

WILLIAM MACDONALD DEVOTIONS

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald's daily devotional meditations drawing spiritual lessons from Scripture, addressing topics like the dangers of a critical spirit and the importance of humble, grace-filled Christian living.

204 Chapters

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William MacDonald Devotions

And I will bless them that bless thee

“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee.” (Gen. 12:3)

When God first called Abraham to be the head of His chosen earthly people, He promised to bless the friends of that nation and to curse its enemies. In the intervening centuries the Jewish people have suffered untold hostility and discrimination, but the curse of God has never been lifted on anti-Semitism.

Haman plotted the destruction of the Jewish people in Persia. He inveigled the king into signing an unalterable decree. For a while everything seemed to be moving in his favor. But then snags developed. The arch-conspirator staggered from disappointment to failure till finally he was hanged on the gallows he had built for Mordecai, the Jew.

Failing to learn from history, Adolph Hitler was doomed to relive it. He inaugurated a vicious program to wipe out the Jews with his concentration camps, gas chambers, ovens, mass shootings. It seemed that nothing could stop him. But then the tide turned and he died ignominiously with his mistress in a Berlin bunker.

Anti-Semitism will reach its most horrendous climax during the Great Tribulation. The Jews will be delivered up to be afflicted and killed; they will be hated by all the Gentile nations. Vast numbers will be massacred. But the pogrom will be interrupted by the personal advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who have persecuted His people will be destroyed; those who have befriended Christ's Jewish brethren will enter the Kingdom.

No true believer should ever allow his soul to be tainted with a trace of anti-Semitism. His Lord, his Savior, his best and truest Friend was and is a Jew. God used the Jewish people to give and preserve the Scriptures. Although God has temporarily set aside the nation because of its rejection of the Messiah, He still loves Israel for the Fathers' sake. No one who hates the Jews can expect the blessing of God on his life and service.

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee” (Psa. 122:6). They shall also prosper who love the Jewish people.

Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death

“Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.” (2 Sam. 6:23)

David was ecstatic when he brought the ark to Jerusalem and when it was placed in the tent that he had specially prepared for it. Sensing that this was one of his greatest achievements and one of the most glorious moments in his career, the king danced before the Lord with all his might. His wife, Michal, ridiculed him for what she thought was shameful behavior. As a direct result of her critical attitude, she had no child unto the day of her death.

We learn from this that a critical spirit produces barrenness. Of course, when we say that, we are not speaking about constructive criticism. If criticism is true, we should welcome it and benefit from it. There are few friends in life who love us enough to give helpful criticism.

But destructive criticism can be devastating. It can destroy the work of God in someone's life, and can undo the progress of years in a few minutes.

In the incident involving David, the ark represents Christ and the ark given its place in Jerusalem speaks of Christ enthroned in the human heart. When that happens, the Spirit-filled believer cannot help but express his exuberance and enthusiasm. This often stirs up the hostility of unbelievers and sometimes the scorn of other Christians. But that critical spirit inevitably leads to barrenness.

It can lead to barrenness not only in an individual life but in a local assembly as well. Take, for example, a fellowship where the young people are subjected to a continual torrent of criticism. They are taken to task for the way they dress, for their hair styles, for their public prayers, for their music. Instead of patiently training them, the leadership expects them to be instantly full-grown. Soon the young people drift away to more congenial fellowships, and the assembly is left to die on the vine.

Let us be warned by the example of Michal that censoriousness not only harms its victims but takes its revenge on the one who practices it. That revenge is spiritual barrenness.

as he is, so are we in this world

“...as he is, so are we in this world.” (1 John 4:17b)

Here is one of those New Testament truths that shocks us by its sheer audacity. We would not dare to utter the words if we did not see them in the Bible. But they are gloriously true, and we can revel and rejoice in them.

In what sense are we like Christ in this world? Our minds almost automatically think first of the ways we are not like Him. We do not share with Him the attributes of deity, such as omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. We are full of sin and failure whereas He is absolutely perfect. We do not love as He loves, or forgive as He forgives.

How, then, are we like Him? The verse explains. “Herein has love been perfected with us that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, that even as he is, we also are in this world” (Darby). God’s love has so worked in our lives that we will not be terrified when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. The reason for our confidence is that we have this in common with the Savior—judgment is behind us. We are like Him with respect to judgment. He bore the judgment of our sins on the Cross of Calvary and settled the sin question once for all. Because He took the punishment of our sins, we will never have to take it. We can confidently sing, “Death and judgment are behind me,/ grace and glory lie before,/ all the billows rolled o’er Jesus,/ there they spent their utmost power.” Just as judgment is forever past for Him, so it is past for us also, and we can say, “There is no condemnation,/ there is no hell for me,/ the torment and the fire,/ mine eyes shall never see./ For me there is no sentence,/ for me death has no sting:/ because the Lord who loves me/ will shield me with His wing.”

We are like Him not only with respect to judgment but also with respect to acceptance before God. We stand before God with the same favor that the Lord Jesus does, because we are in Him. “Near, so very near to God / I could not nearer be,/ for in the Person of His Son,/ I am as near as He.”

And finally, we are like Christ because we are loved by God the Father, just as Christ is. In His high-priestly prayer, the Lord Jesus said, “...thou...hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (John 17:23b). Thus, it is no exaggeration for us to say, “Dear, so very dear to God,/ I could not dearer be./ The love wherewith He loves His Son,/ such is His love to me.”

So it is blessedly true that as Christ is, so are we in this world.

A man that hath friends must show himself friendly

“A man that hath friends must show himself friendly.” (Prov. 18:24)

Even though all modern versions translate this verse differently, the King James Version enshrines the valuable truth that friendships must be cultivated. They thrive on attention but die through neglect.

An editorial in *Decision Magazine* said, “Friendships don’t just happen; they have to be cultivated—in short, we have to work at them. They are not built on just taking, they are built on giving. They are not just for the good times, they are for the bad times as well. We do not hide our needs from a true friend. Neither do we hold onto a friend only to have his help.”

A good friend is worth keeping. He stands by you when you are falsely accused. He commends you for whatever is praiseworthy, and is frank to point out areas that need improvement. He keeps in touch over the years, sharing your joys and sorrows.

That is important—keeping in touch. It can be done by letters, cards, phone calls, visits. But friendship is a two-way street. If I consistently fail to answer letters, I am saying that I don’t consider the friendship worth continuing. I am too busy. Or I can’t be bothered. Or I hate writing letters. Few friendships can survive on continued neglect.

Our refusal to communicate is often a form of selfishness. We are thinking of ourselves, of the time, effort and cost involved. True friendship thinks of others—how we can encourage or comfort or cheer or help; how we can minister spiritual food to them.

How much we owe to friends who have come alongside with the Spirit-given word when it was most needed! There was a time in my life when I was feeling very low over a deep disappointment in Christian service. A friend who could not have known of my discouragement wrote a cheery letter in which she quoted Isaiah 49:4, “Then I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.” It was just the word I needed to pick me up and set me to work again.

Charles Kingsley wrote, “Can we forget one friend,/ can we forget one face,/ which cheered us to the end,/ which nerved us for our race?/ To godlike souls, how deep our debt!/ We would not, if we could, forget.”

Most of us have only a few close friends in life. That being so, we should do all in our power to keep those friendships strong and healthy.

If ye know these things

“If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” (John 13:17)

Those who teach and preach the Christian faith should practice what they preach. They should present to the world a living example of the truth. The will of God is that the Word should become flesh in the lives of His people.

The world is more impressed by action than by talk. Wasn't it Edgar Guest who wrote, “I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day”? And there is the well-known jibe, “What you are speaks so loud, I can't hear what you say!”

It was said of one preacher that when he was in the pulpit, the people wished he would never leave it; but when he was out of the pulpit, the people wished he would never enter it again.

H. A. Ironside said, “Nothing locks the lips like the life.” In similar vein, Henry Drummond wrote, “The man is the message.” Carlyle added his testimony: “Holy living is the best argument that tells for God in an age of fact...Words have weight when they have a man behind them.” E. Stanley Jones said, “The Word has to become flesh in us before it can become power through us.” “If I preach the right thing but do not live it, I am telling an untruth about God,” said Oswald Chambers.

Of course we know that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only One who perfectly embodies what He teaches. There is absolutely no contradiction between His message and His life. When the Jews asked Him, “Who are you?” He replied, “Just what I have been claiming all along” (John 8:25 NIV). His conduct corresponded to His claims. Ours should do so increasingly.

Two brothers were doctors, one a preacher and the other an M.D. One day a troubled woman came to see the preacher, but she was not sure which of the doctors lived there. When the preacher opened the door, she asked, “Are you the doctor who preaches or the one who practices?” The question impressed him afresh with the necessity of being a living example of what he taught.

Not as though I had already attained

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.” (Phil. 3:12)

In yesterday’s study we saw that our conduct should correspond to our creed. But in order to balance the subject we must add two postscripts.

First, we have to acknowledge that we will never fully and completely live out the truth of God as long as we are in this world. After we have done our best, we still have to say that we are unprofitable servants. But we must not use this fact to excuse failure or even mediocrity: our obligation is to continually try to close the gap between our lips and our lives.

The second consideration is this. The message is always greater than the messenger, no matter who he is. Andrew Murray said, “We who are the Lord’s servants will sooner or later have to preach words which we ourselves are unable to fulfil.” Thirty-five years after he wrote the book *Abide in Christ*, he wrote, “I would like you to understand that a minister or Christian author may often be led to say more than he has experienced. I had not then (when he wrote *Abide in Christ*) experienced all that I wrote of. I cannot say that I have experienced it all yet.”

The truth of God is superlative and sublime. It is so supernal that, as Guy King wrote, it “causes one to fear lest one should in any wise spoil it by touching it.” But must it go forever unheralded simply because we do not reach its loftiest summits? On the contrary we will proclaim it, even if in so doing we condemn ourselves. To whatever extent we fail to experience it ourselves, we will make it the aspiration of our hearts.

Once again we emphasize that these considerations must never be used to excuse behavior that is unworthy of the Savior. But they should keep us from unwarranted condemnation of a true man of God just because his message sometimes leaps to heights which he himself has not attained. And it should not keep us ourselves from holding back the full counsels of God, even if we have not experienced them in full. God knows our hearts. He knows whether we are practicing hypocrites or passionate aspirants.

The battle is not yours, but God's.

“The battle is not yours, but God's.” (2 Chron. 20:15)

If a man is a soldier of the Cross, he can expect to be attacked sooner or later. The more courageously he declares the truth of God and the more accurately he exemplifies the truth in his own life, the more he will be subjected to assault. An old Puritan said, “He that standeth near his Captain, is a sure target for the archers.”

He will be accused of wrongs he did not do. He will be savaged by gossip, slander and backbiting. He will be ostracized and ridiculed. This treatment will come from the world and, sadly enough, it may sometimes come from fellow-Christians.

At such times, it is important to remember that the battle is not ours, but God's. And we should claim the promise of Exodus 14:14: “The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” What this means is that we don't have to defend ourselves or fight back. The Lord will vindicate us at the proper time.

F. B. Meyer wrote, “How much is lost by a word! Be still; keep quiet; if they smite thee on one cheek, turn the other also. Never retort. Never mind your reputation or character—they are in his hands, and you mar them by trying to retain them.”

Joseph stands out as an example of one who did not try to vindicate himself when falsely accused. He committed his cause to God, and God cleared his name and promoted him to great honor.

An aged servant of Christ testified that he had been wronged many times over the years. But he prayed in the words of Augustine, “Lord, deliver me from the lust of always vindicating myself.” He said that the Lord had never failed to justify him and to expose his accusers.

The Lord Jesus, of course, is the supreme Example. “...when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Pet. 2:23).

This, then, is the message for today. We don't have to defend ourselves when we are falsely accused. The battle is the Lord's. He will fight for us. We should hold our peace.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1 NASB)

We live in a day when cults are multiplying with amazing rapidity. Actually there are no new cults; they are just variations of heretical groups that sprang up in New Testament days. It is their variety that is new, not their basic tenets.

When John says that we should test the spirits, he means that we should test all teachers by the Word of God so that we can detect those that are false. There are three fundamental areas where the cults expose themselves as being counterfeits. No cult can pass all three of these tests.

Most of the cults are fatally defective in their teaching concerning the Bible. They do not accept it as the inerrant Word of God, the final revelation of God to man. They give equal authority to the writings of their own leaders. They claim new revelations from the Lord and boast of “new truth.” They publish their own translation of the Scripture which twists and perverts the truth. They accept the voice of tradition on a par with the Bible. They handle the Word of God deceitfully.

Most of the cults are heretical in their teachings concerning our Lord. They deny that He is God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. They might admit that He is the Son of God, but by this they mean something less than equality with God the Father. Often they deny that Jesus is the Christ, teaching that the Christ is a divine influence that came upon the man Jesus. Often they deny the true, sinless humanity of the Savior.

A third area in which the cults stand condemned is in what they teach concerning the way of salvation. They deny that salvation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus alone. Every one of them teaches another gospel, namely, salvation by good works or good character.

When propagators of these cults come to our door, what should be our response? John leaves us in no doubt: “Don’t have him inside your house; don’t even greet him. For to greet such a man is to share in the evil that he is doing.” (2 John 10, 11 Phillips).

(We) have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty

“(We) have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but, by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” (2 Cor. 4:2)

On the previous page, we noted three areas in which the cults expose themselves as being untrue to the Christian faith that has been once-for-all delivered unto the saints. There are other characteristics of the cults of which we should not only be aware but which we should carefully avoid in our own Christian fellowships.

For instance, their leaders build up what we might call a personality cult, setting themselves forth as virtual messiahs and wonder-men. Men with charisma often exercise harsh, autocratic control over the laity, demanding submission and threatening dire punishment for failure to obey.

They often claim to be exclusive possessors of the truth, make prideful claims to certain distinctives, and criticize all other groups that disagree. Some claim to combine the best of other doctrines and thus to be the final word. They imply that no one can be fully happy until he is initiated into their mysteries.

They try to isolate their members from all other teachers, from all others who profess to be believers and from books written by others than their own leaders.

They often prescribe a legalistic lifestyle that becomes a system of bondage. They equate holiness with certain rituals and observances which men can do by their own strength rather than by divine life.

They exploit the people financially by a system of clever psychological manipulations. The leaders live in splendor and luxury, while many of the people are reduced to near poverty.

Many of the cults are sheep-stealers, conducting raids on other religious institutions rather than trying to reach the unchurched.

They overemphasize one doctrine or a few doctrines, completely neglecting vital areas of divine revelation.

They treat those who teach the truth as enemies. Thus Paul asked the legalistic Galatians, “Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” (Gal. 4:16).

It is unfortunate that any of these attitudes or acts should ever creep into sound Christian fellowships, but as long we are in the body, we all have to guard against them zealously.

But go ye and learn what that meaneth

“But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.” (Mt. 9:13)

God is far more interested in how we treat other people than in how many religious ceremonies we go through. He prefers mercy to sacrifice. He places practical morality above ritual. It might seem strange to read that God doesn't desire sacrifice, because it was He who instituted the sacrificial system in the first place. But there is no contradiction. While it is true that He ordered the people to bring sacrifices and offerings, He never intended these to take the place of justice and kindness. “To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice” (Prov. 21:3)

The Old Testament prophets thundered out against people who observed all the proper rituals, yet who cheated and oppressed their neighbors. Isaiah told them that God was fed up with their burnt offerings and religious holidays as long as they oppressed the fatherless and widows (Isa. 1:10-17). He told them that the fast God desired was to treat their employees fairly, to feed the hungry and clothe the poor (Isa. 58:6,7). Unless their lives were right, they might as well offer a dog's head or swines' blood (Isa. 66:3).

Amos told the people to stop their religious observances because God would continue to hate these rituals until justice and mercy flowed like a mighty torrent (Amos 5:21-24). And Micah warned that what God wants more than ritual is reality—the reality of fairness, justice, mercy and humility (Micah 6:6-8).

In our Lord's day, the Pharisees earned His scorn by pretending to be religious with long, public prayers while evicting widows from their homes (Mt. 23:14). They were careful to give God a tenth of the mint in their garden, but this could never take the place of justice and faith (Mt. 23:23). It is futile for us to bring our offering to the Lord if our brother has a valid grievance against us (Mt. 5:24); the gift is acceptable only after the wrong has been righted. Attending church regularly will never serve as a cover-up for dishonest business practices during the week. There is no use giving mother a box of chocolates on Mother's Day if we treat her hatefully during the year. Or a shirt to father on Father's Day if we do not show love and respect to him the rest of the time.

God is not fooled by externals or rituals. He sees the heart and our day-by-day behavior.

Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth

“Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.” (Psa. 12:1)

Faithful people are an endangered species; they are rapidly vanishing from the human race. If David mourned their demise in his day, we often wonder how he would feel if he lived today.

When we speak of a faithful person, we mean one who is trustworthy, reliable, dependable. If he makes a promise, he keeps it. If he has a responsibility, he fulfills it. If he has honorable allegiances, he is staunchly loyal to them.

The unfaithful man makes an appointment, then either fails to keep it or is inexcusably late. He agrees to teach a Sunday School class, yet fails to arrange for a replacement when he cannot be present. You can never depend on him. His word means nothing. No wonder Solomon said, “Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint” (Prov. 25:19).

God is looking for faithful men and women. He wants stewards who are faithful in caring for His interests (1 Cor. 4:2). He wants teachers who are faithful in passing on the great truths of the Christian faith (2 Tim. 2:2). He wants believers who are faithful to the Lord Jesus, sharing His rejection and bearing the cross. He wants people who are uncompromisingly loyal to His inspired, inerrant, infallible Word. He wants Christians who are loyal to the local assembly, instead of wandering from church to church like religious gypsies. God wants saints who are faithful to other believers and faithful to the unsaved as well.

As in all other virtues, the Lord Jesus is our glorious example. He is the faithful and true Witness (Rev. 3:14), a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God (Heb. 2:17), faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). His words are true, His promises are unfailing and His ways are utterly dependable.

Although men might not put a high premium on faithfulness, God does. The Lord Jesus commended the faithfulness of His disciples with the words, “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me” (Lu. 22:28, 29). And the ultimate reward for faithfulness will be to hear His accolade, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant:... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Mt. 25:21).

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Rom. 10:13)

No one can ever really call on the Name of the Lord without being saved. This call of desperate earnestness never goes unanswered. When we get to the end of our own resources, when we abandon all hope of saving ourselves, when we have nowhere to turn but up, if at that time we send a distress call to the Lord, He will hear and answer.

A young Sikh named Sadhu Sundar Singh determined that if he could not find peace, he would commit suicide. He prayed, “Oh God, if there is a God, reveal Thyself to me tonight.” If he didn’t get an answer in seven hours, he was going to put his head on the railroad track as the next train rushed to Lahore.

In the early hours of the morning, he had a vision of Jesus coming into his room and saying in Hindustani, “You were praying to know the right way. Why do you not take it? I am the way.”

He rushed into his father’s room and said, “I am a Christian. I can serve no one else but Jesus. Till the day I die, my life is His.”

I have never known of anyone who called on the Name of the Lord in blood-earnestness without being heard. Of course, there are those who pray to the Lord when they are in a tight spot, who promise to live for Him if He will deliver them, and who then quickly forget once the pressure has been lifted. But God knows their hearts; He knows they were only fox-hole opportunists who never made a genuine heart-commitment to Him.

The fact remains that God will always reveal Himself to the one who is desperate to find Him. In countries where the Bible is not readily available, He may do it in a vision. Elsewhere He may do it through a Scripture portion, through personal witness, through Christian literature or through the miraculous converging of circumstances. So in a real sense it is true that “he who seeks God has already found Him.” It’s that sure!

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers

“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” (Heb. 13:2)

Hospitality is not only a sacred duty (Be not forgetful to entertain strangers); it carries within it the promise of glorious surprises (for thereby some have entertained angels unawares).

It had started out as just another ordinary day for Abraham. Suddenly three men appeared before him as he sat by the door of his tent. The patriarch reacted in the typical middle-eastern manner—he washed their feet, arranged a cool resting place for them under a tree, went out to the herd for a calf, asked Sarah to bake some bread, then served them a sumptuous meal.

Who were these men anyway? Two of them were angels; the third was the angel of the Lord. We believe that the angel of the Lord was the Lord Jesus appearing as a Man (see Genesis 18:13 where the angel is called “the Lord”).

So Abraham entertained not only angels, he entertained the Lord Himself in one of His many preincarnate appearances. And we may have the same privilege, startling as it may seem!

How many Christian families can testify to the blessing received from entertaining godly men and women in their homes. Impressions for God have been made on children that followed them all through their lives. Zeal for the Lord has been rekindled, sorrowing hearts have been comforted, problems have been resolved. How much we owe to these “angels” whose very presence was a benediction in the home!

