like a kangaroo when he goes away he is apt to forget the flab and the paunch, and in the fantasy of his mind become some Mr. Muscle who is worthy of admiring glances from all who are privileged to pass his way.

The church is called the "Bride of Christ," and unfortunately we are not immune to irrational behaviour relative to the mirror syndrome. After nearly 2,000 years of earnestly endeavoring to evangelize the world, we are further from completing our task than when we started. Yet many of us are so obsessed with our own "beauty" and "cleverness" that we strongly resent any suggestions of change. Perhaps we are not vain . . . but crazy!

Reality

Jesus came to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He was manifested that He might "destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:8). Before ascending into heaven He gave to His disciples what is generally know as the "Great Commission." It is found in one form or another in all four Gospels, and also in the book of Acts.

Jesus said:

Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world, Amen (Matt. 28:19-20).

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature . . . (Mark 16:15-16).

. . . and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things . . . (Luke 24:47-48).

. . . as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you . . . (John 20:21).

But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Here is a little chart that will provide you with an overview of the population of our world since Jesus gave the Great Commission:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Population in Billions</i>	<i>Number of Years to Double</i>
1	.25?	1,650
1650	.50	200
1850	1.1	80
1930	2.0	45
1975	4.0	35
2010	8.0	?

Note the accelerating population of our world. At present time we must face the painful reality that the world is not Christian. We live in a world beset by hunger and war and crime and the vast majority of people alive today have never even heard the name of Jesus.

Certainly we cannot blame the Apostles. History testifies with a unanimous voice that they did precisely what Jesus commanded them to do. All of the original Apostles except Judas and John, died as martyrs for their faith. Judas, as you know, betrayed Jesus and died a suicide. Though John did not die a martyr, he did suffer numerous persecutions for his faith, and was a prisoner on the

Island of Patmos when he received those visions in the book of Revelation.

Someone has said that everybody makes mistakes, but not everybody makes excuses. Let us not make the mistake of making excuses. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Let's remember these words as we face the reality of the world around us.

Admitting Our Mistakes

At this juncture it is extremely important that we do not get "up tight" and defensive. Jesus didn't come to minister to those who were "whole" but to those who were "sick." It is much easier for Jesus to help those who admit their problems than those who endeavor to camouflage them with clever arrangements of fig leaves.

Wouldn't it be a lot better to come to Jesus like little children and admit that we have made a mess? Wouldn't it be better to own up to it like the Prodigal Son than to grow resentful like the elder brother?

There is an old saying, "When all else fails, read the instructions." But this has been one of our problems. Most of us think we have already read the instructions, but in practice we have galloped off in different directions. Why not let Jesus tell us what it is all about? The K.J.V. of the Bible contains:

3,566,480 letters
773,746 words
31,102 verses
1,189 chapters
66 books

But Jesus, the Author of the Bible, has reduced its message to only two commandments. Jesus said:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Is it remotely possible that a large part of our present problems might be directly associated with our failure to believe and practice the priorities of Jesus?

Are We Asleep?

Sleep is a strange phenomenon which is not yet fully understood by medical science. Generally speaking we expect a sleeping person to remain in one position occasionally turning from side to side or experiencing a few reflexive spasms. Brain waves are greatly diminished except for periods of occasional dreaming. Because the sleeping person so rarely accomplishes anything constructive, it is, therefore, appropriate to use the term "sleep" as a figurative expression for "death."

The analogy and comparison between sleep and spiritual lethargy is quite obvious. (Note Rom. 11:8; 13:11; Eph. 5:14; I Thess. 5:6ff., etc.) A sleeping church is quite similar to a sleeping person. A sleeping church may occasionally roll from side to side or experience a reflexive spasm or an exciting dream yet never accomplish anything very constructive or worthwhile.

To awaken such a church involves a certain degree of danger. Not everyone wakes with a smile upon his face. Sometimes people strongly resent an alarm clock or being doused with a glass of cold water. Those involved in the business of awakening the sleepers must learn to expect a lot of snarling and an occasional punch in the nose.

It is well to remember that monotony is conducive to slumber. This is one reason why so many drivers go to sleep on large divided highways. The drone of the engine . . . the whine of the tires . . . and the monotonous routine have lulled many drivers into a fatal slumber. In similar fashion the monotony in our churches is partially responsible for sleeping Christians.

Mr. Average "Christian" can arrive at church on Sunday morning with much the same mentality that he stumbled to the restroom with the night before. He can glance at the bulletin and relax with the assurance that nothing unusual is going to happen. Every Sunday he can remember has been the same and today will be no different. He can settle back in his pew fully confident that the local pastor will pilot him (or the congregation) safely through to another invitation song just as he has done so many times before. With all that soft music the monotonous drone of the sermon and the reliable routine, it is hard for anyone to stay awake.

The Scriptures teach:

. . . Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that we walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is . . . (Eph. 5:14-17).

When we wake up, turn the lights on and face reality, we will discover that the will of the Lord is to love.

Questions for Discussion — Lesson 2

1. "Do you agree with this chapter, or do you think that we are winning the world for Christ?"
2. Why are we reluctant to admit mistakes?
3. Did Jesus really expect us to evangelize the world?
4. How come Paul did not emphasize evangelism in his letters to the churches?
5. Is it possible to be completely objective about our own church? Our own self?
6. Can you think of anywhere in recent times that Christianity has actually taken over a country?
7. Do you agree that many today are asleep? If so, how do you recommend that they be awakened?