But it is also our incomparable privilege to have the Lord Jesus as a guest. Whenever we receive one of His people in His Name, it is the same as if we received Him (Mt. 10:40). If we really believe this, we will spend and be spent in the wonderful ministry of hospitality as never before. We will “use hospitality one to another without grudging” (1 Pet. 4:9). We will treat every guest the same as we would treat Christ Himself. And our homes will be like the home of Mary and Martha in Bethany—where Jesus loved to be.

Wilt thou not revive us again

“Wilt thou not revive us again that thy people may rejoice in thee.” (Psa. 85:6)

A backslidden condition is often like cancer; we don't know we have it. We can grow spiritually cold so gradually that we don't realize how carnal we have actually become. Sometimes it takes a tragedy, a crisis or the voice of some prophet of God to awaken us to our desperate need. Only then can we claim God's promise, “I will pour water on him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground” (Isa. 44:3).

I am in need of revival when I have lost my enthusiastic zest for the Word of God, when my prayer life has lapsed into a dull routine (or lapsed altogether), when I have left my first love. I need a fresh touch from God when I am more interested in TV programs than in the meeting of the local fellowship, when I am punctual for work but late for meetings, when I am regular at my job but spasmodic at the assembly. I need reviving when I am willing to do for dollars what I am unwilling to do for the Savior, when I spend more money on self-indulgence than I do on the work of the Lord.

We need revival when we harbor grudges, resentments, bitter feelings. When we are guilty of gossiping and backbiting. When we are unwilling to confess wrongs we have committed or to forgive others when they confess their faults to us. We need reviving when we fight like cats at home, then appear in the assembly as if all were sweetness and light. We need to be revived when we have become conformed to the world in our talk, our walk, our whole life-style. How great is our need when we are guilty of the sins of Sodom—pride, fullness of bread and prosperous ease (Ez. 16:49)!

As soon as we realize our coldness and barrenness, we can claim the promise of 2 Chronicles 7:14, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

Confession is the road to revival!

O Holy Ghost, revival comes from Thee;

Send a revival—start the work in me.

Thy Word declares Thou wilt supply our need.

For blessings now, O Lord, I humbly plead.

J. Edwin Orr

Quench not the Spirit

“Quench not the Spirit; despise not prophesyings.” (1 Th. 5:19, 20)

We usually think of quenching in connection with a fire. We quench the fire when we throw water on it. In so doing, we either douse it completely or greatly reduce its scope and effectiveness.

Fire is used in the Scriptures as a type of the Holy Spirit. He is fervent, burning, enthusiastic. When people are under the control of the Spirit, they are glowing, ardent and overflowing. We quench the Spirit when we suppress the manifestation of the Spirit in the gatherings of God's people.

Paul says, “Quench not the Spirit; despise not prophesyings.” The way in which he links the quenching of the Spirit with the despising of prophesyings leads us to believe that quenching has to do primarily with meetings of the local church.

We quench the Spirit when we make a man ashamed of his testimony for Christ, whether in prayer, worship or ministry of the Word. Constructive criticism is one thing, but when we carp at a man over words or nitpicking details, we are apt to discourage or stumble him in his public ministry.

We also quench the Spirit when we have services so overorganized that He is effectively in a straitjacket. If arrangements are made in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit, then no one can object. But arrangements that are made on the basis of human cleverness have the effect of leaving the Holy Spirit as a Spectator instead of as the Leader.

God has given many gifts to the Church. He uses different gifts at different times. Perhaps a brother has a word of exhortation for the fellowship. If all public ministry is centralized in some other man, then the Spirit does not have liberty to bring forth the needed message at the appropriate time. This is another way of quenching the Spirit.

Finally, we quench the Spirit when we refuse His promptings in our own lives. Perhaps we are powerfully moved to minister on a certain subject but we hold back because of the fear of man. We feel impelled to lead in public prayer but remain seated because of shyness. We think of a hymn that would be especially appropriate but we lack the courage to give it out.

The net result is that the fire of the Spirit is quenched, our meetings lose their spontaneity and power, and the local body is impoverished.

And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God

“And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed until the day of redemption.” (Eph. 4:30)

Just as it is possible for us to quench the Spirit in the meetings of the church, so it is possible for us to grieve Him in our private lives.

There is a certain tenderness about the word “grieve”. We can only grieve someone who loves us. The neighborhood brats don’t grieve us, but our own naughty children do.

We hold a special place of nearness and dearness to the Holy Spirit. He loves us. He has sealed us until the day of redemption. He can be grieved by us.

But what grieves Him? Any form of sin brings sorrow to His heart. It is not by accident that Paul here calls Him the Holy Spirit. Anything that is unholy bows Him down with grief.

The exhortation “grieve not” comes in the middle of a series of sins against which we are warned. The list is not intended to be exhaustive but merely suggestive.

Lying grieves the Spirit (v. 25)—white lies, black lies, fibs, exaggerations, half-truths and shaded truths. God cannot lie and He cannot give that privilege to His people.

Anger that overflows into sin grieves the Spirit (v. 26). The only time that anger is ever justified is when it is in God’s cause. All other anger gives the devil a beachhead (v. 27).

Stealing is grievous to the Holy Spirit (v. 28), whether from mother’s purse or from our employer’s time, tools or office supplies.

Unwholesome speech grieves the Holy Spirit (v. 29). This runs the gamut from dirty, suggestive jokes to idle chatter. Our conversation should be edifying, appropriate and gracious.

Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice complete the list in chapter 4.

One of the favorite ministries of the Holy Spirit is to occupy us with the Lord Jesus Christ. But when we sin, He has to turn from this ministry in order to restore us to proper fellowship with the Lord.

But even then He is never grieved away. He never leaves us. We are sealed by Him unto the day of redemption. However, this should not be used as an excuse for carelessness but should be one of the greatest motives for holiness.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Rom. 8:18)

Taken by themselves, the sufferings of this present time can be appalling. I think of the gruesome sufferings of the Christian martyrs. I think of what some of God’s people have had to endure in the concentration camps. What shall we say concerning the horrible sufferings associated with war? The cruel dismemberment and paralysis connected with accidents? The unspeakable pain of human bodies racked by cancer or other diseases?

And yet physical suffering isn’t the whole story. It seems at times that bodily pain is easier to bear than mental torture. Isn’t that what Solomon meant when he wrote, “The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?” (Prov. 18:14)? There is the suffering that comes with unfaithfulness in the marriage relationship, or with the death of a loved one, or with disappointment over a broken dream. There is the heartbreak of being forsaken, of being betrayed by a close friend. We wonder oftentimes at the ability of the human frame to endure the blows, the agonies, the crushing griefs of life.

Viewed by themselves, these sufferings are overwhelming. But when seen alongside the coming glory, they are only pinpricks. Paul says they are “not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” If the sufferings are so great, how much greater must be the glory!

In another passage, the Apostle Paul indulges in a delightful burst of spiritual imagery when he says that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). Seen on the scales, the afflictions are feather-light while the glory is infinitely heavy. Judged by the calendar, the sufferings are momentary while the glory is eternal.

When we see the Savior at the end of the journey, the sufferings of this present time will fade into insignificance.

It will be worth it all when we see Jesus.

Life’s trials will seem so small when we see Christ.

One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow will erase,

So bravely run the race till we see Christ.

Esther K. Rusthoi

they made me the keeper of the vineyards

“...they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.” (Song of Solomon 1:6b)

The brothers of the Shulamite maiden had sent her to work in the vineyard. She kept so busy tending the vines that she neglected her own vineyard, that is, her personal appearance. Her skin had become swarthy and dried, and no doubt her hair was unkempt.

There is always the danger of neglecting our own vineyard by becoming overly occupied with someone else's. There is the peril, for instance, of becoming so engrossed with the evangelization of the world that one's own family is lost. If God gives us children, those children are our number one mission field. When we stand before the Lord, one of the greatest joys will be to be able to say, “Behold, I and the children which God hath given me” (Heb. 2:13). Not all the accolades from appreciative audiences will compensate for the loss of our own sons and daughters.

It does seem from the Scriptures that responsibility begins at home. After Jesus had driven the demons out of Legion, He charged him, “Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee” (Mark 5:19). It often seems that the most difficult place to evangelize is in our own backyard, but that is where we should start.

Again when the Lord commissioned His disciples, He said, “...both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Begin in “Jerusalem” (your home base)!

Andrew was determined not to neglect his own vineyard. We read of him, “He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ” (John 1:41).

There are, no doubt, cases where a believer is faithful in seeking to win his loved ones to the Lord Jesus, and yet they persist in their unbelief. We cannot guarantee the eternal salvation of our relatives and friends. But what we must guard against is the possibility of being so preoccupied in ministering to others that we neglect our own family circle. Our own vineyard, in such cases, should have priority.

Husbands, love your wives

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” (Eph. 5:25)

What does a Christian wife desire in her husband? Her first concern should be with his spiritual life, not with his physical appearance.

He should be a man of God, one who seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. His objective is to serve the Lord and to be active in the local fellowship. In the home he should maintain a family altar, and be an example of the believer.

This man takes his proper place as head of the house, but he is not a tyrant.

He loves his wife and thereby wins her subjection rather than demanding it. He is respectful to her, treating her like a lady at all times. He is faithful, understanding, longsuffering, kind, thoughtful, considerate and joyful.

The ideal husband is a good provider, one who is diligent in business. But money is not his first priority. He is not covetous or greedy.

He is one who loves his children, trains them, spends time with them, plans social activities for them, is a good example for them and gives each one individual attention.

He is a lover of hospitality. His home is open to the Lord’s servants, to all Christians and to the unsaved as well.

He keeps lines of communication open with his wife and family. He understands and accepts their limitations and can laugh goodnatureedly at their blunders. He shares with them on a social and intellectual basis. When he does or says something wrong, he is quick to admit his mistake and apologize. He is always open to suggestions from the family. It is highly desirable that he be able to keep on top when his wife is down.

Other desirable traits are that he be clean and well-groomed, unselfish, honest, gentle, dependable, loyal, generous and appreciative. He should have a good sense of humor and be neither grouchy nor complaining.

Few if any men embody all these virtues and it is unrealistic to expect them all. A wife should be grateful for those which she does find and lovingly help her husband to develop others.

Prove all things

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” (1 Th. 5:21)

Sometimes it seems that Christians are especially prone to accept passing fads and winds of doctrine. John Blanchard wrote of two tour-bus drivers who were comparing notes. When one mentioned that he had a bus full of Christians, the other said, “Really? What do they believe?” To which the first replied, “Anything I tell them!”

One minute it may be a food fad. Certain foods are denounced as poison and others are credited with almost magical properties. Or it may be a medicinal fad, claiming spectacular results for some strange weed or extract.

Christians can be gullible when it comes to financial appeals. In this country, at least, they respond readily to publicity involving orphans or anti-Communist crusades without investigating the integrity of the sponsoring agency.

Impostors have a heyday among believers. No matter how ridiculous their sob story, they are able to rake in the money.

Perhaps the problem is that we fail to distinguish between faith and gullibility. Faith believes the surest thing in the universe, that is, the Word of God. Gullibility accepts things as fact without evidence and sometimes in the face of evidence to the contrary.

God never intended His people to abandon their powers of discernment or their critical faculty. Interspersed in the Bible are such exhortations as the following:

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Th. 5:21),

“...take forth the precious from the vile” (Jer. 15:19),

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment” (Phil. 1:9 NASB),

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1 NASB)

The danger is especially great, of course, in connection with doctrinal fads and novelties. But in many other areas as well it is possible for Christians to get sidetracked or duped with schemes or crazes that they pursue with exaggerated zeal.

those who have fallen asleep in Jesus

“...those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.” (1 Th. 4:14 NASB)

How are we to react when one of our loved ones dies in the Lord? Some Christians fall apart emotionally. Others, while sorrowful, are able to bear up heroically. It depends on how deep our roots are in God and how fully we appropriate the great truths of our faith.

First of all, we should view the death from the Savior's standpoint. It is an answer to His prayer in John 17:24, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory...” When our loved ones go to be with Him, He sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied (Isa. 53:11). “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Psa. 116:15).

Then we should appreciate what it means to the one who has died. He has been ushered in to see the King in His beauty. He is forever free from sin, sickness, suffering and sorrow. He has been taken away from the evil to come (Isa. 57:1). “Nothing compares with the homegoing of a saint of God...to go home, to leave these old clods of clay, to be loosed from the bondage of the material-welcomed by the innumerable company of angels.” Bishop Ryle wrote, “The very moment that believers die, they are in paradise. Their battle is fought. Their strife is over. They have passed through that gloomy valley we must one day tread. They have gone over that dark river we must one day cross. They have drunk that last bitter cup which sin has mingled for man. They have reached that place where sorrow and sighing are no more. Surely we should not wish them back again! We should not weep for them but for ourselves.” Faith appropriates this truth and is enabled to stand firm like a tree planted by rivers of water.

For us the death of a loved one always involves sadness. But we sorrow not as others who have no hope (1 Th. 4:13). We know that our loved one is with Christ, which is far better. We know that the separation is only for a little while. Then we will be reunited on the hillsides of Immanuel's land, and will know each other under better circumstances than we have ever known down here. We look forward to the Lord's coming when the dead in Christ shall rise first, we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Th. 4:16, 17). This hope makes all the difference.

And so the consolations of God are not too small for us (Job 15:11). Our sorrow is mingled with joy, and our sense of loss is more than compensated by the promise of eternal blessing.

Suffer the little children to come unto me

“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God.”
(Mark 10:14)

The death of children is always an especially severe trial of the faith of God’s people, and it is important to have some solid moorings to hold us at such a time.

The general belief among Christians is that children who die before they reach the age of accountability are safe through the blood of Jesus. The reasoning goes something like this: the child himself has never had the capacity to either accept or reject the Savior, so God reckons to him all the value of the work of Christ on the Cross. He is saved through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, even though he himself has never fully understood the saving value of that work.

As far as the age of accountability is concerned, no one but God knows what that is. It is clearly different in each case since one child may mature earlier than another.

While there is no Scripture that says specifically that children who die before the age of accountability go to heaven, there are two lines of Scripture that support this view. The first is our verse for today: “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14). Speaking of children, Jesus said, “...of such is the kingdom of God.” He didn’t say that they had to become adults to enter the kingdom of God, but that they themselves are characteristic of those who are in the kingdom of God. This is a very strong argument for the salvation of little children.

Another line of proof is as follows. When Jesus was speaking of adults, He said, “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lu. 19:10). But when he was speaking of children, He omitted any mention of seeking. He simply said, “The Son of man is come to save that which was lost” (Matt. 18:11). The implication here is that children have not wandered away as adults have, and that the Savior sovereignly gathers them into His fold at the time of their death. Although they have never known about the work of Christ, God knows about it and reckons all the saving value of that work to their account.

We should not question the providence of God when He takes children away from us. As Jim Elliot wrote, “I must not think it strange if God takes in youth those whom I would have kept on earth till they were older. God is peopling eternity, and I must not restrict Him to old men and women.”

O my son Absalom!

“O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Sam. 18:33)

Whether Absalom was a saved man or not, his father’s wail mirrors the grief of many believers who mourn the death of an unsaved relative for whom they may have prayed for many years. Is there any balm in Gilead for such an occasion? What is the Scriptural attitude to take?

Well, first of all, we cannot always be sure whether the person actually did die without Christ. We have heard of the testimony of one man who was thrown by a horse and who trusted Christ “Between the stirrup and the ground, he mercy sought and mercy found.” Another man slipped off a gangplank and was converted before he hit the water. If either had died in these mishaps, no one would have known that he died in faith.

We believe that it is possible for a person to be saved in a coma. Medical authorities tell us that a person in a coma can often hear and understand what is being said in the room, even if he himself cannot speak. If he can hear and understand, why can he not receive Jesus Christ by a definite act of faith?

But let us suppose the worst. Let us suppose that the person actually did die unsaved. What should be our attitude then? We should very clearly take sides with God against our own flesh and blood. It is not God’s fault if anyone dies in his sins. At stupendous cost, God has provided a way by which people can be saved from their sins. His salvation is a free gift, quite apart from debt or merit. If men refuse the gift of eternal life, what more can God do? He certainly cannot populate heaven with people who don’t want to be there, for then it would not be heaven.

So if some of our loved ones do go into eternity without hope, all we can do is share the grief and heartbreak of the Son of God, who, weeping over Jerusalem, said, “I would but ye would not.”

We know that the Judge of all the earth will do right (Gen. 18:25), so we vindicate Him in the punishment of the lost as much as in the salvation of repentant sinners.

And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place

“And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place...they departed into a desert place...the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them...Jesus...was moved with compassion.” (Mark 6:31-34)

It is easy for us to be annoyed by interruptions. I blush to think how often I have chafed at unexpected demands that prevented me from accomplishing some self-appointed task. Perhaps I was writing, and the words were flowing easily. Then the phone rang or someone was at the door in need of counsel. It was an unwelcome intrusion.

The Lord Jesus was never upset by interruptions. He accepted them all as part of His Father’s plan for that day. This gave tremendous poise and serenity to His life.

Actually, the extent to which we are interrupted is often an index of our usefulness. A writer in the Anglican Digest said, “When you are exasperated by interruptions, try to remember that their very frequency may indicate the valuableness of your life. Only the people who are full of help and strength are burdened by other people’s need. The interruptions which we chafe at are the credentials of our indispensability. The greatest condemnation that anyone could incur—and it is a danger to guard against—is to be too independent, so unhelpful, that nobody ever interrupts us and we are left uncomfortably alone.

We all smile nervously when we read the experience of a busy housewife. One day when she had planned an unusually full schedule, she looked up from her work to see her husband come home earlier than usual. “What are you doing here?” she asked with thinly-veiled annoyance. “I live here,” he replied with a pained smile. She wrote later, “Since that day I’ve made it a point to lay aside my work when my husband comes home. I give him a loving welcome and let him know he’s really tops.”

Every morning we should turn the day over to the Lord, asking Him to arrange every detail. Then if someone interrupts us, it is because He has sent that person. We should find out the reason and minister to it. That could be the most important thing we do all day, even if it came disguised as an interruption.

Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing

“Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing...” (1 Tim. 2:15)

From some of the restrictions Paul places on woman’s ministry in the church, it might seem that she is reduced to a nonentity. For instance, she is not permitted to teach or to usurp authority over the man, but must be in silence (v. 12). Some might conclude that she is relegated to an inferior place in the Christian faith.

But verse 15 clears up any such misconception. “She shall be saved in childbearing...” Clearly this is not referring to the salvation of her soul, but rather to the salvation of her position in the church. To her is given the tremendously important privilege of raising sons and daughters for God.

William Ross Wallace said, “The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world.” Behind almost every great leader is a great mother.

It is doubtful that Susannah Wesley ever ministered from a pulpit, but her ministry in the home has had a worldwide outreach through two of her sons, John and Charles.

In our society it is fashionable for many women to desert the home in order to carve out more glamorous careers in the business or professional world. To them housework is drab and raising a family is a dispensable chore.

At a Christian women’s luncheon, the conversation had drifted to the subject of careers. Each one was rhapsodizing about her position and her salary. There is no question that there was a spirit of rivalry! Finally one turned to a housewife who had three stalwart sons and asked, “And what is your career, Charlotte?” Charlotte replied humbly, “I raise men for God.”

Pharaoh’s daughter said to the mother of Moses, “Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages” (Ex. 2:9). Perhaps one of the greatest surprises at the Judgment Seat of Christ will be the high wages the Lord pays to those women who have devoted themselves to raising boys and girls for Him and for eternity.

Yes, “she shall be saved in childbearing...” Woman’s place in the church is not one of public ministry, but perhaps the ministry of godly childbearing is of far greater importance in the eyes of God.

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mk. 16:16)

If this were the only verse in the Bible on the subject, we might justifiably conclude that salvation is by faith plus baptism. But when there are 150 verses in the New Testament that condition salvation on faith alone, we must conclude that those 150 verses cannot be contradicted by one or two like this one.

However, although baptism is not essential for salvation, it is essential for obedience. God’s will is that all who have trusted His Son as Lord and Savior should publicly identify themselves with Him in the waters of believer’s baptism.

The New Testament does not contemplate any such anomaly as an unbaptized believer. It assumes that when a person is saved, he will be baptized. In the book of Acts, the disciples practiced what we might call “instant baptism.” They didn’t wait for a formal service in a church setting, but baptized immediately on the basis of a person’s profession of faith.

The sequence of belief and baptism is so close that the Bible speaks of them in the same breath—“He that believeth and is baptized...”

In our desire to avoid the unscriptural teaching of baptismal regeneration, we often allow the pendulum to swing too far in the opposite direction. People are apt to go off with the false idea that it doesn’t really matter whether they are baptized. But it does matter.

We hear some saying glibly, “I can go to heaven without being baptized.” I always answer them, “Yes, that is true. You can go to heaven without being baptized, but if you do, you’ll be unbaptized for all eternity.” There will be no opportunity for baptism in heaven. It is one of those acts in which we can obey the Lord now or never.

All who have trusted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior should lose no time in being baptized. In this way they publicly identify themselves with Him in His death and resurrection and they publicly commit themselves to walk with Him in newness of life.

Verily, verily, I say unto you

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” (John 5:24)

Here is an insight that has revolutionized and transformed many a life.

The duplication of “verily” or “truly” at the outset alerts us to expect something momentous. We will not be disappointed.

“I say unto you.” The “I” is the Lord Jesus; we know that from verse 19. What we must also know is that when He says something, it is absolutely and invariably true. He cannot lie. He cannot deceive. He cannot be deceived. Nothing can be more sure and dependable than what He says.

To whom is He speaking? “I say unto you.” The Eternal Son of God is speaking to you and to me. We never had anyone so illustrious speak to us before and never will. We ought to listen!

“He that heareth my word.” The “He” means “anyone.” It has the same force as “whoever.” To hear His word means not just to hear it with the ears, but to hear and believe, to hear and receive, to hear and obey.

“...and believeth on him that sent me.” We know that it was God the Father who sent Him. But the important question is, “Why did He send Him?” I must believe that the Father sent His Son to die as my Substitute, to pay the penalty I deserved, to shed His blood for the remission of my sins.

And now comes the threefold promise. First, “hath everlasting life.” As soon as a person believes, he possesses eternal life. It’s just as plain as that. Second, he “shall not come into condemnation.” This means he will never be consigned to hell because of his sins, because Christ has paid the debt, and God will not demand payment twice. Third, he “is passed from death unto life.” He passes from a condition in which he is spiritually dead as far as his relation to God is concerned, and is born again into a new life that will never end.

If you have truly heard His Word and if you have believed on the Father who sent Him, then the Lord Jesus Christ assures you that you are saved.

No wonder it is called “Good News”.

And it came to pass

“And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.” (Exodus 17:11)

Israel was in conflict with the forces of Amalek. Moses was on top of the hill,, overlooking the battle field. The position of Moses’ hand spelled the difference between victory and defeat. The uplifted hand turned Amalek back. The lowered hand turned Israel back.

As long as Moses’ hand was raised, he pictured the Lord Jesus as our Intercessor, “for us His hands uplifting in sympathy and love.” It is through His intercession that we are saved to the uttermost. But from then on, the type breaks down, because our Intercessor’s hand is never lowered. No fatigue causes Him to need outside help. He always lives to make intercession for us.

There is a second way in which we may apply this incident, namely, to ourselves as prayer warriors. The uplifted hand pictures our faithful intercession for those believers who are engaged in the spiritual conflict on the mission fields of the world. When we neglect the ministry of prayer, the enemy prevails.

A missionary and his party on safari had to spend the night in an area infested by brigands. They committed themselves to the Lord’s care, then retired. Months later when a brigand chief was brought to a mission hospital, he recognized the missionary. “We intended to rob you that night out in the open country,” he said, but we were afraid of your twenty-seven soldiers.”

Later, when the missionary related this in a news letter to his home church, one of the members said, “We had a prayer meeting that same night and there were twenty-seven of us present.”

When our God beholds us there,
Pleading in the place of prayer,
Then the tide of battle turns,
Then the flame of conquest burns,
Then the flag of truth prevails,
Foes slink back and Satan quails!
Then the faltering wail of fear
Turns to victory’s ringing cheer!
Bring us, Lord, O bring us there,
Where we learn prevailing prayer.

Then we can see another insight in this incident. The Lord swore that He will have war with Amalek from generation to generation. Amalek is a picture of the flesh. The Christian must wage ceaseless warfare against the flesh. Prayer is one of his principal weapons. The faithfulness of his prayer life often spells the difference between victory and defeat.

then shall I know even as also I am known

“...then shall I know even as also I am known.” (1 Cor. 13:12)

It is quite normal and understandable for us as Christians to wonder if we will know our loved ones in heaven. While there is no Scripture that deals specifically with the subject, there are several lines of reasoning that lead us to a positive conclusion.

First of all, the disciples recognized Jesus in His resurrected, glorified body. His physical appearance was unchanged. There was no mistaking that it was “this same Jesus.” This suggests that we too will have our own distinctive features in heaven, though in a glorified form. There is no suggestion that we will all look alike. When it says in 1 John 3:2 that we shall be like the Lord Jesus, it means morally like Him, i.e., forever free from sin and its consequences. But certainly we will not look like Him so as to be mistaken for Him. Never!

Second, there is no reason to believe that we will know less in heaven than we know down here. We recognize one another down here; why should it be thought strange that we should recognize each other up there? If we shall know then as we are now known, that should be decisive.

Paul expected to know the Thessalonians in heaven. He said that they would be his hope, joy and crown of rejoicing (1 Th. 2:19).

There are indications in the Bible that people have been given and will be given the ability to identify people they have never seen before. Peter, James and John recognized Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:4).

The rich man in Hades recognized Abraham (Lu. 16:24). Jesus told the Jews that they would see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God (Lu. 13:28). We are told to make friends through the wise stewardship of our money so that these friends will welcome us to the everlasting habitations (which assumes that they will recognize us as their benefactors) (Lu. 16:9).

But one word of caution should be added! While it seems clear that we will know our loved ones in heaven, we will not know them in the same relationships that existed on earth. For instance, the husband-wife relationship will no longer be in effect. That seems to be the clear meaning of the Savior’s words in Matthew 22:30, “...in the resurrection, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage.”

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Martha, Martha

“Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41, 42)

Mary sat quietly at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. Martha was flustered and upset in her service, and resented the fact that Mary didn’t pitch in to help. The Lord Jesus didn’t correct Martha for her service but for the spirit in which she was doing it. Also there is a suggestion that Martha’s priorities were wrong; she shouldn’t have put service above worship.

Many of us are like Martha. We are achievers, who would rather be doing than sitting. We pride ourselves on being organized, efficient, able to accomplish. We are so preoccupied with our work that our morning Bible reading is often interrupted by the memory of sixty things that have to be done. Our prayers tend to be helter-skelter because our mind wanders from Dan to Beersheba, planning out the day. It is easy for us to resent it when others don’t grab a towel and help. We feel that everyone should be doing what we are doing.

Then there are those who are like Mary. They are lovers. Their lives exude affection for others. To them people are more important than pots and pans. One Person in particular is the Object of their affection. They are not lazy, though it might seem that way to us Marthas. It’s just that they have different priorities.

We ourselves appreciate a person who is warm and loving more than one who is coldly capable and efficient. Our hearts are captured by a child who showers us with hugs and kisses more than by one who is too busy with his toys to pay much attention to us.

Someone has well said that God is more interested in our worship than in our service; the heavenly Bridegroom is wooing a bride, not hiring a servant.

Christ never asks of us such busy labor

As leaves no time for sitting at His feet

The patient attitude of expectation

He often counts a service most complete.

Mary chose that good part, which shall not be taken away from her. May we all do the same!

Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord

“Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.” (Jer. 23:24b)

When we speak of God’s omnipresence, we mean that He is present in all places at one and the same time. A Puritan named John Arrowsmith told of a heathen philosopher who once asked, “Where is God?” The Christian answered, “Let me first ask you, ‘Where is He not?’”

An atheist wrote on a wall, “God is nowhere.” A child came along and changed the spacing to read, “God is now here.”

We are indebted to David for a classic passage on the omnipresence of God. He wrote, “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.” (Psa. 139:7-10).

When we speak of omnipresence, we must be careful not to confuse it with pantheism. The latter says that all is God. In some of its forms, men worship trees or rivers or the forces of nature. The true God controls the universe and fills the universe, but He Himself is separate from the universe and is greater than it.

What practical influence should the truth of God’s omnipresence have in the life of His people?

There is the solemn reminder, of course, that we cannot hide from God. He is inescapable.

There is unspeakable comfort in knowing that God is always with His people. He never leaves us. We are never alone.

Then there is challenge! Because He is always with us, we should walk in holiness and in separation from the world.

He has promised His presence in a special way when two or three are gathered together in His Name: He is in the midst. This should inspire deep reverence and solemnity in the gatherings of the Saints.

The Lord God omnipotent reigneth

“The Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” (Rev. 19:6)

The omnipotence of God means that He can do anything that is not inconsistent with His other attributes. Hear the uniform testimony of Scripture! “I am the Almighty God” (Gen. 17:1). “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:14). “I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted” (Job 42:2 NASB). “There is nothing too hard for Thee” Qer. 32:17). “With God all things are possible” (Mt. 19:26). “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37).

But it is understood that God cannot do anything that is inconsistent with His own character. For instance, it is impossible for God to lie (Heb. 6:18). He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). He cannot sin because He is absolutely holy. He cannot fail because He is absolutely dependable.

The omnipotence of God is seen in His creation and sustaining of the universe, in His providence, in the salvation of sinners, and in the judgment of the impenitent. The greatest display of His power in the Old Testament was the Exodus; in the New Testament, the resurrection of Christ.

If God is omnipotent, then no man can fight successfully against Him. “There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord” (Prov. 21:30).

If God is omnipotent, then the believer is on the winning side. One with God is a majority. “If God be for us, who can be against us” (Rom. 8:31).

If God is omnipotent, then in prayer we can deal in the realm of the impossible. As the chorus says, we can laugh at impossibilities and cry, “It shall be done.”

If God is omnipotent, then we have the unutterable comfort that:

The Savior can solve every problem,

The tangles of life can undo.

There is nothing too hard for Jesus,

There is nothing that He cannot do.

“When my weakness leans on His might, all seems light.”

To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever

“To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever.” (Rom. 16:27)

The wisdom of God is a thread that runs all through the Bible. For example! “With him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding...With him is strength and wisdom: the deceived and the deceiver are his” (Job 12:13,16). “O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches” (Psa. 104:24). “The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens” (Prov. 3:19). “Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his” (Dan. 2:20). “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). “Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom...” (1 Cor. 1:30).

The wisdom of God refers to His perfect insight, His unerring discernment and His infallible decisions. Someone has defined it as His ability to produce the best possible results by the best possible means. It is more than knowledge. It is the ability to use that knowledge properly.

All the works of God express His wisdom. The marvelous design of the human body, for instance, bears eloquent tribute to it.

And God’s wisdom is seen in the plan of salvation. The Gospel tells us how sin’s penalty is paid, God’s justice is vindicated, His mercy is dispensed righteously, and the believer in Christ is better off than he ever could have been if Adam had not fallen.

Now that we are saved, the wisdom of God speaks tender comfort to our souls. We know that our God is too wise to make a mistake. Though there are things in life that are hard to understand, we know that He cannot err.

We can have utmost confidence in His guidance. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows pathways of blessing of which we are completely unaware. His way is perfect.

Finally, He wants us to grow in wisdom. We should be wise unto that which is good (Rom. 16:19). We should walk circumspectly, as wise men, redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Eph. 5:15,16). We should be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves (Mt. 10:16).

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” (Rev. 4:8)

When we speak of the holiness of God, we mean that He is spiritually and morally perfect in His thoughts, deeds, motives and in every other way. He is absolutely free from sin and defilement. He cannot be anything but pure.

The Scriptural testimony to His holiness is abundant. Here are a few examples. “I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). “There is none holy as the Lord” (1 Sam. 2:2). “O Lord my God, mine Holy One... Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab. 1:12,13). “God can not be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (Jas. 1:13). “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5b). “Thou only art holy” (Rev. 15:4).

Even the stars are not pure in His sight (Job 25:5). The priesthood and the sacrificial system of the Old Testament taught, among other things, the holiness of God. They taught that sin had brought distance between God and man, that there must be a go-between to bridge the gap, and that a holy God can be approached only on the basis of the blood of a sacrificial victim.

The holiness of God was also demonstrated in a unique way at the Cross. When He looked down and saw His Son bearing our sins, God forsook His Well-beloved for those three terrible hours of darkness.

The application of all this to us is clear. The will of God is that we should be holy “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1 Th. 4:3). “As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Pet. 1:15).

Thoughts of the holiness of God should also produce in us a profound sense of reverence and awe. As He said to Moses, “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Ex. 3:5).

T. Binney marveled at the holiness required to stand in the presence of God.

Eternal light! Eternal light!

How pure the soul must be

When, placed within Thy searching sight,

It shrinks not, but with calm delight

Can live, and look on Thee.

Our hearts overflow with worship when we realize that we have that necessary purity imputed to us through faith in the Lord Jesus.

I am the Lord; I change not

“I am the Lord; I change not.” (Mal. 3:6)

The attribute of God which describes Him as changeless is called His immutability. He does not change in His essential being. He does not change in His attributes. He does not change in the principles by which He operates.

The psalmist contrasted the changing destiny of the heavens and earth with God’s changelessness: “They shall be changed, but thou art the same” (Psa. 102:26, 27). James describes the Lord as “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jas. 1:17).

There are other Scriptures that remind us that God does not repent. “God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent” (Num. 23:19). “The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent” (1 Sam. 15:29).

But what, then, do we do with verses that say that God does repent? “It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth” (Gen. 6:6). “The Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel” (1 Sam. 15:35b). See also Exodus 32:14 and Jonah 3:10.

There is no contradiction. God always acts on these two principles: He always rewards obedience and always punishes disobedience. When man shifts from obedience to disobedience, God must still be true to His own character by shifting from the first principle to the second. This seems like repentance to us, and it is so described in what we might call the language of human appearance. But it does not indicate regret or changeableness.

God is always the same. In fact, that is one of His names. “...thou, the Same, thou alone art the God of all the kingdoms of the earth” (Isa. 37:16, Darby). That name is also found in 2 Sam. 7:28 Margin, Psa. 102:27 and Isa. 41:4 Margin, all in Darby’s translation.

The immutability of God has been a comfort to His saints in all ages, and a theme of their song. We celebrate it in the immortal lines of Henry F. Lyte:

Change and decay in all around I see—

O thou who changest not, abide with me!

It is also a quality for us to imitate. We should be stable, constant and steadfast. If we are vacillating, fickle and mercurial, we misrepresent our Father to the world.

“Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)

Love is that quality in God which causes Him to lavish unbounded affection on others. His love is manifest in giving good and perfect gifts to the beloved.

We can give only a few of the myriad of verses that speak of that love! “I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3). “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us...” (Eph. 2:4). And, of course, the best known of all, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

When John says “God is love” (1 John 4:8), he is not defining God, but insisting that love is a key element in the divine nature. We do not worship love, but the God of love.

His love had no beginning and can have no end. It is limitless in its dimensions. It is absolutely pure, without taint of selfishness or any other sin. It is sacrificial, never minding the cost. It seeks only the welfare of others, and nothing in return. It goes out to the unlovely as well as to the lovely, to enemies as well as to friends. It is not drawn out by any virtues in its objects, but only by the goodness of the Giver.

The practical implications of this sublime truth are obvious. “Therefore be imitators of God,” said Paul, “as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us” (Eph. 5:1,2a, NASB). Our love should ascend to the Lord, should flow out to our brethren, and should extend to the unsaved world.

Contemplation of His love should also inspire deepest worship. As we fall at His feet, we must say repeatedly:

How Thou canst love me as Thou dost

And be the God Thou art

Is darkness to my intellect

But sunshine to my heart.

The God of all grace

“The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus...” (1 Pet. 5:10)

The grace of God is His favor and acceptance to those who do not deserve it; who, in fact, deserve the very opposite; but who trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Four of the better known verses on grace are these! “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9).

Some extol God’s grace as the chief of all His virtues. Samuel Davies, for instance, wrote:

Great God of wonders! all Thy ways

Display Thine attributes divine;

But the bright glories of Thy grace

Above Thine other wonders shine:

Who is a pard’ning God like Thee?

Or who has grace so rich and free?

But who can say that one of God’s attributes is greater than another?

God has always been a God of grace-in the Old Testament as well as in the New. But that aspect of His character was revealed in a new and arresting way with the coming of Christ.

Once we come to understand something of the grace of God, we become worshipers forever. We ask ourselves, “Why should He have chosen me? Why should the Lord Jesus have shed His life’s blood for one so unworthy? Why should God not only save me from hell, but bless me with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies now, and destine me to spend eternity with Him in heaven?” No wonder we sing of the amazing grace that saved such wretches!

Then, too, God wants His grace to be reproduced in our own lives and to flow through us to others. He wants us to be gracious in our dealings with others. Our speech should be always with grace, seasoned with salt (Col. 4:6). We should impoverish ourselves that others might be enriched (2 Cor. 8:9). We should grant favor and acceptance to the unworthy and the unlovely.

God...is rich in mercy

“God...is rich in mercy.” (Eph. 2:4)

The mercy of God is His pity, lovingkindness and compassion on those who are guilty, failing, distressed or needy. The Scriptures emphasize that God is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4) and plenteous in mercy (Psa. 86:5). His mercy is abundant (1 Pet. 1:3); it is great unto the heavens (Psa. 57:10). “For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him” (Psa. 103:11). God is spoken of as “the Father of mercies” (2 Cor. 1:3), One who is “very pitiful and of tender mercy” (Jas. 5:11). He is impartial in bestowing mercy: “for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mt. 5:45). Men are not saved by works of righteousness (Tit. 3:5) but by His sovereign mercy (Ex. 33:19; Rom. 9:15). His mercy endures forever to those who fear Him (Psa. 136:1; Lu. 1:50), but for the impenitent it is for this life only.

There is a difference between grace and mercy. Grace means that God showers me with blessings which I do not deserve. Mercy means that He does not give me the punishment that I do deserve.

Every doctrine of the Scripture has duty attached. The mercies of God require, first of all, that we should present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God (Rom. 12:1). It is the most reasonable, rational, sane, sensible thing we can do.

Then, too, God would have us to be merciful to one another. A special reward is promised to the merciful: “they shall obtain mercy” (Mt. 5:7). The Lord would rather have mercy than sacrifice (Mt. 9:13), that is, great acts of sacrifice are unacceptable if they are divorced from personal godliness.

The good Samaritan is the one who shows mercy to his neighbor. We show mercy when we feed the hungry, clothe the poor, nurse the sick, visit the widows and orphans, and weep with those who weep.

We are merciful when we refuse the opportunity to take vengeance on someone who has wronged us, or when we show compassion on those who have failed.

Remembering what we are, we should pray for mercy for ourselves (Heb. 4:16) and for others (Gal. 6:16; 1 Tim. 1:2).

Finally the mercies of God should tune our hearts to sing His praise.

When all thy mercies, O my God,

My rising soul surveys,

Transported with the view I'm lost,

In wonder, love, and praise.

Joseph Addison

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven

“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” (Rom. 1:18)

The wrath of God is His fierce anger and retributive punishment directed against unrepentant sinners in time and in eternity. A. W. Pink has pointed out that it is as much a divine perfection as is His faithfulness, power and mercy. We need make no apology for it.

In pondering the wrath of God, there are a few facts we should keep in mind.

There is no conflict between God’s love and His wrath. True love punishes sin, rebellion and disobedience.

If men refuse God’s love, what is left but His wrath? There are only two eternal abodes, heaven and hell. If men refuse heaven, they thereby choose hell.

God did not create hell for men, but for the devil and his angels (Mt. 25:41). The Lord does not desire the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). But there is no alternative for the Christ-rejecter.

Judgment is spoken of as God’s strange work (Isa. 28:21). The suggestion is that He prefers to show mercy (Jas. 2:13b).

There is no vindictiveness or spite in God’s wrath. It is righteous wrath, without any stain of sin.

The wrath of God is an attribute we are not called to imitate. It is peculiarly His in the sense that He alone can exercise it with absolute justice. Thus Paul writes to the Romans, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Rom. 12:19 NASB).

The Christian is called on to display righteous anger, but it must be righteous. It must not overflow into sinful wrath (Eph. 4:26). And it should be exercised only when God’s honor is at stake, never in self-defense or self-justification.

If we really believe in the wrath of God, it should move us out to share the Gospel with those who are still on the broad road that leads to destruction. And when we preach the wrath of God, it should be with tears of compassion.

His compassions fail not

“His compassions fail not, they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness.” (Lam. 3:22, 23)

God is faithful and true. He cannot lie or deceive. He cannot go back on His word. He is absolutely trustworthy. No promise of His can ever fail.

“God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Num. 23:19). “Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God” (Deut. 7:9). “Thy faithfulness is unto all generations” (Psa. 119:90).

God’s faithfulness is seen in His calling us into the fellowship of His Son (1 Cor. 1:9). It is seen in not allowing us to be tempted beyond what we can bear (1 Cor. 10:13). It is seen in the way He establishes us and keeps us from evil (2 Th. 3:3). Even if some do not believe, yet He remains faithful: He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13).

The Lord Jesus is truth incarnate (John 14:6). The Word of God is sanctifying truth (John 17:17). “Let God be true, but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4).

The knowledge that God is faithful and true floods our souls with confidence. We know that His Word cannot fail, that He will do as He has promised (Heb. 10:23). We know, for instance, that we are eternally secure, because He said that no sheep of His will ever perish (John 10:28). We know that we will never want because He has promised to supply all our needs (Phil. 4:19).

God wants His people to be faithful and true. He wants us to be true to our word. He wants us to be dependable in keeping appointments. We should not be given to lies, exaggeration or half-truths. We should be faithful in keeping our promises. Christians, above all people, should be faithful to their marriage vows. They should be faithful in discharging their commitments in the assembly, in business and in the home.

How we should praise and thank the Lord for His faithfulness. He is the God who cannot fail.

He cannot fail—for He is God

He cannot fail—He gave His Word.

He cannot fail—He’ll see you through.

He cannot fail—He’ll answer you.

C. E. Mason, Jr.

Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased

“Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.” (Psa. 115:3)

God is sovereign. That means that He is the supreme Ruler of the universe, and that He can do as He pleases. But having said that, we must quickly add that what God pleases is always right. His way is perfect.

Isaiah quotes the Lord as saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my Pleasure” (Isa. 46:10). When Nebuchadnezzar was restored to his right mind, he said, “He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan. 4:35). The Apostle Paul insists that man has no right to question God’s actions: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?” (Rom. 9:20). And in another place he speaks of God as the One “who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph. 1:11).

Spurgeon said, “We proclaim an enthroned God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as He thinks well, without consulting them in the matter.”

To put it very simply, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God is a doctrine that allows God to be God.

It is a truth that fills me with reverence and awe. I cannot comprehend all its ramifications, but I can worship and adore.

It is a truth that moves me to submit myself to Him. He is the Potter; I am the clay. He has rights to me by creation and redemption. Under no circumstances should I talk back to Him or question His decisions.

It is a truth that is full of comfort. Since He is the supreme Ruler, I know that He is working out His purposes and that they will reach their desired end.

Though there are things in life I can’t understand, I can be sure that the dark threads are as necessary for His weaving as the threads of gold and silver.

Canst thou by searching find out God?

“Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?.” (Job 11:7)

There are other attributes of God that must be mentioned, even if only briefly. Contemplation of these divine perfections lifts the soul from earth to heaven, from the petty to the sublime.

- God is righteous, that is, He is just, equitable and fair in all His dealings. He is “a just God and a Saviour” (Isa. 45:21).
- God is incomprehensible (Job 11:7,8). He is too great to be understood by the human mind. As Stephen Charnock said, “It is visible that God is. It is invisible what He is.” And Richard Baxter said, “You may know God, but not comprehend Him.”
- God is eternal—without beginning or end (Psa. 90:1-4). Eternity is His lifetime.
- God is good (Nahum 1:7). He is “good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works” (Psa. 145:9).
- God is infinite (1 Kings 8:27). He has no limits or boundaries. “His greatness is beyond calculation, measurement or human imagination.”
- God is self-existent (Ex. 3:14). He did not receive His existence from any outside source. He is the Fountain of His own life as well as of all other life.
- God is self-sufficient, that is, He has within the Trinity all that He could ever need.
- God is transcendent. He is far above the universe and time, and is separate from the material creation.

A final attribute of God is His foreknowledge. Christians are divided on whether God’s foreknowledge determines who will be saved, or whether it is merely a prior knowledge of who will trust the Savior. Judging from Romans 8:29, I believe that God sovereignly selected certain individuals and decreed that all whom He thus foreknew would eventually be glorified.

And so we come to the end of our consideration of the attributes of God. But it is a subject that in another sense has no end. God is so great, so majestic, so awesome that we only see through a glass darkly. Because He is infinite, He never can be fully known by finite minds. Throughout eternity we will dwell on the wonders of His Person and will still have to say, “The half has not been told.”

Pure religion and undefiled before God

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” (Jas. 1:27)

When James wrote these words, he didn't mean to suggest that if a believer did these things, he did all that was required of him. Rather he was saying that two outstanding examples of ideal religion are to visit orphans and widows and to keep oneself pure.

We might have thought that he would have zeroed in on expository preaching, or missionary work, or personal soul winning. But no! He thinks first of visiting those in need.

The Apostle Paul reminded the Ephesian elders how he had visited “from house to house” (Acts 20:20). J. N. Darby considered visiting “the most important part of the work.” He wrote, “The clock strikes the hours and the passers-by hear it, but the works inside make the clock go, and keep the striking and the hands right. I think that visiting should be your substantive work, and take all else as it comes. I dread much public testimony: and especially so, if there be no private work” (from a letter to G. V. Wigram, Aug. 2, 1839).

An elderly widow, living alone, reached the stage where she depended on help from neighbors and friends. With time on her hands, she kept a diary of anything and everything that happened during the day—especially of contacts with the outside world. One day neighbors realized that they hadn't seen any signs of life around her house for several days. The police were called to enter the house, and they found that she had been dead for several days. For three days prior to her death, the only entry in her diary was “No one came,” “No one came,” “No one came.”

In the busyness of our everyday lives, it is all too easy to forget the lonely, the needy, the infirm. We give priority to other matters, and often to those forms of service that are more public and glamorous. But if we want our religion to be pure and undefiled, we will not neglect the orphans and widows, the aged and shut-ins. The Lord has a special concern for those who need help, and a special reward for those who step forward to fill the need.

as thy days, so shall thy strength be

“...as thy days, so shall thy strength be.” (Deut. 33:25)

God promises to give His people strength according to their needs at any particular time. He does not promise it in advance of the need, but when the crisis comes, the grace is there to meet it.

Perhaps you are called to go through a patch of sickness and suffering. If you knew in advance how great the testing would be, you would say, “I know I could never bear it.” But all the divine support comes with the testing, to your amazement and everyone else’s.

We live in fear of the time when our loved ones will be called away by death. We are sure our little world will fall apart and that we ourselves will be utterly unable to cope. But it isn’t that way at all. We are conscious of the Lord’s presence and power in a way we never knew before.

Many of us have close scrapes with death in accidents and situations of extreme peril. We find our hearts flooded with peace when ordinarily we would be in panic. We know it is the Lord, coming alongside to help.

As we read the stories of those who have heroically laid down their lives for the sake of Christ, we realize afresh that God gives “martyr grace for martyr days.” Their cool courage was beyond human bravery. Their bold witness was obviously empowered from on high.

Now it should be obvious that worrying in advance of the need produces nothing but ulcers. The fact is that God doesn’t give the grace and strength until they are needed. As D. W. Whittle said,

I have nothing to do with tomorrow,

The Savior will make that His care;

Its grace and its strength I can’t borrow,

Then why should I borrow its care?

Annie Johnson Flint’s memorable lines are ever apropos.

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater;

He sendeth more strength when the labors increase.

To added affliction He addeth His mercy;

To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,

When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,

When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,

Our Father's full giving is only begun.

Who can find a virtuous woman?

“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.” (Prov. 31:10)

What are some of the things that a Christian husband desires in his wife? The following is a suggested list. Hopefully no one will be so immature as to expect all this in any one woman.

First of all, she should be a godly woman—one who is not only born again but spiritually minded as well. This woman puts Christ first in her life. She is a woman of prayer and active in the service of the Lord. A woman of Christian character and integrity whom he can respect spiritually; and who respects him in return.

She is a woman who takes her God-given place of subjection and who actively assists her husband to take his proper place as head...She is faithful to her marriage vows— She is a good wife and mother of her children— She is personally neat and attractive, one who does not go to extremes in dress, one who is feminine and ladylike but not prissy.

This ideal wife is a good homemaker, who keeps the place neat and clean and who manages its affairs efficiently. She serves good meals on a regular schedule and loves to show hospitality to others... It goes without saying that she should share the same goals and interests as her husband.

When differences arise, she is willing to bring her problems to the surface rather than clam up, pout or sulk. She is willing to negotiate differences and is able to apologize and confess if necessary.

She is not a gossip nor a busybody, meddling in other people’s affairs. She has a meek and a quiet spirit and is not contentious or a nagger.

This wife cooperates in living within the family income. She is not obsessed with a desire for fancy things, and does not strive to keep up with the Joneses.

She is willing to accept adversity, if necessary.

She renders her husband his conjugal rights joyfully, not passively nor disinterestedly.

She has a good temperament, is a good sport, is not a social climber, and is entirely trustworthy.

Husbands should be grateful when they find a majority of these traits in their wives, and wives can use these as a checklist to help them climb higher.

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord

“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Cor. 3:18)

The Bible teaches that we become like what we worship. That important insight is found in today’s text. Let’s break it down this way:

But we all—that is, all true believers;

with open or unveiled face—sin causes a veil between our faces and the Lord. When we confess and forsake the sin, we have an open or unveiled face;

beholding as in a glass—the glass or mirror is the Word of God, in which we behold

the glory of the Lord—meaning His moral excellence. In the Bible we gaze upon the perfection of His character, the beauty of all His works and ways;

are changed into the same image—we become like Him. We are changed by beholding. The more we are occupied with Him, the more like Him we become.

This change is

from glory to glory—from one degree of glory to another. The change does not take place all at once. It is a process that continues as long as we behold Him. The transformation of our character is effected

even as by the Spirit of the Lord—the Holy Spirit produces likeness to Christ in all those who gaze by faith upon the Savior as He is revealed in the Bible.

In The Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne, it wasn’t Mr. Gathergold or General Blood and Thunder or Old Stony Phiz or the poet, but Ernest—who, gazing in quiet meditation on the Great Stone Face, eventually came to resemble it.

I heard once of a man who went daily to a Buddhist temple and sat with legs akimbo and arms folded, gazing upon the green statue. It was said that after years of this meditation, he actually came to resemble the Buddha. Whether that is true, I don’t know, but I do know that reverent occupation with the Son of God produces moral resemblance to Him.

The way to holiness is through gazing upon the Lord Jesus. It is not ordinarily possible to think of Christ and of sin at the same time. During those moments when we are taken up with Him, we are most free from sin. Our goal then should be to increase the percentage of our time when we are beholding Him.

Not that I speak in respect of want

“Not that I speak in respect of want...” (Phil. 4:11)

It is noteworthy that Paul never made his own financial needs known. His was a life of faith. He believed that God had called him into His service, and was utterly convinced that God pays for what He orders.

Should Christians today publicize their needs or beg for money? Here are a few considerations: There is no Scriptural justification for this practice. The apostles made known the needs of others, but never asked for money for themselves.

It seems more consistent with the life of faith to look to God alone. He will provide the needed funds for anything he wants us to do. When we see Him providing in just the right amount at just the right time, our faith is greatly strengthened. And He is greatly glorified when the provision is undeniably miraculous. On the other hand, He does not get the credit when we manipulate our own finances through clever fund-raising techniques.

By using appeals and solicitation, we can carry on works “for God” that might not be His will at all. Or we can perpetuate a work long after the Spirit has departed from it. But when we are dependent on His supernatural provision, we can continue only as long as He supplies.

High-pressure solicitation introduces a new way of measuring success in Christian work. The one who is most clever in public relations is the one who gets the most money. It may be that worthy works suffer because the fund campaigns siphon off the money. This often gives rise to jealousy and disunity.

C. H. Mackintosh took a dim view of publicizing one’s own personal needs. “To make known my wants, directly or indirectly, to a human being is departure from the life of faith, and a positive dishonor to God. It is actually betraying Him. It is tantamount to saying that God has failed me, and I must look to my fellow for help. It is forsaking the living fountain and turning to a broken cistern. It is placing the creature between my soul and God, thus robbing my soul of rich blessing, and God of the glory due to Him.”

In similar vein, Corrie Ten Boom wrote in *Tramp for the Lord*, “I would much rather be a trusting child of a rich Father, than a beggar at the door of worldly men.”

no man knoweth the Son, but the Father

“...no man knoweth the Son, but the Father.” (Mt. 11:27)

There is deep mystery connected with the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Part of the mystery is the combination of absolute deity and full humanity in one Person. There is the question, for instance, how One who has the attributes of God can at the same time have the limitations of finite Man. No mere man can comprehend the Person of Christ. Only God the Father understands.

Many of the most serious heresies that have racked the Church have centered on this subject. Heedless of their own frailty, men have occupied themselves with that which is too deep for them. Some have overemphasized the deity of our Lord at the expense of His humanity. Others have so stressed His humanity as to detract from His Godhood.

William Kelly once wrote, “The point where error comes in is as to the Son of God becoming a man; for it is the complex person of the Lord Jesus that exposes persons to break down fatally. There are those, no doubt, who dare to deny His divine glory. But there is a far more subtle way in which the Lord Jesus is lowered; where, although He is owned to be divine, the manhood of the Lord is allowed to swamp His glory, and neutralize the confession of His person. Thus, one is soon perplexed, and one lets that which puts Him in association with us here below work so as to falsify that which He has in common with God Himself. There is but one simple safeguard that keeps the soul right as to this, which is, that we do not venture to pry and never dare to discuss it, fearing to rush in human folly on holy ground, and feeling that on such ground as this we should be only worshipers. Wherever this is forgotten by the soul, it will invariably be found that God is not with it—that He allows the self-confident one, who of himself ventures to speak of the Lord Jesus to prove his own folly. It is only by the Holy Ghost that he can know what is revealed about the Only-begotten.”

A venerable servant of the Lord once advised his students to stick to the language of Scripture itself when discussing the dual nature of our Lord. It is when we inject our own ideas and speculations that errors creep in.

No man knows the Son. Only the Father knows Him.

The high myst'ries of His fame

The creature's grasp transcend.

The Father only—glorious claim—

The Son can comprehend.

Josiah Conder

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,” (1 Cor. 2:14)

The natural man is the one who has never been born again. He does not have the Spirit of God. He is disinclined to receive spiritual truths because they sound like nonsense to him. But that is not all! He cannot understand spiritual truths because they can only be understood by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

This must be emphasized. It is not just that the unsaved man doesn't want to understand the things of God. He cannot understand them. He has a native incapacity for doing so.

This helps me in properly evaluating the scientists, philosophers and other professional people of the world. As long as they speak about mundane matters, I respect them as experts. But as soon as they start intruding into the spiritual realm, I write them off as unqualified to speak with any authority.

I am not unduly surprised if some college professor or even some liberal clergyman grabs the headlines with doubts or denials concerning the Bible. I have come to expect that and disregard it. I realize that the unregenerate have gone beyond their depth when they talk about the things of the Spirit of God.

F. W. Boreham likened the great men of science and philosophy to second-class passengers on an ocean liner, barred from the first-class promenade. “Scientists and philosophers—as such—are, so to speak, ‘second-class passengers,’ and they must be kept on their own side of the barrier. They are not authorities on the Christian faith...The fact is that we have a faith which cannot be shocked by the contempt of second-class passengers, and which derives no real support from their corroboration and patronage.”

Of course, there is the occasional scientist or philosopher who is a saint. In such a case, Boreham said, “I always discover a ‘first-class ticket’ peeping out of his pocket; and as I stroll the promenade in his delightful company, I no more think of him as a scientist than I think of Bunyan as a tinker. We are fellow passengers—first-class.”

Said Robert G. Lee, “Men may be critical and scholarly and scientific, knowing all about rocks and molecules and gases, and yet be utterly incompetent to sit in judgment upon Christianity and the Bible.”

And the Lord was with Joseph

“And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a -prosperous man.” (Gen. 39:2)

I have heard that one of the earliest versions of the English Bible translated this verse, “And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a luckye fellow.” Perhaps “luckye” at that time had a different meaning. At any rate we are glad that later translators removed Joseph from the realm of luck.

For the child of God there is no luck. His life is controlled, guarded, planned by a loving heavenly Father. Nothing happens to him by chance.

That being so, it is inconsistent for a Christian to wish “Good luck” to someone else. Nor should he say “I lucked out.” Such expressions are a practical denial of the truth of divine providence.

The unbelieving world associates various things with good luck—a rabbit’s foot, a wishbone, a four-leaf clover, a horseshoe (always with ends pointing upward so the luck won’t spill out!). Men cross their fingers and knock on wood, as if those actions could affect events favorably or avert misfortune.

The same people associate other things with bad luck—a black cat, Friday the 13th, walking under a ladder, the number 13 on a room or on the floor of a building. It is sad to think of people living in bondage to such superstitions, a bondage that is both needless and fruitless.

In Isaiah 65:11 (NASB), God threatened punishment for those in Judah who, it seems, were worshipping the god of chance.

But you who forsake the Lord,

Who forget My holy mountain,

Who set a table for Fortune,

And who fill cups with mixed wine for Destiny.

We cannot be positive as to the particular sin involved but it sounds suspiciously as if the people were bringing offerings to idols that were associated with luck and chance. God hated it and still does.

What confidence it gives us to know that we are not the helpless pawns of blind chance, or of the rolling of cosmic dice, or of Lady Luck. Everything in life is planned, is meaningful and is purposeful. For us it is our Father, not fate; Christ, not chance; love, not luck.

It is enough; now, O Lord

“It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.” (1 Kings 19:4b)

It is not uncommon for God’s people to suffer from nervous depression, just as Elijah did. Moses and Jonah also wished they could die (Ex. 32:32; Jonah 4:3). The Lord has never promised believers exemption from this type of trouble. Neither does the presence of this affliction necessarily indicate a lack of faith or spirituality. It could happen to any one of us.

When it does strike, it is something like this. You feel that God has forsaken you, even though you know very well that He never forsakes His own. You go to the Word of God for comfort, and invariably you turn to a passage on the unpardonable sin or the hopeless condition of an apostate. You experience the frustration of having an affliction that cannot be removed by surgery and cannot be cured by medicines. Your friends suggest that you should “snap out of it,” but they never tell you how. You pray and long for some quick remedy, but find that while nervous prostration comes in pounds, it leaves in ounces. All you can think about is yourself and your own misery. In your despondency, you wish you could die by some dramatic act of God.

Depression like this can have several different causes. There may be a physical problem; anemia, for instance, can cause your mind to play tricks on you. There may be a spiritual cause; sin unconfessed or unforgiven can do it. There may be an emotional basis; the unfaithfulness of a spouse can bring it on. Overwork or extreme mental stress can lead to nervous exhaustion. Or it may be caused by a medication to which a certain individual may react unfavorably.

What can be done? First, go to God in prayer, asking Him to work out His wonderful purposes. Confess and forsake all known sin. Forgive anyone who may have wronged you. Then have a thorough medical checkup to rule out any physical ailment as a possible reason. Take drastic action to eliminate causes of overwork, worry, stress and anything else that might be bothering you. Regular rest, good food and physical work out of doors all provide good therapy.

From then on, you must learn how to pace yourself, daring to say “no” to claims on you that might push you over the brink again.

And herein do I exercise myself

“And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men.” (Acts 24:16)

In a society like ours,, and with a corrupt old nature like ours, we are constantly faced with problems of ethics that test the sincerity of our commitment to Christian principles.

The student, for instance, is tempted to cheat on his exams. If all diplomas earned dishonestly were returned, the schools and colleges would scarcely contain them.

The taxpayer is forever tempted to understate his income, overstate his expenses or withhold some pertinent information altogether.

The name of the game in business, politics and law is payola. Bribes are used to pervert justice. Gifts change hands to get orders. Kickbacks keep business coming. Payoffs appease local inspectors who often make extreme and sometimes ridiculous demands.

Almost every profession has its own pressures to be dishonest. The Christian doctor is called on to sign his name to insurance claims that are patently false. The lawyer must decide whether to defend a criminal whom he knows to be guilty, or to handle a divorce case where both parties are Christians. The used car dealer fights a battle within whether to adjust the odometer to show a lower mileage. The laborer faces the decision, in joining a union, of committing himself to violence in the event of a strike. Should a Christian flight attendant serve liquor (or, choosing that job, does she have any choice)? Should a Christian athlete play on the Lord’s Day? Should a Christian grocer sell cigarettes, which are known to produce cancer?

Is it worse for a Christian architect to design a nightclub or a modernistic, liberal church building? Should a Christian organization accept gifts from a brewery? Or from a Christian who is living in sin? Should a buyer accept a crate of oranges or a box of jams and jellies from one of his suppliers at Christmas time?

The best deciding rule is the one in our text—“to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men.”

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised

“Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable.” (Psa. 145:3)

The thought of God is undoubtedly the greatest thought that can occupy the human mind. Great thoughts of God ennoble all of life. Small thoughts of God destroy those who hold them.

God is very great. After a magnificent description of the power and majesty of God, Job said, “Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways: and how small a whisper do we hear of him! but the thunder of his power who can understand?” (Job 26:14 RV). We see only the fringes, and hear only a whisper!

The Psalmist reminds us that the glance of God produces an earthquake and His touch precipitates volcanic eruptions (Psa. 104:32).

The Lord has to humble Himself to behold things in heaven (Psa. 113:6). He is so great that He calls the stars by name (Psa. 147:4).

When Isaiah tells us that the train of God’s glory fills the Temple (Isa. 6:1), he leaves us to imagine how great the full display of His glory must be. Later he pictures God as measuring the oceans in the hollow of His hand and measuring the skies by the width of His spread hand (Isa. 40:12). To Him the nations are a drop in a bucket or the dust on the scales (40:15). All the forests of Lebanon and all its animals would not be sufficient to make a suitable burnt offering to Him (40:16).

The prophet Nahum says, “The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet” (Nahum 1:3).

In the midst of another breathtaking description of the glory of God, Habakkuk says, “and there was the hiding of his power” (Hab. 3:4). All of which says that human language breaks down in any attempt to picture the greatness of God.

As we contemplate some of the attributes of God in the next few days, they should lead us to:

- Wonder—because He is wonderful.
- Worship—because of Who He is and all He has done for us.
- Trust—because He is worthy of our full, undivided confidence.
- Serve—because it is one of life’s greatest privileges to serve such a Master.
- Imitate—because His will is that we should be more and more like Him.

(However, there are some attributes of God, such as His wrath, that we should not imitate, and others, such as His infinity, that we cannot imitate.)

God...knoweth all things

“God...knoweth all things.” (1 John 3:20)

The omniscience of God means that He has perfect knowledge of everything. He has never learned and can never learn.

One of the great passages on the subject is Psalm 139:1-6, where David wrote: “O Lord, thou has searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.”

In Psalm 147:4, we learn that God counts the number of the stars and calls them all by name. The wonder of this increases when Sir James Jeans tells us that “the total number of stars in the universe is probably something like the total number of grains of sand on all the sea shores of the world.”

Our Lord reminded His disciples that not a sparrow falls to the ground unnoticed by our Father. And in the same passage He said that the very hairs of our head are all numbered (Matt. 10:29, 30).

It is clear then that “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13), causing us to join with Paul in saying “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).

The omniscience of God is filled with practical meaning for every one of us. There is warning. God sees everything we do. We can't keep anything secret from Him.

There is comfort. He knows what we are going through. As Job said, “He knoweth the way that I take” (Job 23:10). He counts our tossings and numbers our tears in His bottle (Psa. 56:8 RSV).

There is encouragement. He knew all about us and yet He saved us anyway. He knows what we feel in worship and prayer but cannot express.

There is wonder. Although God is omniscient, yet He can forget the sins He has forgiven. As David Seamands said, “I don't know how divine omniscience can forget but it does.”

go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone

“...go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.” (Mt. 18:15b)

Someone has done or said something which has offended you or bothered you in some way. The Bible says to go and tell him his fault, but you don't want to do it; it's too difficult.

So you start brooding about it. You begin rehearsing what he has done, how he was utterly in the wrong. When you should be working, your mind is going over all the details, and your gastric juices become sulphurous. When you should be sleeping, you resurrect the unpleasant incident, and the pressure builds up in the boiler. The Bible says to go and tell him his fault, but you just can't face up to it.

You try to think of some way in which you can get the message across to him anonymously. Or you hope that something will happen to shame him for what he has done. It doesn't happen. You know what you ought to do, but you dread the trauma of a face to face confrontation.

By this time, the ordeal is harming you a lot more than it is harming him. People can tell by your glum appearance that something is bothering you. When they talk to you, your mind is off in another hemisphere. Your work suffers because you are preoccupied. In general, you are too distracted to be effective. And the Bible still says, “Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.” By a tremendous display of willpower, you have refrained from talking to anyone else about it, but finally the pressure becomes unbearable. You break down and tell one person-just for his prayer fellowship, of course. Instead of giving you the expected sympathy, he says, “Why don't you go and talk to the one who has offended you?”

That does it! You decide to bite the bullet. After rehearsing your speech, you obey the Word by telling him his fault. He takes it surprisingly well, is sorry that it has happened, and asks your forgiveness. The interview is terminated by prayer.

As you walk away a great load is lifted from your shoulders. Your stomach quits churning and your metabolism returns to normal. You kind of hate yourself for not having had the sense to obey the Scriptures more promptly.

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice

“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” (1 Sam. 15:22)

God’s instructions to King Saul were clear enough. Slay the Amalekites and destroy all their possessions. All of them. Don’t take any spoil. But Saul spared King Agag and the choicest of the sheep, oxen, fatlings and lambs.

When Samuel met Saul in the morning at Gilgal, Saul confidently announced that he had done exactly what the Lord commanded. But at that very moment, a barnyard choir began its oratorio-sheep bleating and oxen lowing. Very embarrassing!

Samuel wanted to know, of course, how the sheep were bleating if Saul had killed them all. The King then tried to cover his disobedience by blaming the people and by excusing them on religious grounds. He said, “The people spared the best of the sheep and oxen to sacrifice to the Lord.”

It was then he heard God’s prophet thunder out the convicting words, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.”

Obedience is more important than rituals, sacrifices and offerings. I heard once of a family who treated their mother with cool contempt and disobedience during her lifetime. But when she died, they dressed her corpse in a Dior original. A despicable and futile attempt to atone for years of rebellion and discourtesy!

We often hear people defending an unscriptural position or unscriptural associations on the ground that they can have a wider influence in this way. But God is not deceived by such specious rationalizations. He wants our obedience—He will take care of our sphere of influence. The truth is that when we are disobedient, our influence is negative. Only when we are walking in fellowship with the Lord can we exert a godly influence on others.

William Gurnall said, “Sacrifice without obedience is sacrilege.” And it becomes even worse when we cloke our disobedience with some pious, religious excuse. God is not hoodwinked.

whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?

“...whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?” (Mt. 23:17)

The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day taught that if a man swore by the Temple, he wasn't necessarily obligated to do what he promised. But if he swore by the gold of the Temple, then that was a different story. He was bound by that oath. They made the same false distinction between swearing by the altar and swearing by the sacrifice on it. The former oath could be broken; the latter was binding.

The Lord told them that their sense of values was completely twisted. It is the Temple that gives the gold special value, and it is the altar that sets apart the sacrifice in a special way.

The Temple was the dwelling place of God on earth. The highest honor that any gold could have was to be used in that dwelling. Its connection with the House of God set it apart in a unique way. So it was with the altar and the sacrifice on it. The altar was an integral part of the divine service. No animal could be more highly honored than to be sacrificed on the altar. If animals could have ambitions, they would have all aimed for that destiny.

A tourist bought an inexpensive amber necklace in a secondhand shop in Paris. He became curious when he had to pay heavy customs in New York. He went to a jeweler to have it appraised and was offered \$25,000. A second jeweler offered \$35,000. When he asked why it was so valuable, the jeweler put it under a magnifying glass. The tourist read, “From Napoleon Bonaparte to Josephine.” It was the name of Napoleon that made the necklace so valuable.

The application should be clear. In ourselves we are nothing and can do nothing. It is our association with the Lord and with His service that sets us apart in a special way. As Spurgeon said, “Your connection with Calvary is the most wonderful thing about you.”

You may have an unusually brilliant mind. That is something to be thankful for. But remember this. It is only as that mind is used for the Lord Jesus Christ that it ever reaches its highest destiny. It is Christ that sanctifies your intellect.

You may have talents for which the world is willing to pay a high price. You may even think that the Church is too insignificant for them. But it is the Church that sanctifies your talents, and not your talents that sanctify the Church.

You may have bundles of money. You can hoard it, spend it on self-indulgence, or use it for the Kingdom. The greatest use to which it can be put is to spend it in furthering the cause of Christ. It is the Kingdom that sanctifies your wealth, not vice versa.

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” (John 17:21)

Twice in His great high priestly prayer, our Lord prayed that His people might be one (verses 21 and 22, 23). This prayer for unity has been seized as Scriptural support for the ecumenical movement—a great organizational union of all professing Christian churches. Unfortunately this ecumenical unity is achieved through abandoning or reinterpreting fundamental Christian doctrines. As Malcolm Muggeridge wrote, “By one of our time’s larger ironies, ecumenicalism is triumphant just when there is nothing to be ecumenical about; the various religious bodies are likely to find it easy to join together only because, believing little, they correspondingly differ about little.”

Is this the kind of unity that the Lord Jesus was praying for in John 17? We think not. He said that the unity He had in mind would result in the world’s believing that God had sent Him. It is extremely doubtful that any external federation would have this effect.

The Lord defined the unity He had in mind when He said, “...as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.” He also said, “... even as we are one, I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.” What unity does the Father and Son share which we can also have a part in? Not the fact of their common deity; we can never share in that. I would suggest that the Lord Jesus was referring to a unity based on common moral likeness. He was praying that believers might be one in exhibiting the character of God and of Christ to the world. This would mean lives of righteousness, holiness, grace, love, purity, longsuffering, self-control, meekness, joy and generosity. Ronald Sider suggests in *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* that the unity for which Christ prayed was manifested when the early Christians shared freely with one another whenever there was need. They had a true spirit of *koinonia* or community. “Jesus’ prayer that the loving unity of His followers would be so striking that it would convince the world that He had come from the Father has been answered—at least once! It happened in the Jerusalem church. The unusual quality of their life together gave power to the apostolic preaching” (see Acts 2:45-47; 4:32-35).

Such unity today would have a profound impression on the world. As Christians presented a united testimony in radiating the life of the Lord Jesus, unbelievers would be convicted of their own sinfulness and would thirst for the living water. Today’s tragedy is that many Christians are scarcely distinguishable from their worldly neighbors. Under such circumstances, there is little inducement for unbelievers to be converted.

Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished

“Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished.” (Prov. 13:11)

“You may have already won \$100,000!” With this and similar come-ons, we are constantly barraged by the temptation to participate in some form of gambling. The housewife shopping in the supermarket is enticed by the latest sweepstakes. The average citizen is encouraged to send his name (together with a subscription for a magazine) to participate in an upcoming lottery involving millions. Or it may be a bingo contest in which you are almost assured of being a winner.

Then, of course, there are the more obvious forms of gambling—roulette, horse-racing, dog-racing, the numbers game, etc.

What does the Bible have to say about all this? Nothing good.

It says, “Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labor shall increase” (Prov. 13:11).

It says, “He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him” (Prov. 28:22).

It says, “Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means. When his life is half gone, they will desert him, and in the end he will prove to be a fool” (Jer. 17:11 NIV).

While the Ten Commandments do not explicitly say, “Thou shalt not gamble,” they do say, “Thou shalt not covet” (Ex. 20:17), and what is gambling but a form of covetousness?

Gambling will always have an evil connotation for believers when they remember that Roman soldiers gambled for the Savior’s seamless robe at the scene of His crucifixion.

Consider also the poverty and grief that chronic gamblers have brought to their families, the crimes that have been committed to recoup losses, and the evil associations frequently linked with gambling, and it will be seen that it should have no place in a Christian’s life.

After reminding Timothy that the believer should be content with food and raiment, Paul warned that “they that will be (desire to be) rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition” (1 Tim. 6:9).

Cease ye from man

“Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?” (Isa. 2:22)

When we give a man or woman the place in our life that only God should have, we are in for a bitter disappointment. We will soon learn that the best of men are men at best. Although they might have some very fine qualities, yet they still have feet of iron and clay. This may sound like cynicism, but it is not. It is realism.

When the invaders were threatening Jerusalem, the people of Judah looked to Egypt for deliverance. Isaiah denounced them for this misplaced trust, saying, “Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh King of Egypt to all that trust in him”(Isa. 36:6). And Jeremiah said later, under similar circumstances, “Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord” (Jer. 17:5).

The psalmist showed genuine insight on this subject when he wrote, “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes” (Psa. 118:8,9). And again, “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish” (Psa. 146:3, 4).

Of course, we must realize that there is a certain sense in which we have to trust one another. What would a marriage be, for instance, without a certain measure of trust and respect? In business life, the use of checks as money is based on a system of mutual trust. We trust doctors to diagnose and prescribe properly. We trust the labels on cans and packages in the food market. It would be almost impossible to live in any society without some confidence in our fellows.

The danger comes when we trust man to do what only God can do, when we take the Lord off the throne and put man on it. Anyone who displaces God in our affections, who takes His place as our confidence, who usurps any of His prerogatives in our lives—that one is certain to disappoint us bitterly. We will realize too late that man is not worthy of our trust.

no man putteth new wine into old bottles

“...no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved.” (Lu. 5:37, 38)

The bottles referred to here were actually containers made from the hides of animals. When these wineskins were new, they were pliable and somewhat elastic. But when they became old, they were stiff and inflexible. If new wine was placed in old skins, the fermenting action of the wine would build up too much pressure for the old wineskins to accommodate, and they would burst.

Here in Luke 5, Jesus uses this to illustrate the clash between Judaism and Christianity. He is saying that “the outmoded forms, ordinances, traditions and rituals of Judaism were too rigid to hold the joy, the exuberance and the energy of the new dispensation.”

This chapter contains dramatic illustrations. In verses 18-21, we see four men tearing up the roof of a house in order to bring a paralyzed man to Jesus for healing. Their innovative, unconventional method is an illustration of the new wine. In verse 21, the scribes and Pharisees begin to find fault with Jesus; they are the old wineskins. Again, in verses 27-29 we have Levi's enthusiastic response to Christ's call, and the banquet he held to introduce his friends to Jesus. That is the new wine. In verse 30, the scribes and Pharisees grumble again. They are the old wineskins.

We see this in all of life. People get set in traditional ways of doing things and find it hard to adjust to change. The housewife has her own way of doing the dishes and finds it irritating to see someone else fumbling around in her sink. The husband has his own ideas as to how a car should be driven, and nearly loses his senses when wife or children drive.

But the great lesson for all of us is in the spiritual realm. We should be flexible enough to allow for the joy, the effervescence, the enthusiasm of the Christian faith, even if it comes in unconventional ways. We neither want nor need the stodginess and cold formalism of the Pharisees, who sat on the sidelines criticizing when God was working.

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die

“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)

One day some Greeks came to Philip with the noble request, “Sir, we would see Jesus!” But why did they want to see Him? Perhaps they wanted to take Him back to Athens as a popular new philosopher. Or perhaps they wanted to save Him from crucifixion and death, which now seemed inevitable.

Jesus answered with one of the great laws of harvest: a kernel of grain must fall into the ground and die if it is to become productive. If He were to save Himself from death, He would abide alone. He would enjoy the glories of heaven by Himself; there would be no saved sinners there to share His glory. But if He died, He would provide a way of salvation by which many would enjoy eternal life. It was imperative for Him that He die a sacrificial death rather than live a comfortable life.

T. G. Ragland once said, “Of all plans of ensuring success, the most certain is Christ’s own, becoming a grain of wheat, falling into the ground and dying. If we refuse to become grains of wheat...if we will neither sacrifice prospects, nor risk character, and property and health; nor, when we are called, relinquish home, and break family ties, for Christ’s sake; then we shall abide alone. But if we wish to be fruitful, we must follow our Blessed Lord Himself, by becoming a corn of wheat, and dying, then we shall bring forth much fruit.

Years ago I read of a group of missionaries in Africa who had labored tirelessly for years without seeing any lasting fruit for God. In desperation, they finally announced a conference where they would get before God in prayer and fasting. In the discussion that followed, one of the missionaries said, “I don’t think we’ll ever see blessing until a corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies.” Shortly afterward, that same missionary took sick and died. Then the harvest began - the blessing which he had predicted.

Samuel Zwemer wrote:

There is no gain but by a loss,

You cannot save but by a cross;

The corn of wheat to multiply

Must fall into the ground and die.

Wherever you ripe fields behold,

Waving to God their sheaves of gold,

Be sure some corn of wheat has died,

Some soul there has been crucified—

Someone has wrestled, wept and prayed,
And fought hell's legions undismayed.

the judgment of God is according to truth

“...the judgment of God is according to truth.” (Rom. 2:2)

God is the only One in the universe who is perfectly qualified to judge. We can be everlastingly thankful that He has not entrusted the final judgment to us. Think of some of the disabilities under which an earthly judge works. It is impossible for him to be completely objective. He may be influenced by the prominence of the defendant or by his appearance. He may be influenced by bribes or by other more subtle considerations. He cannot always know if a witness is lying. Or if not lying, the witness may be withholding the truth. Or again, he may be shading the truth. Or finally, he may be sincere but inaccurate.

The judge cannot always know the motives of those with whom he deals—and it is important to establish motives in many legal cases.

Even the polygraph or lie detector can be fooled. Hardened criminals can sometimes control their physiological reactions to guilt.

But God is the perfect Judge. He has absolute knowledge of all acts, thoughts and motives. He can judge the secrets of men’s hearts. He knows all the truth; nothing can be withheld from Him. He is not a respecter of persons but treats each one impartially. He knows the mental ability with which each one is endowed; an imbecile may not be as responsible as others for his actions. He knows the differing moral strengths of His subjects; some may resist temptation more easily than others. He knows the differing privileges and opportunities each one has, and the extent to which a person sins against light. He detects sins of omission as easily as sins of commission, secret sins as easily as public scandal.

Therefore we need not fear that the heathen who has never heard the Gospel will be treated unjustly. Or that those who have suffered wrongfully through life will be unavenged. Or that wicked tyrants who have escaped in this life will go unpunished.

The Judge on the bench is a perfect Judge, and His justice will be according to truth and therefore absolutely perfect.

he spake unadvisedly with his lips

“...he spake unadvisedly with his lips.” (Psa. 106:33)

When the people of Israel grumbled about the lack of water at Kadesh, God told Moses that water would flow if he would speak to the rock. But Moses was fed up with the people by now, so he lashed out at them, saying, “Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of the rock?” Then he smote the rock twice with his rod. By his angry words and disobedient action, he misrepresented God to the people. The result was that he forfeited the privilege of leading the children of Israel into the promised land (Num. 20:1-13).

It is easy for a man of burning zeal to be intemperate with other believers. He is so self-disciplined whereas they need to be forever babied along. He is so knowledgeable and they so ignorant.

But what he must learn is that they are still God’s beloved people, and that the Lord will not tolerate any verbal abuse of them. It is one thing to preach the Word of God in such power that people are convicted and torn up. But it is quite another thing to scold them severely as an expression of personal irritation. This will cut a man off from God’s best rewards.

When David’s illustrious men are listed in 2 Samuel 23, there is one name that is conspicuous by its absence. It is the name of Joab, David’s commander-in-chief. But why is his name missing? It has been suggested that the reason is that Joab used the sword on some of David’s friends. If so, the incident is full of warning for us when we are tempted to use our tongues as a sword on God’s people.

When James and John, the sons of thunder, wanted to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans, Jesus said, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of” (Luke 9:55). How apropos the rebuke is to us when we speak unadvisedly with our lips to those who are His not only by creation (as the Samaritans were), but by redemption as well.

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in

“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Mt. 18:6)

It would be difficult to imagine a more effective and foolproof method of drowning than this. The millstone here was not the small one that was operated by hand, but the great one that was turned by an ass. To have a millstone like that secured around one’s neck would mean speedy and inescapable drowning.

At first we might be startled by the vehemence of the Savior’s words. He seems to thunder out with unusual condemnation against the sin of offending a little one. What is it that provokes such anger?

Let us take an illustration! Here is a minister of the Gospel who has a constant line of people coming to him for counseling. Among them is a young person who is enslaved by some sexual sin. This young person needs help—desperately. He (or she) looks to the minister as one in whom he can have confidence, as one who will help him find the way of deliverance. But instead of that, the minister finds himself inflamed with passion, he makes improper advances, and soon he has led his counselee back into immorality. The young person is shattered by this betrayal of trust and is thoroughly disillusioned by the religious world. It may be that he is crippled spiritually for the rest of his life.

Or the offender may be a college professor who labors tirelessly to rob his students of whatever faith they may have. By sowing doubts and denials, he undermines the authority of the Scriptures and attacks the Person of our Lord.

Again it may be a Christian whose behavior stumbles a young believer. Overstepping the fine line between liberty and license, he is seen engaging in some questionable activity. The young Christian interprets his behavior as acceptable Christian conduct and leaves the path of godly separation to plunge into a life of worldliness and compromise.

We should be solemnly warned by the words of the Savior that it is a tremendously serious thing to contribute to the ethical, moral or spiritual delinquency of a minor who belongs to Him. Better to drown in literal water than to drown in a sea of guilt, disgrace and remorse for causing one of His little ones to fall into sin.

Let there be no...silly talk, nor levity

“Let there be no...silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting.” (Eph. 5:4 RSV)

Excessive levity should be avoided because it inevitably results in a leakage of spiritual power.

The preacher deals with serious issues, with life and death, with time and eternity. He may deliver a masterpiece of a message, and yet if there is undue humor in it, people are apt to remember the jokes and forget the rest.

Oftentimes the power of a message can be dissipated by lighthearted conversation afterwards. A solemn Gospel appeal may result in the hush of eternity coming over a meeting. Yet when the people rise to leave, there is the buzz of social chatter. People talk about the football scores or the business of the day. Little wonder that the Holy Spirit is grieved and nothing happens for God.

Elders who are forever cracking jokes have little real spiritual impact on young people who look to them for inspiration. They might think that their wit ingratiates them with the young, but the truth is that the latter feel a keen sense of disappointment and disillusionment.

A form of levity that is especially harmful is making puns on the Bible, using passages of Scripture to get a laugh rather than to change a life. Every time we pun on the Bible, we lower its sense of authority in our own lives and in the lives of others.

This does not mean that a believer must be a gloomy Gus, without a trace of humor showing. It means rather that he should control his humor so that it will not cancel out his message.

Kierkegaard tells of the circus clown who ran into a town to cry out that the circus tent on the outskirts was on fire. The people listened to his cries and roared with laughter. He had been clowning so much that he had lost his credibility.

Charles Simeon kept a picture of Henry Martyn in his study. Wherever Simeon went in the room, it seemed that Martyn was following him with his eyes and saying, “Be earnest, be earnest; don’t trifle, don’t trifle.” And Simeon would reply, “Yes, I will be in earnest; I will, I will be in earnest; I will not trifle, for souls are perishing, and Jesus is to be glorified.”

Neither murmur ye

“Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer,” (1 Cor. 10:10)

The Israelites were chronic complainers as they trekked through the desert. They complained about the water supply. They complained about the food supply. They complained about their leaders. When God gave them manna from heaven, they soon grew tired of it and longed for the leeks, onions and garlic of Egypt. Although there were no food markets or shoe stores in the wilderness, God provided an unfailing supply of groceries for forty years, and shoes that never wore out. Yet instead of being grateful for this miraculous provision, the Israelites complained without letup.

Times haven't changed. Men today complain about the weather: it's either too hot or too cold, too wet or too dry. They complain about the food, like lumpy gravy or burnt toast. They complain about their work and wages, then about unemployment when they have neither. They find fault with the government and its taxes, at the same time demanding ever-increasing benefits and services. They are unhappy with other people, with their car, with service in the restaurant. They complain about minor pains and aches, and wish they were taller, thinner, better looking. No matter how good God has been to them, they say, “What's He done for me lately?”

It must be a trial to God to have people like us on His hands. He has been so good to us, providing not only the necessities of life, but luxuries which His own Son did not enjoy when He was here upon earth. We have good food, pure water, comfortable homes, clothes in abundance. We have sight, hearing, appetite, memory and so many other mercies that we take for granted. He has protected us, guided us and sustained us. Best of all, He has given us eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And what thanks does He receive? Too often He hears nothing but a tirade of complaints.

I had a friend in Chicago years ago who had a good answer when asked, “How are you?” He would always reply, “It would be a sin to complain.” I often think of that when tempted to murmur. It's a sin to complain. The antidote to complaining is thanksgiving. When we remember all that the Lord has done for us, we realize that we have no reason to complain.

Love not the world

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” (1 John 2:15)

The world is presented in the New Testament as a kingdom that is opposed to God. Satan is its ruler, and all nonbelievers are subjects. This kingdom makes its appeal to man through the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. It is a society in which man tries to make himself happy without God, and in which the name of Christ is unwelcome. Dr. Gleason L. Archer Jr. says that the world is “the organized system of rebellion, self-seeking and enmity toward God which characterizes the human race in opposition to God.”

The world has its own amusements, politics, art, music, religion, thought-patterns and life-style. It seeks to force everyone to conform and hates those who refuse. This explains its hatred of the Lord Jesus.

Christ died to deliver us from the world. Now the world is crucified to us and we to it. It is positive treason for believers to love the world in any of its forms. In fact, the Apostle John says that those who love the world are the enemies of God.

Believers are not of the world, but they are sent into it to testify against it, to denounce its works as evil, and to preach salvation from it through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians are called to walk in separation from the world. In the past, this may have been too narrowly limited to dancing, theaters, smoking, drinking, card playing and gambling. But it includes much more. Much of what comes over the TV is worldly, appealing to the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh. Pride is worldly, whether it be pride of titles, degrees, salary, heritage or a big name. Luxurious living is worldly, whether palatial homes, gourmet foods, attention-getting clothing and jewelry or prestige cars. So is a life of ease and pleasure, spent largely on travel cruises, shopping sprees, sports and recreation. Our ambitions for ourselves and for our children may be worldly, even while we appear to be spiritual and pious. Finally, sex outside of marriage is a form of worldliness.

The more devoted we are to the Savior and the more sold-out we are to Him, the less time we will have for worldly pleasures and amusements. C. Stacey Woods said, “The measure of our devotion to Christ is the measure of our separation from the world.”

We are but strangers here, we do not crave

A home on earth, which gave Thee but a grave;

Thy cross has severed ties which bound us here,

Thyself our treasure in a brighter sphere.

J. G. Deck

whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached

“...whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea and will rejoice.” (Phil. 1:18)

It is a common failing among men to acknowledge no good beyond their own private circle. It is as if they have a monopoly on excellence and refuse to admit that anyone else can be or do anything comparable. They remind us of the humorous bumper-sticker, “I’m O.K. You’re so so.” Even this would be a grudging admission for some of them to make.

Their church is the only right one. Their service for the Lord is what really counts. Their views on all subjects are the only authoritative ones. They are the people and wisdom will die with them.

Paul did not belong to that school. He recognized that others were also preaching the Gospel. True, some were doing it out of jealousy, hoping to annoy him. But he could still give them credit for proclaiming the Gospel, and could still rejoice that Christ was being preached.

In his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, Donald Guthrie wrote, “It takes great grace for independent thinkers to acknowledge that truth can flow in channels other than their own.”

It is a distinctive feature of the cults that their leaders profess to speak the last word on all matters of faith and morals. They demand unquestioning obedience to their pronouncements, and seek to isolate their followers from contact with any dissenting views.

In the seldom-read introduction to the King James Version of the Bible, the translators wrote of “self-conceited Brethren, who run their own ways, and give liking unto nothing, but what is framed by themselves, and hammered on their anvil.” The lesson for us is to be large-souled, to be willing to acknowledge good wherever we find it, and to realize that no believer or Christian fellowship can afford to claim that they are the only right ones or that they have a corner on the truth.

He careth for you

“He careth for you.” (1 Pet. 5:7)

The Bible is fairly full of tokens of God’s marvelous care for His people. During Israel’s forty-year trek through the wilderness, they ate food from heaven (Ex. 16:4), had an unfailing supply of water (1 Cor. 10:4), and were equipped with shoes that never wore out (Deut. 29:5).

It is the same in our wilderness journey. To prove this, our Lord reminds us how His care for us is so much greater than His care for birds, flowers and animals. He speaks of sparrows, for instance. He provides their food (Mt. 6:26). Not one of them is forgotten before God (Lu. 12:6). Not one falls to the ground without Him (Mt. 10:29), or, as H. A. Ironside said, “God attends the funeral of every sparrow.” The moral of the story, of course, is that we are of more value to Him than many sparrows (Mt. 10:31).

If He clothes the lilies of the field more beautifully than Solomon was ever attired, He will much more clothe us (Mt. 6:30). If He makes provision for the care of oxen, how much more will He care for our needs (1 Cor. 9:9).

As our High Priest, the Lord Jesus bears our names on His shoulders—the place of power (Ex. 28:9-12) and on His breast—the place of affection (Ex. 28:15-21). Also our names are engraved in the palms of His hands (Isa. 49:16), a fact that inevitably reminds us of the nail wounds He sustained for us at Calvary.

He knows the exact number of the hairs of our head (Mt. 10:30). He numbers our tossings at night and keeps count of our tears in His book (Psa. 56:8 RSV).

Whoever touches us, touches the apple of His eye (Zech. 2:8). No weapon formed against us can prosper (Isa. 54:17).

Whereas the heathen carry their gods on their shoulders (Isa. 46:7), our God carries His people (Isa. 46:4).

When we go through the waters, the rivers or the fire, He is with us (Isa. 43:2). In all our afflictions, He is afflicted (Isa. 63:9).

The One who guards us neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psa. 121:3, 4). Someone has called this characteristic of God “the divine insomnia”.

The Good Shepherd who gave His life for us will not withhold any good from us (John 10:11; Psa. 84:11; Rom. 8:32).

He cares for us from the beginning of the year to the end (Deut. 11:12). He bears us even to old age (Isa. 46:4). In fact He will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). God really cares!

And I will give thee the treasures of darkness

“And I will give thee the treasures of darkness.” (Isa. 45:3)

When God made this promise to Cyrus, He was speaking of material treasures from lands of darkness that Cyrus would conquer. But we are not doing violence to the verse when we take it and apply it in a spiritual sense.

There are treasures that are discovered in the dark nights of life that are never found in days of unrelieved sunshine.

For instance, God can give songs in the darkest night (Job 35:10) that would never have been sung if life were completely devoid of trials. That is why the poet wrote:

And many a rapturous minstrel among those sons of light

Will say of his sweetest music, “I learned it in the night;”

And many a rolling anthem that fills the Father’s home

Sobbed out its first rehearsal in the shade of a darkened room.

There is the darkness of what J. Stuart Holden calls “life’s inexplicable mysteries—the calamities, the catastrophes, the sudden and unexpected experiences which have come into life, and which all our forethought has not been sufficient to ward off; and life is dark because of them—sorrow, loss, disappointment, injustice, misconception of motive, slander.” These are often the things that make life dark.

Humanly speaking, none of us would choose this darkness, and yet its benefits are incalculable. Leslie Weatherhead wrote, “Like all men, I love and prefer the sunny uplands of experience, when health, happiness and success abound, but I have learned far more about God and life and myself in the darkness of fear and failure than I have ever learned in the sunshine. There are such things as the treasures of darkness. The darkness, thank God, passes. But what one learns in the darkness, one possesses for ever.”

the maid that is of the land of Israel

“...the maid that is of the land of Israel.” (2 Ki. 5:4)

A person doesn't have to be known by name in order to accomplish great exploits for God. In fact, some of the people in the Bible who won immortal fame are not identified by their names.

There were the three men who brought water to David from the well of Bethlehem (2 Sam. 23:13-17). David considered this act of devotion so remarkable that he would not drink the water but poured it out as a holy offering. But the men are unnamed.

We do not know the name of the great woman of Shunem (2 Ki. 4:8-17) but she will always be remembered for building a prophet's chamber for Elisha.

It was an anonymous Jewish maid whose advice sent Naaman to Elisha to be healed of leprosy (2 Ki. 5:3-14). God knows her name, and that is all that matters.

Who was the woman who anointed the head of Jesus (Mt.26:6-13)? Matthew does not give her name, but her fame is announced in the words of our Lord, “Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her” (v. 13).

The poor widow who cast her two mites into the treasury is another of “God's unknowns” (Lu. 21:2). She illustrates the truth that it's wonderful how much you can do for God if you don't care who gets the credit.

Then, of course, there was the lad who gave his five loaves and two fishes to the Lord and saw them multiplied so that they fed 5000 men plus women and children (John 6:9). We don't know his name but what he did will never be forgotten.

A final illustration! Paul sent two brothers to Corinth with Titus in connection with a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. He does not give their names but he eulogizes them as messengers of the churches and the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 8:23).

As Gray looked at the tombstones of obscure people in a country churchyard, he wrote:

Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,

And waste its sweetness in the desert air.

With God, however, nothing is wasted. He knows the names of all those who serve Him anonymously, and He will reward in a manner that is worthy of Himself.

we are not ignorant of his devices

“...we are not ignorant of his devices.” (2 Cor. 2:11)

It is important to know the devices of our enemy, the Devil. Otherwise he is likely to take advantage of us.

We should know that he is a liar, and has been from the beginning. In fact, he is the father of lies (John 8:44). He lied to Eve by misrepresenting God, and he has been doing it ever since.

He is a deceiver (Rev. 20:10). He mixes a little truth with error. He imitates or counterfeits everything that is of God. He poses as an angel of light and sends out his messengers as ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14,15). He deceives by using great signs and lying wonders (2 Th. 2:9). He corrupts the minds of people (2 Cor. 11:3).

Satan is a murderous destroyer (John 8:44; 10:10). His goal and the goal of all his demons is to destroy. There is no exception to that statement. As a raging lion, he goes about seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). He persecutes God's people (Rev. 2:10) and destroys his own slaves through drugs, demon-ism, alcohol, immorality and related vices.

He is the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10). The word “devil” (Gr. diabolos) means accuser or slanderer, and as his name is, so is he. All those who slander the brethren are doing the devil's work.

He sows discouragement. Paul warned the Corinthians that if they did not forgive the repentant backslider, Satan might gain an advantage by plunging the brother into extreme discouragement (2 Cor. 2:7-11).

Just as Satan, speaking through Peter, sought to dissuade Jesus from going to the Cross (Mark 8:31-33), so he encourages Christians to spare themselves from the shame and suffering of crossbearing.

A favorite ploy of the Wicked One is to divide and conquer. He seeks to sow strife and discord among the saints, knowing that “a house divided against itself cannot stand.” Sad to say, he has been all too successful in this strategy.

He blinds the minds of unbelievers lest the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ should shine unto them and they should be saved (2 Cor. 4:4). He blinds them by amusements, false religion, procrastination and pride. He occupies them with feelings rather than facts, and with themselves rather than Christ.

Finally, Satan attacks right after great spiritual victories or mountaintop experiences, when the danger of pride is greatest. He looks for a weak spot in our armor, and shoots straight for it.

The best defense against the Devil is to live in unclouded fellowship with the Lord, covered by the protective gear of a holy character.

Moab hath been at ease from his youth

“Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and liath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.” (Jer. 48:11)

Jeremiah here takes an illustration from the art of wine-making to teach us that a life of ease does not produce strength of character.

Whenever wine is being fermented in casks or vats, lees or dregs settle to the bottom. If the wine is left undisturbed, it becomes unpalatable. So the vintner must pour out the wine from vessel to vessel, eliminating the dregs and impurities. When he does this, the wine develops strength, aroma, color and flavor.

Moab had lived a life of ease. He had never suffered the disruption of going into captivity. He had insulated himself from troubles, trials and privations. The result was that his life was flat and insipid. It lacked fragrance and piquancy.

What is true of wine is true of us also. We need disruption, opposition, difficulties and disturbances to rid us of impurities and to develop the graces of a Christ-filled life.

Our natural tendency is to protect ourselves from anything that would unsettle us. We strive unceasingly to nestle.

But God’s will for us is that our lives should be a perpetual crisis of dependence on Him. He is forever stirring up the nest.

In her biography of Hudson Taylor, Mrs. Howard Taylor wrote: “This life that was to be made a blessing the wide world over must pass through a very different process (i.e., different from being settled on his lees), including much of that emptying and re-emptying ‘from vessel to vessel’, so painful to the lower nature, from which we are being refined.”

When we realize what the Divine Vintner is seeking to accomplish in our lives, it saves us from rebellion and teaches us submission and dependence. We learn to say:

Leave to His sovereign sway

To choose and to command;

So shalt thou wondering own His way,

How wise, how strong His hand.

Far, far above thy thought

His counsel shall appear,

When fully He the work hath wrought

That caused thy needless fear.

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God

“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” (1 Cor. 1:21)

Some in the church in Corinth were trying to make the Gospel intellectually respectable. Their preoccupation with the wisdom of this world made them sensitive to those aspects of the Christian message which were offensive to the philosophers.

There was no thought of their abandoning the faith, only of redefining it so that it would be more palatable to the scholars.

Paul came down hard on this attempt to marry the world’s wisdom to God’s. He knew only too well that the achieving of intellectual status would result in a loss of spiritual power.

Let’s face it! There is that about the Christian message that is scandalous to Jews and foolish to Gentiles. And not only that—most Christians are not what the world would call wise, mighty or noble. Sooner or later we have to face up to the fact that instead of belonging to the intelligentsia, we are foolish, weak, base, despised—in fact, we are nobodies as far as the world is concerned.

But the wonderful thing is that God uses that message, which seems to be foolish, in saving those who believe. And God uses nonpersons like us to accomplish His purposes. In choosing such unlikely instruments, He confounds all the pomp and pretension of this world, eliminates any possibility of our boasting, and insures that He alone gets the credit.

This is not to say that there is no place for scholarship. Of course there is. But unless that scholarship is combined with deep spirituality, it becomes a deadening and dangerous thing. When scholarship sits in judgment on the Word of God, claiming, for instance, that some writers used more reliable sources than others, it represents departure from the truth of God. And when we court the approbation of scholars like that, we are vulnerable to all their heresies.

Paul did not come to the Corinthians with excellence of speech or of wisdom. He determined to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He knew that power lay in the simple, straightforward presentation of the Gospel, not in occupation with knotty problems or unprofitable theories, or in the worship of intellectualism.

How long wilt thou mourn for Saul

“How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel.” (1 Sam. 16:1)

There comes a time in life when we must stop mourning over the past and get on with the work of the present.

God had rejected Saul from being king. The action was final, irreversible. But Samuel had difficulty in accepting it. He had been closely associated with Saul and he now wept to see his hopes disappointed. He continued to mourn a loss that would never be retrieved. God said, in effect, “Quit mourning. Go out and anoint Saul’s successor. My program has not failed. I have a better man than Saul to step onto the stage of Israel’s history.”

We would like to think that Samuel not only learned the lesson for himself but that he passed it on to David, who took Saul’s place as king. At any rate, David showed that he had learned the lesson well. As long as his baby was dying, he fasted and mourned, hoping that God would spare the child. But when the infant died, he bathed, changed his clothes, went to the Tabernacle to worship, then ate a meal. To those who questioned his realism, he said, “Now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him but he shall not return to me” (2 Sam. 12:23).

This has a voice for us in our Christian life and service. Sometime it may happen that a ministry might be wrenched away from us and given to someone else. We grieve over the death of an avenue of service.

It may be that a friendship or a partnership is severed, and that, as a result, life seems empty and flat. Or that we have been cruelly disappointed by someone who was very dear to us. We mourn the death of a valued relationship.

Or it may be that some life-long dream is shattered or some ambition is frustrated. We mourn the death of a noble aspiration or vision.

There is nothing wrong about mourning, but it should not be prolonged to the extent that it cripples our effectiveness in meeting the challenges of the hour. E. Stanley Jones said he made it a point to “recover within the hour” from the griefs and blows of life. An hour may not be long enough for most of us, but we must not be forever inconsolable over circumstances that cannot be changed.

If ye love me, keep my commandments

“If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)

Commandments? In the New Testament? Whenever people hear the word commandments, they immediately think legalism. But the two words are not synonymous. No one spoke more of commandments than the Lord Jesus, yet no one was less legalistic than He.

What is legalism? Though the word itself is not found in the New Testament, it describes man’s ceaseless effort to earn or deserve God’s favor. Basically it signifies the attempt to gain justification or sanctification by lawkeeping. That is its real meaning.

But today the word is used in a wider sense to describe what are thought of as rigid, moralistic rules. Any attempt to classify certain practices as taboo is “legalistic.” In fact, the word “legalism” is now used as a handy club to beat back almost any restraints on Christian behavior or any negatives.

How, then, should a Christian think in order to avoid the danger associated with “legalism”?

First of all, it is true that a Christian is free from the law, but it is important to add quickly that he is not lawless. He is enlawed to Christ. He shouldn’t do as he pleases but as Christ pleases.

Secondly, it must be remembered that the New Testament is filled with commandments, including a fair number of negatives. The difference is that these commandments are not given as law, with penalty attached. They are given as instructions in righteousness for the people of God.

Next, things may be lawful for a Christian but they may not be profitable. They may be lawful but they may also be enslaving (1 Cor. 6:12 NASB).

It is possible that a believer may have liberty to do something and yet he might stumble someone else in doing it. In that case he shouldn’t do it.

Just because someone dubs a prohibition as “legalistic” doesn’t mean it is bad. People also use the word “puritanical” to denounce certain codes of conduct, but the behavior of the Puritans was more Christ-honoring than that of many who criticize them.

Very often when Christians castigate accepted patterns of godly behavior as “legalism,” it may be a sign that they themselves are becoming more permissive and are drifting from their moral moorings. They naively imagine that by throwing mud at so-called legalists or Puritans, they themselves will look better.

Our safety lies in staying as close to the teachings of Scripture as possible, not in trying to see how close we can get to the edge of the precipice.

If ye ask anything in my name

“If ye ask anything in my name, I will do it.” (John 14:14)

God answers prayer. He answers it exactly the same way we would if we had infinite wisdom, love and power. Sometimes He gives us what we want, sometimes He gives us something better, but always what we need. Sometimes He answers our prayers quickly; at other times He teaches us to wait patiently. God answers prayer; sometimes when hearts are weak, He gives the very gifts His children seek. But often faith must learn a deeper rest, And trust God’s silence when He cannot speak; For He whose name is love will send the best. Stars may burn out, nor mountain walls endure, But God is true, His promises are sure

To those who seek. There are conditions to prayer. Often what seems like a blank check (“if ye ask anything”) has conditions attached (“in My Name”). Individual prayer promises must be considered in the light of all other Scriptures on the subject.

There are mysteries to prayer. It is easy to think up all kinds of questions about the “whys” and “wherefores.” But, for the most part, they are not edifying. It is better to pray and to see God work than to solve all the mysteries connected with prayer. I like what Archbishop Temple said: “When I pray, coincidences happen. When I do not, they don’t.”

When we pray to God in the Name of the Lord Jesus, it is just the same as if He were making those requests to the Father. This is what gives such significance and power to our prayers. And this is why we never come closer to omnipotence than when we pray. Of course, we will never be omnipotent, even in eternity. But when we pray in the Name of the Lord Jesus, we lay hold on infinite power.

The best prayer comes from a strong, inward necessity. This means that the more we are dependent on the Lord, the more effective our prayer life will be.

When we pray, we see things happen that would never happen according to the laws of chance or probability. Our lives crackle with the supernatural. They become radioactive with the Holy Spirit. And when we touch other lives, something happens for God.

We should be like the saint who said, “I measure my influence by the number who need my prayers and the number who pray for me.”

And Jesus went about all Galilee

“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.” (Matt. 4:23)

A recurring problem among Christians is maintaining the proper balance between evangelism and social involvement. Evangelicals are often criticized for being too concerned with people’s souls and not enough with their bodies. In other words, they don’t spend enough time feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick and educating the illiterate.

To say anything against any of these ministries would be like criticizing motherhood. The Lord Jesus certainly was concerned with man’s physical needs, and He taught His disciples to be concerned also. Historically, Christians have always been out in front in compassionate causes.

But as in so many other areas of life, it is a question of priorities. Which is more important, the temporal or the eternal? Judged on this basis, the Gospel is the main thing. Jesus intimated this when He said, “This is the work of God, that ye believe...” Doctrine comes before social involvement.

Some of man’s most pressing social problems are the result of false religion. For example, there are people dying of starvation who won’t kill a cow because they believe a relative may be reincarnated in the cow. When other nations send enormous shipments of grain, the rats eat more of it than the people, because no one will kill the rats. These people are shackled by false religion and Christ is the answer to their problems.

In trying to strike the proper balance between evangelism and social service, there is always the danger of becoming so occupied with “coffee and doughnuts” that the Gospel is crowded out. The history of Christian institutions is filled with such examples where the good has become the enemy of the best.

Certain forms of social involvement are questionable if not altogether “out.” The Christian should never participate in revolutionary attempts to overthrow the government. It is doubtful that he should resort to political processes to right social injustices. Neither the Lord nor the apostles did. More can be accomplished through the spread of the Gospel than through legislation.

The Christian who forsakes all to follow Christ, who sells all to give to the poor, who opens his heart and pocketbook whenever he sees a genuine case of need, need not have a guilty conscience over social unconcern.

He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption

“He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.”(Gal. 6:8)

No one can sin and get away with it. The results of sin are not only inescapable, they are extremely bitter. Sin may look like a harmless pussy but it eventually devours like a pitiless lion.

The supposed glamor of sin receives wide coverage. We seldom hear the other side. Few leave behind a description of their downfall and subsequent misery.

One of Ireland’s most brilliant authors did. This man began to dabble in unnatural vice. One thing led to another until he became embroiled in lawsuits and finally landed in prison, where he wrote the following:

“The gods had given me almost everything. I had genius, a distinguished name, high social position, brilliancy, intellectual daring: I made art a philosophy, and philosophy an art: I altered the minds of men and the colour of things: There was nothing I said or did that did not make people wonder...I treated Art as the supreme reality, and life as a mere mode of fiction: I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me: I summoned up all systems in a phrase, and all existence in an epigram.

“Along with these things, I had things that were different. I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease. I amused myself with being a flaneur, a dandy, a man of fashion. I surrounded myself with the smaller natures and the meaner minds. I became the spendthrift of my own genius, and to waste an eternal youth gave me a curious joy. Tired of being on the heights I deliberately went to the depths in search for new sensations. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion. Desire, at the end, was a malady, or a madness, or both. I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber one has some day to cry aloud on the housetops...I ended in horrible disgrace.”

The essay in which he wrote the above confession bears the appropriate title De Profundis—out of the depths.

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man

“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.” (Prov. 14:12)

Twice in the book of Proverbs (14:12 and 16:25) we learn that man’s judgment as to the right way is not reliable. What seems right to him ends in disaster and death.

During World War II the Navy gave a vivid illustration of this to its flight personnel. It was trying to impress on them that when they were flying at high altitudes and did not use their oxygen, they could not trust their senses. A pilot was instructed to enter a decompression chamber and sit down at a table on which was a sheet of mathematical problems. Oxygen was withdrawn from the chamber to simulate high altitudes. When the air became less dense, the pilot was told to solve the problems. He was also told that no one had done so correctly so far.

The pilot would breeze through the problems with utmost confidence that he had beaten the system. The problems seemed easy, and he had every assurance that he would receive a perfect score. There was no doubt in his mind about it.

But when oxygen was fed back into the chamber, and he emerged to have his paper corrected, he learned that his ability to solve problems had been seriously impaired by the lack of oxygen getting to his brain. The lesson was, of course, that if he flew at high altitudes without using his oxygen, he wouldn’t be able to trust his own judgment, and he would be inviting a crash.

Man’s judgment has been seriously impaired by sin. He feels absolutely sure that the way to heaven is by doing the best he can. If you tell him that no one has ever been saved by good works, he still has every confidence that he will be the first to beat the system. He is certain that God would never turn him away from the gates of heaven.

But he is wrong, and if he persists in his lack of “spiritual oxygen”, he will perish. His safety lies in trusting the Word of God rather than his own judgment. If he does so, he will repent of his sins and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Because God’s Word is truth, those who believe it can be confident that they are following the right route.

Esau...for one morsel of meat sold his birthright

“Esau...for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.” (Heb. 12:16)

It is often possible to barter life's best values for a momentary gratification of physical appetite.

That is what Esau did. He had come in from the field tired and hungry. At that moment Jacob was cooking a pot of red bean soup. When Esau asked for a bowl of the “red stuff,” Jacob said, in effect, “Sure, I'll give you some if you'll sell me your birthright in return.”

Now the birthright was a valuable privilege which belonged to the oldest son in a family. It was valuable because it gave him the place of eventual headship in the family or tribe and entitled him to a double portion of the inheritance.

But at that moment, Esau considered the birthright worthless. What good is a birthright, he thought, to a man who is as famished as I? His hunger seemed so overpowering that he was willing to give almost anything to satisfy it. In order to pacify a momentary appetite, he was willing to surrender something that was of enduring value. And so he made the awful bargain!

A similar drama is being reenacted almost daily. Here is a man who has maintained a good testimony for years. He has the love of a fine family and the respect of his Christian fellowship. When he speaks, his words carry spiritual authority, and his service has the blessing of God upon it. He is a model believer.

But then comes the moment of fierce passion. It seems as if he is being consumed by the fires of sexual temptation. All of a sudden nothing seems so important as the satisfaction of this physical drive. He abandons the power of rational thought. He is willing to sacrifice everything for this illicit alliance.

And so he takes the insane plunge! For that moment of passion, he exchanges the honor of God, his own testimony, the esteem of his family, the respect of his friends and the power of a sterling Christian character. Or as Alexander Maclaren said, “He forgets his longings after righteousness; flings away the joys of divine communion; darkens his soul; ends his prosperity; brings down upon his head for all his remaining years a cataract of calamities; and makes his name and his religion a target for the barbed sarcasms of each succeeding generation of scoffers.”

In the classic words of Scripture, he sells his birthright for a mess of pottage.

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp

“Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.” (Heb. 13:13)

We learn first from this verse that Christ is the gathering center for His people. We don't gather to a denomination, a church, a building or a great preacher but Christ alone. “Unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10). “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice” (Psa. 50:5).

A second lesson is that we must go to Him outside the camp. The camp here has been defined as “the whole earthly religious system adapted to the natural man.” It is the religious sphere in which Christ is dishonored or downgraded. It is the pagan monstrosity that masquerades today as Christianity, “having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof.” Christ is outside, and we must go out to Him.

We also learn that meeting to Christ alone outside the camp involves reproach. It seldom occurs to Christians that there is reproach connected with obedience to the Lord in the matter of church fellowship. More often church associations carry a measure of prestige and status. But the closer we get to the New Testament ideal, the more likely it is that we will have to share His reproach. Are we willing to pay that price?

He called me out, the Man with garments dyed,
I knew His voice—my Lord, the crucified;
He showed Himself, and oh, I could not stay,
I had to follow Him—had to obey.
It cast me out—this world when once it found
That I within this rebel heart had crowned
The Man it had rejected, spurned and slain,
Whom God in wondrous power had raised to reign.
And so we are without the camp, my Lord and I,
But oh, His presence sweeter is than any earthly tie
Which once I counted greater than His claim;
I'm out, not only from the world, but to His Name.

Selected

If any man defile the temple of God

“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” (1 Cor. 3:17)

In this verse, the temple of God refers to the local assembly. Paul is not speaking to individual Christians but to believers collectively when he says “which temple ye (plural) are.” The saints in Corinth comprised a temple of God.

It is also true, of course, that individual believers are a temple of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle brings this out in 1 Corinthians 6:19: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” The Holy Spirit of God dwells in the body of every child of God.

But in our text for today it is the assembly that is in view. Paul is saying that if any man destroys the assembly, God will destroy him. It is the same word that is translated “defile” and “destroy” in this verse. It is used of marring a local church by leading it away from that condition of holiness of life and purity of doctrine in which it should abide, and of God’s retributive destruction of the offender who is guilty of this sin” (W. E. Vine).

So our verse warns us that it is a serious thing to tamper with a local fellowship. In fact, it is a form of self-destruction. Yet how diffident people often are in this very area. Here is a man who doesn’t get his own way in the assembly. Or he becomes involved in a violent personality clash with some other brother. Rather than make things right in a Scriptural manner, he lines up people to take his side and forms a faction in the church. Things go from bad to worse and soon there is an open split.

Or perhaps it is a carnal sister who carries on a campaign of gossip and back-biting against someone else. Her slanderous tongue lashes out until the church is filled with bitterness and strife. She will not stop until a once-prosperous assembly lies in ruins.

People like this are playing a perilous game. They cannot get away with it. The Great God of the universe is committed to wreck those who wreck His assembly. Let all who are inclined to faction beware!

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.” (2 Cor. 2:14 NASB)

It is generally understood that Paul here borrows a figure from the victory parade of a military leader just returned from a foreign conquest. The general is at the head of the parade, savoring the sweet satisfaction of victory. Behind him are his jubilant troops. Then behind them are the prisoners-of-war, slated for punishment, perhaps death. All along the parade route are incense burners, filling the air with aroma. But the aroma means different things to different people, depending on whose side they are on. To those who are loyal to the commander in chief, it is the fragrance of victory. To the captives, however, it is an omen of defeat and retribution.

The pathway of a servant of the Lord parallels this picture in several respects. The Lord always leads him in triumph. Though it might not always seem like victory, the fact is that he is on the winning side and God's cause can never fail.

Everywhere he goes, he carries the aroma of Christ with him. But this aroma means different things to different people. To those who bow to the Lord Jesus, it is the scent of everlasting life. To those who refuse the Gospel, on the other hand, it is the smell of death and destruction.

But in both cases God is glorified. He is glorified in the salvation of the repentant, and he is also vindicated in the refusal of those who are perishing. When the latter stand before Christ, at the Judgment of the Great White Throne, they will not be able to blame God for their plight. They had the opportunity to be saved but refused it.

We generally judge the effectiveness of Christian service by how many people are saved. Perhaps there is a suggestion in this passage that it would be equally valid to judge it by how many people, after receiving a clear presentation of the Gospel, reject it and plunge into hell.

God is glorified in both cases. To Him there is the sweet incense of grace in the first instance and of justice in the second.

Solemn issues! No wonder the Apostle asks, in closing, “Who is sufficient for these things?”

Thou shalt never wash my feet

“Thou shalt never wash my feet.” (John 13:8)

The Lord Jesus had just girded Himself with a towel and filled a basin with water, preparatory to washing the disciples’ feet. When He came to Peter, He met this emphatic refusal, “Thou shalt never wash my feet.”

Why? Why didn’t Peter want to submit to this gracious ministry from the Lord? On the one hand, there may have been a sense of unworthiness; he did not consider himself worthy to be served by the Lord. But there is also the real possibility that Peter’s attitude was one of pride and independence. He did not want to be on the receiving end. He did not want to be dependent on others for help.

This same attitude keeps many people from being saved. They want to earn salvation or deserve it, but to receive it as a free gift of grace is beneath their dignity. They don’t want to feel indebted to God. But “no one who is too proud to be infinitely in debt will ever be a Christian” (James S. Stewart).

There is also a lesson here for those who are already Christians. We have all met believers who are compulsive givers. They are always doing for others. Their lives are poured out in service for their relatives and neighbors. Their generosity deserves high praise. But there is a fly in the ointment! They never want to be on the receiving end. They never want anyone to do anything for them. They have learned how to give generously but they have never learned how to receive graciously. They enjoy the blessing of ministering to others, but they deny to others that same blessing.

Paul proved himself to be a gracious recipient of gifts from the Philippians. In thanking them, he said, “Not because I desire a gift; but I desire fruit that may abound to your account” (Phil. 4:17). He thought of their reward more than of his own need.

“It is told of Bishop Westcott that at the end of his life he said he had made one great mistake, for, while he had always been willing to do for others to the limit of his ability, he had never been willing to let others do for him, and as a result some element of sweetness and completeness was missing. He had not allowed himself the discipline of receiving many kindnesses which could not be repaid” (J. O. Sanders).

An unknown poet summed it up well when he wrote:

J hold him great, who, for love’s sake,

Can give with generous, earnest will;

But he who takes for love’s sweet sake,

I think I hold more generous still.

he began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord

“...he began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord.” (Acts 11:23 NASB)

There is an alarming tendency in some Christian circles to fawn over men because they are scholars, even though they are disloyal to the Person of Christ.

Here is a man, for instance, who is a brilliant writer, a master in the use of illustrations, a commentator whose word studies are superb. But this man denies the Virgin Birth. He explains away the miracles of our Lord. He rejects the literal, bodily resurrection of the Savior. He speaks patronizingly of Jesus as one who must find a place in any gallery of the world's heroes. To him, Jesus is just one among many heroes. What this amounts to, of course, is damning the Son of God with faint praise. This man is simply not true to the Lord.

It is shocking, then, to find Christians defending a man like this for his brilliant scholarship. With mealy mouth, they extol his intellectual prowess and pass lightly over his heretical treatment of Christ. They like to quote him as a respected authority and to move in the same scholarly circles. If challenged for fraternizing with one who is an enemy of the Cross of Christ, they use weasel words to play down the seriousness of the offense. Not uncommonly, they attack fundamental, Bible-believing Christians for daring to speak out against one who is such an acknowledged authority.

It is time that Christians recapture a sense of righteous anger when their Savior is being betrayed in the halls of scholarship. This is no time for compromise. The truth concerning His Person and work is not negotiable. We must stand and be counted.

The prophets did not speak equivocally when the truth of God was at stake. They were fiercely loyal to the Lord and lashed out at those who dared to deny or belittle Him.

The apostles too bristled at any effort to rob the Lord of His glory. They chose loyalty to Christ over renown in the theological world.

The martyrs chose to die rather than compromise their loyalty to the Son of God. They were more interested in God's approval than man's.

Our responsibility is to be faithful to the Lord Jesus in all things, and to take an adversary relationship to anyone or anything that fails to give Him His proper place of preeminence.

Hear, ye children

“Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.” (Prov. 4:1)

In the first four verses of Proverbs 4, Solomon describes how good advice can and should be passed down from one generation to another. He tells how his father had taught him, then urges his son, in turn, to pay attention to good doctrine and sound instruction.

It is sensible for young people to learn as much as possible from their earthly parents concerning the practical affairs of life. But it is also true that, in the spiritual sphere, every young Christian should have a spiritual mentor—someone to whom he can go with his questions, someone in whom he can confide, someone who will share from a rich store of experience and someone who will be candid in dealing with areas of need. If a parent can fill this role, all the better. But if not, someone else should be sought out.

Godly, mature believers have accumulated a vast amount of practical knowledge. No doubt they have experienced defeats, but they have learned valuable lessons from them and have learned how to avoid them the next time. Older Christians can often see aspects of a problem that young people might miss. And they have learned to be balanced and to avoid unreasonable extremes.

A wise young Timothy will cultivate a Paul, trying to draw on his wisdom and know-how. He will save himself from humiliations and blunders by checking first with someone who has been through it before him. Instead of treating old age with contempt, he will honor those who have fought in the conflict and have maintained a good record.

Generally speaking, older saints will not push themselves on the young. They know that no advice is as unwelcome as advice that is unsolicited. But, when asked, they are always glad to share insights that have been of help to them along the way.

So whether a young person is having a struggle with lust, or wants to know how to find God’s guidance, or seeks to raise a family for the Lord, or wonders if God is calling him to the mission field, or needs help in managing his finances, or longs for a more effective prayer life—he would be wise to seek the help of a spiritual guide who can bring the light of Scripture to shine on the particular problem. Underneath those gray hairs there is often a fund of wisdom to be tapped. Why learn the hard way when you can profit from the insights and past experience of others?

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1)

Faith is implicit trust in the Word of God. It is confidence in the trustworthiness of God. It is the conviction that what God says is true and that what He promises will come to pass. It deals primarily in the realm of the future (“things hoped for”) and the realm of the invisible (“things not seen”).

Whittier said that “the steps of faith fall on the seeming void, and find the rock beneath.” But not so! Faith is no leap in the dark. It demands the surest evidence, and finds that evidence in the Word of God.

Some people have the misconception that if you just believe a thing strongly enough it will come to pass. But that is credulity, not faith. Faith must have some revelation of God to lean on, some promise of God to cling to. If God promises something, then it is as sure as if it had already happened. If He foretells the future, then it is certain to be fulfilled. In other words, faith brings the future within the present and makes the invisible seen.

There is no risk in believing God. God cannot lie, He would not deceive, and He cannot be deceived. To believe God is the most rational, sane, logical thing a person can do. What is more reasonable than that the creature should believe the Creator?

Faith is not limited to possibilities but invades the realm of the impossible. Someone has said, “Faith begins where possibilities end. If it’s possible then there’s no glory for God in it. If it’s impossible, it can be done.”

Faith, mighty faith the promise sees

And looks to God alone;

Laughs at impossibilities

And cries, “It shall be done.”

Admittedly there are difficulties and problems in the life of faith. God tests our faith in the crucible of trial and affliction to see if it is genuine (1 Pet. 1:7). We often have to wait long years to see the fulfilment of His promises, and sometimes we have to wait till we reach the other side. But “difficulties are food for faith to feed on” (George Muller).

“Without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6). When we refuse to believe Him, we are saying that He is a liar (1 John 5:10), and how can God be pleased by people who call Him a liar?

thinketh in his heart, so is he

“...as (a man) thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Prov. 23:7)

A. P. Gibbs used to say, “You are not what you think you are, but what you think—this is what you are.” This means that the mind is the spring from which behavior flows. Control the source and you control the stream that flows from it.

Therefore control of the thought-life is basic. That is why Solomon said, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23) Here the heart is used as a synonym for the mind.

James reminds us that sin begins in the mind (Jas. 1:13-15). If we think about a thing long enough, eventually we’ll do it.

Sow a thought and reap an act.

Sow an act and reap a habit.

Sow a habit and reap a character.

Sow a character and reap a destiny.

The Lord Jesus emphasized the importance of the thought-life by equating hatred with murder (Mt. 5:21, 22) and by equating the lustful look with adultery (Mt. 5:28). He also taught that it’s not what a man eats that defiles him but what he thinks (Mk. 7:14-23).

We are responsible for what we think because we have the power to control it. We can think about lewd, suggestive things or we can think about what is pure and Christlike. Each one of us is like a king. The empire that we rule over is our thought-life. That empire has tremendous potential for good and enormous potential for evil. We are the ones who determine which it will be.

Here are some positive suggestions as to what we can do. First, take the whole matter to the Lord in prayer, saying “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa. 51:10). Second, judge every thought by how it appears in the presence of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). Third, confess every evil thought instantly and expel it (Prov. 28:13). Next, avoid having a blank, empty mind. Fill it with positive, worthy thoughts (Phil. 4:8). Fifth, exercise discipline over what you read, see, and hear. You cannot expect a pure thought life if you feed on filth and pollution. Finally, keep busy for the Lord. It’s when you shift your mind into neutral that vile fantasies seek admission.

Through faith we understand

“Through faith we understand...”(Heb. 11:3)

“Through faith we understand...” These words embody one of the most basic principles of spiritual life. We believe God’s Word first, then we understand. The world says, “Seeing is believing;” God says, “Believing is seeing.” The Lord Jesus said to Martha, “Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see...”(John 11:40). Later He said to Thomas, “...blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29). And the Apostle John wrote, “These things have I written unto you that believe...that ye may know...” (1 John 5:13). Believe first, then you’ll know.

Billy Graham tells how this principle came alive in his life: “In 1949 I had been having a great many doubts concerning the Bible. I thought I saw apparent contradictions in Scriptures. Some things I could not reconcile with my restricted concept of God. When I stood up to preach, the authoritative note so characteristic of all great preachers of the past was lacking. Like hundreds of other seminary students, I was waging the intellectual battle of my life. The outcome could certainly affect my future ministry.

“In August of that year I had been invited to Forest Home, Presbyterian conference center high in the mountains outside Los Angeles. I remember walking down a trail, tramping into the woods, and almost wrestling with God. I dueled with my doubts, and my soul seemed to be caught in the crossfire. Finally, in desperation, I surrendered my will to the living God revealed in Scripture. I knelt before the open Bible and said, ‘Lord, many things in this book I do not understand. But thou hast said, “The just shall live by faith.”’ All I have received from Thee, I have taken by faith. Here and now, by faith, I accept the Bible as Thy Word. I take it all. I take it without reservations. Where there are things I cannot understand, I will reserve judgment until I receive more light. If this pleases Thee, give me authority as I proclaim Thy Word, and through that authority convict men of sin and turn sinners to the Saviour!

“Within six weeks we started our Los Angeles crusade, which is now history. During that crusade I discovered the secret that changed my ministry. I stopped trying to prove that the Bible was true. I had settled in my own mind that it was and this faith was conveyed to the audience.”

And be ye kind to one another

“And be ye kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (Eph. 4:32 NASB)

There is a definite order to be followed in connection with Scriptural forgiveness. If we would follow this order we would save ourselves a lot of headaches and heartaches.

The first thing to do when you have been wronged is to forgive that person in your heart. You don't tell him yet that he has been forgiven, but by forgiving him in your heart, you leave the matter between the Lord and him. This prevents your gastric juices from turning into sulphuric acid, and saves you from other horrible physical and emotional disorders.

Next you go to the brother and rebuke him (Lu. 17:3). Instead of blabbing to others about how you have been wronged, “Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone” (Mt. 18:15). Try to contain the problem as much as possible, that is, try to keep it as private as you can.

If he does not confess and ask forgiveness, then go to him with one or two witnesses (Mt. 18:16). This provides adequate Scriptural testimony as to the offender's attitude.

If he is still unbending, then you take the matter to the assembly, accompanied by the witnesses. If he refuses to listen to the judgment of the assembly, then, of course, he is dis-fellowshipped (Matt. 18:17).

But if at any point during this process, he repents, then you forgive him (Lu. 17:3). You have already forgiven him in your heart, but now you administer forgiveness to him. Here it is important not to gloss over the matter. Don't say “Oh that's alright. You really didn't do anything wrong.” Rather say, “I very gladly forgive you. Now the whole matter is closed. Let's get down and pray together.”

The shame of having to confess and repent may deter him from wronging you again. But even if he repeats his sin and then repents, you must forgive him. Even if he does it seven times in one day and repents seven times, you must forgive him—whether you think he's sincere or not (Lu. 17:4).

We must never forget that we have been forgiven millions. We must not hesitate to forgive others for what amounts to a few dollars, figuratively speaking (Mt. 18:23-35).

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine

“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)

Today’s English Version translates the first part of this verse, “Whoever is willing to do what God wants will know...” It is a wonderful promise that if a person sincerely desires to know, God will show him.

When a sinner has come to the end of himself and when he prays in deep extremity, “Oh God, reveal Yourself to me,” God always does. It is a prayer that never goes unanswered.

A hippie, living in a cave in the Southwest, was ready to end it all. He had sought satisfaction in liquor, drugs, sex, and the occult. But still his life was empty, empty, empty. He could see no way out of his misery. Huddled in the cave one day, he cried out, “Oh God—if there is a God—reveal yourself to me, or I’m going to end my life.”

Within ten minutes, a young Christian, who “just happened” to be passing, stuck his head in the mouth of the cave, saw the hermit-hippie and said, “Hi, mind if I speak to you about Jesus?”

You know what happened! The hippie listened to the good news of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to the Savior and found forgiveness, acceptance and new life. He had prayed out of the depths; God heard and answered. I have never heard of anyone who prayed like that without having a special revelation of the Lord to his soul.

Of course, the promise is true to Christians as well. If a man sincerely desires to know what the will of God for his life is, God will show it to him. If he wants to know the proper pathway as far as church fellowship is concerned, God will make it known. No matter what the need may be, God is committed to meet it, if we want His will supremely. The thing that stands between us and a true knowledge of God’s mind is our own lack of desperate desire.

But I have all, and abound: I am full,

“But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.” (Phil. 4:18)

Paul’s letter to the Philippians was really an acknowledgment of a gift which he had received from the believers at Philippi. We are probably safe in assuming that it was a gift of money. The surprising thing is the way in which the apostle magnifies the gift. He calls it “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.” In Ephesians 5:2 He uses a similar expression to describe Christ’s great gift of Himself at Calvary. He speaks of it as “an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.” It is breathtaking to think that a gift given to a servant of the Lord should be memorialized with language similar to that which describes the Unspeakable Gift.

J. H. Jowett comments finely on this point. “How vast, then, is the range of an apparently local kindness! We thought we were ministering to a pauper, and in reality we were conversing with the King. We imagined that the fragrance would be shut up in a petty neighborhood, and lo, the sweet aroma steals through the universe. We thought that we were dealing only with Paul, and we find that we were ministering to Paul’s Savior and Lord.” When we understand the true spiritual nature of Christian giving and the vast range of its influence, we are delivered from giving grudgingly or of necessity. We are immune forever to the gimmickry of professional fund-raisers who extort by cajolery, pathos or comedy. We see that giving is a form of priestly service, not a legal enactment. We give because we love, and we love to give.

The truth that my minuscule gifts to the Great God fill the throne room of the universe with fragrance should inspire me to humble worship and hilarious giving. Never again will the offering on Sunday morning be a boring, if necessary, part of the service. It will be as truly a means of giving directly to the Lord Jesus as if He were bodily present.

For the word of God is living and active

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword.” (Heb. 4:12a NASB)

A Christian university student was witnessing to another student who was from a liberal seminary. When the believer quoted a verse, the seminarian said, “I don’t believe the Bible.” The Christian quoted another verse, only to be met with “I told you I don’t believe the Bible.” The third time the Christian quoted a verse the seminarian became agitated and exploded, “Don’t quote the Bible to me. I’ve already told you I don’t believe it.” By then the believer felt completely frustrated and defeated. He figured that he was a total failure as a soul winner.

It so happened that Dr. H. A. Ironside was a guest at his home that night. At the supper table, the Christian student shared his disappointing experience about the seminarian. Then he asked Dr. Ironside, “When you are trying to witness to someone and he says to you, ‘I don’t believe the Bible,’ what do you do?” Dr. Ironside replied with a happy smile, “I just quote more of it.”

That is excellent advice for any would-be soul winners. When people say they don’t believe the Bible, just quote more of it. The Word of God is living and powerful. It has an effect on people even when they don’t believe it.

Suppose two men are dueling. One says to the other, “I don’t believe your sword is real steel.” What happens? Does the second man lay down his sword and admit defeat? Or does he give a scientific discourse on the carbon content and malleability of the metal? Ridiculous! He gives his opponent a good sharp jab and lets him feel how real the sword is. So it is with the Bible. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. It needs to be used more than it needs to be defended. It is well able to defend itself.

I do not deny that there is a place for proofs of the inspiration of the Scriptures. Such proofs serve a valuable purpose in confirming the faith of those who are already saved. In a few cases they help people come to saving faith. But generally speaking people aren’t convinced by human reasonings or arguments. “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.” Men need to be confronted with the powerful Word of God. A single verse of Scripture is worth a thousand arguments.

This highlights the importance of Scripture memorization. If I haven’t committed verses to memory, the Spirit will not be able to bring them forth at the appropriate time. But the main point is that God has not promised to honor my words, but He has promised to honor His own. So in dealing with the unsaved, I must use the sword of the Spirit generously and watch it produce conviction and conversion by a miracle of grace.

he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter

“...he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter.” (Isa. 53:7b)

I once saw a lamb die. It was a most moving, most awful sight.

As it was brought to the place of execution, it looked especially lovable. Children would have loved to cuddle it. The young of every species are darling—kittens, puppies, chicks, calves and colts—but a lamb is especially appealing.

As it stood there, it was a picture of innocence. Its white fleece, without blemish, gave the appearance of purity. It was gentle and mild, helpless and defenseless. Its eyes were especially expressive; they spoke of fear, of pathos and poignancy. There seemed to be no reason why anything so young, so beautiful should have to die.

Now the legs were tied and the pathetic lamb was lying on its side, breathing heavily, as if aware of impending death. With one deft motion, the butcher moved the knife across the throat. The blood poured out over the ground. The little body was convulsed by the death throes, then shortly it lay still. The gentle lamb had died.

Some of the spectators had turned away from the sight; it was too sad to watch. Others were wiping away the tears. No one wanted to speak.

By faith I see another Lamb dying—the Lamb of God. It is a most blessed, most awful sight.

This Lamb is altogether lovely, the chief among ten thousand, the fairest of the fair. As He is brought to the place of execution, He is in the prime of life.

He is not only innocent—He is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, without spot and without blemish. There seems no reason why anyone so pure should ever be put to death.

But the executioners take Him and nail Him to the Cross, hands and feet. There He suffers the concentrated torments and horrors of hell as a Substitute for sinners. Through it all His eyes are filled with love and forgiveness.

Now His suffering time is ended. He dismisses His spirit and His body hangs limp on the Cross. A soldier pierces His side and out gushes blood and water. The Lamb of God has died.

My heart is filled. Scalding tears flow freely. I fall to my knees and thank Him and praise Him! Just to think—He died for me! I will never cease to love Him.

ye need not that any man teach you

“...ye need not that any man teach you.” (1 John 2:27)

At first glance this verse poses problems. If we don't need anyone to teach us, why did the risen Lord give teachers to build up the saints for the work of ministering (Eph. 4:11, 12)?

In order to understand John's meaning, it helps to know the background of his letter. At the time he wrote, the church was being plagued by false teachers known as Gnostics. These heretics had once professed to be sincere believers in the Lord Jesus and had been in the fellowship of local assemblies. But then they had left to push their false views concerning the humanity and deity of Christ.

They professed to have superior knowledge, hence the name Gnostic, from the Greek word *gnosis*—“to know.” They probably said something like this to the Christians: “What you have is good, but we have additional truth. We can take you beyond the simple teachings and initiate you into new and deeper mysteries. If you are going to be full-grown and fulfilled, you need our teachings.”

But John warns the Christians that it is all a hoax. They don't need any of these imposters to teach them. They have the Holy Spirit. They have the Word of Truth. And they have God-ordained teachers. The Holy Spirit enables them to discern between truth and error. The Christian faith has been once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), and anything that claims to be in addition to it is fraudulent. Christian teachers are needed to explain and apply the Scriptures, but they must never transgress by going beyond the Scriptures.

John would be the last one to deny the need for teachers in the Church. He himself was a teacher par excellence. But he would be the first one to insist that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate authority, and that He leads His people into all truth through the pages of Holy Writ. All teaching must be tested by the Bible. If it professes to be in addition to the Bible, if it claims equal authority with the Bible, or if it does not agree with the Bible, then it must be rejected.

And when they were assembled with the elders

“And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.” (Matt. 28:12, 13)

The Lord Jesus had no sooner risen from the dead when His enemies began to fabricate an alibi to explain away the miracle. The best falsehood that they could concoct at that time was that the disciples came by night and stole the body. (The swoon theory, suggesting that Jesus did not really die but only swooned, didn't surface till centuries later.) Unfortunately for the theft theory, as for all the other theories, it raises more questions than it answers. For example:

Why didn't the chief priests and elders question the original report of the guards concerning the empty tomb? They accepted it as true and hastened to devise an explanation as to how it had happened.

Why were the soldiers sleeping when they should have been on watch? The Roman penalty for sleeping on duty was death. Yet they were promised immunity from punishment. Why?

How could all the soldiers have fallen asleep at the same time? It taxes credulity to think they would all have risked death for a time of sleep.

How could the disciples have rolled the stone without waking the guards? The stone was large and could not be moved noiselessly.

How could the disciples have moved the stone at all? In a typical Herodian-style tomb, the stone was rolled till it fell down into a lower slot. It was easier to seal such a tomb than it was to open it. Besides, the tomb had been made as “sure” as the Roman authorities were able to make it.

Is it likely that the disciples, recently so fearful that they fled for their lives, would have the courage to face the Roman guards and rob the sepulcher? They would know that such an offense was punishable by a severe sentence.

If the soldiers were all asleep, how did they know that the disciples had stolen the body?

If the disciples stole the body, why did they take time to remove the graveclothes and fold the napkin? (Luke 24:12; John 20:6, 7). Why would the disciples want to steal the body?

There was no reason. Actually they were surprised and incredulous when they learned He had risen.

Finally, would the disciples, honorable men that they were, go forth and preach the resurrection at great personal risk if they knew it was a lie? Paul Little said, “Men do not die for what they know is a lie.” They sincerely believed that Jesus has risen. The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!

If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon

“If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches.” (Luke 16:11)

Unrighteous mammon here refers to earthly riches or material treasures. No illusion is more prevalent than that the man who has a lot of material possessions is rich. We speak of houses and land as real estate because we think they are real wealth. We speak of stocks and bonds as securities because we think they provide security.

But in Luke 16:11 the Lord distinguishes between the unrighteous mammon and true riches. The things men think are wealth aren't wealth at all.

John was a godly Christian who served as caretaker for a wealthy aristocrat's estate. One night John had a vivid dream in which he was told that the richest man in the valley would die before midnight the following evening. When John met his employer the next morning, he shared the dream with him. At first the millionaire pretended to be completely unconcerned. He never felt better. And he didn't believe in dreams anyway.

But as soon as John left, he called his chauffeur to drive him to the doctor's office. He told the doctor he wanted a complete physical checkup. As expected, the tests revealed that he was in splendid condition. And yet he was still worried about John's dream, so as he was leaving the doctor's office, he said, “By the way, Doctor, could you come to my house for supper tonight and for a visit afterwards.” The doctor agreed to come.

The supper went on routinely and they talked over a wide range of subjects. Several times the doctor made a start to leave, but each time the host prevailed upon him to stay a little longer.

Finally when the clock struck midnight, the godless rich man, greatly relieved, said goodnight to the doctor.

A few minutes later, the doorbell rang. When the gentleman opened the door, the adult daughter of old John stood there and said, “Please, sir, my mother wanted to let you know that my father had a heart attack and died a little while ago.”

The richest man in the valley had died that night.

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Cor. 10:31)

One of the great tests of Christian behavior is whether there is any glory for God in it. Too often we test our conduct by the question, “Is there any harm in it?” But that is not the question. What we must ask is this: “Is there any glory for God in it?”

Before engaging in any activity, we should be able to bow our head and ask the Lord to glorify Himself in what we are about to do. If God cannot be honored by it, then we should refrain from doing it.

Other religions might be satisfied with behavior that has the absence of harm in it. Christianity moves beyond the merely negative to the distinctly positive. Therefore, as Keith L. Brooks said, “If you would be a successful Christian, stop hunting for the harm there is in things, and start looking for the good. If you want your life to be happy, cast your lot among those persons who are asking for the ‘good’ and not the ‘harm’ there is in it.”

Things might be harmless in themselves and yet be a dead weight in the Christian race. There is no law against an Olympic runner’s toting a sack of potatoes in the 1500 meter race. He can carry the spuds but he can’t win the race. So it is with the Christian. Things may be harmless and yet be a hindrance.

But usually when we ask “Is there any harm in it?” our question betrays a hidden doubt. We don’t ask that about activities that are legitimate on the face of them—such as prayer, Bible study, worship, witness and our daily work.

Incidentally, any honorable work can be done to the glory of God. That is why some housewives have this motto over their kitchen sink: “Divine services conducted here three times daily.”

Whenever in doubt, we could follow this advice from John Wesley’s mother; “If you wish to determine the lawfulness of a pleasure, follow this rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes away the relish of spiritual things; whatever increases the authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin.”

whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister

“...whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.” (Matt. 20:26, 27)

What is true greatness?

In the kingdom of this world, the great man is the one who has risen to a place of wealth and power. He has a retinue of aides and assistants, conditioned to follow his orders. He is accorded V.I.P. treatment and receives special favors wherever he goes. People regard him with respect and awe because of his rank. He never has to stoop to anything menial; there are always others to do that for him.

But in the Kingdom of our Lord, things are quite different. Here greatness is measured by the extent to which we serve rather than the extent to which we are served. The great man is the one who stoops to become a slave for others. No service is too menial. He does not expect any special treatment or thanks. When one of George Washington’s men saw him performing a menial service, he objected, saying, “General, you are too big a man to be doing that.” Washington replied, “Oh, no, I’m just the right size.”

Commenting on Luke 17:7-10, Roy Hession reminds us that “there are five marks of the bondsman: (1) He must be willing to have one thing on top of another put on him, without any consideration being given to him. (2) In doing this, he must be willing not to be thanked for it. (3) Having done all this, he must not charge the master with selfishness. (4) He must confess that he is an unprofitable servant. (5) He must admit that doing and bearing what he has in the way of meekness and humility, he has not done one stitch more than it was his duty to do.”

When our Lord left the heights of glory to become a Man on this planet, he “took upon him the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). He was among us as One who serves (Luke 22:27). He said, “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28). He girded Himself with a towel, the apron of a slave, and washed His disciples’ feet (John 13:1-17).

“The servant is not greater than his lord” (John 13:16). If He stooped so low to serve us, why should we think it beneath our dignity to serve others?

Wast Thou, Savior, meek and lowly,

And will such a worm as I,

Weak and sinful and unholy

Dare to lift my head on high?

by love serve one another

“...by love serve one another.” (Gal. 5:13)

Someone has said, “Self thinks itself great and is served. Love serves and is great.”

A popular Gospel singer witnessed to the man sitting next to him in a restaurant and had the joy of leading him to Christ. In the weeks that followed, he disciplined this new convert. Then Fred, the new believer, was stricken with inoperable cancer and was taken to a convalescent hospital where, unfortunately, care was below standard. The Gospel singer, a radio celebrity, visited faithfully, changed the bed, bathed and fed his “Timothy”, and did many other things that the staff should have been doing. On the night Fred died, this well-known singer was holding him in his arms, whispering comforting verses of Scripture into his ear. “...by love serve one another.”

A senior instructor at a Bible School often found the men’s room awash after the morning rush. He would patiently clean the fixtures, then get down and wipe the floor dry. Not all his best teaching was done in the classroom. The students were humbled and inspired by the example of their respected teacher cleaning up after them. “...by love serve one another.”

In that same Bible School, a member of the basketball team had the heart of a true servant. After a game, when all the players would rush down to be first in the showers, he would stay in the gym and see that it was set in order for the next day. He “found in the selfishness of others an opportunity to identify himself afresh with the Lord as the servant of all.” “...by love serve one another.”

A Christian mother from rural Turkey was taken to London to donate a kidney for her ailing son. She assumed that to give a kidney would cost her life. When the English doctor asked if she was sure she was willing to give a kidney to her son, she replied, “I am willing to give two kidneys.” “...by love serve one another.”

In a world dominated largely by self-interest, the pathway of selfless, sacrificial service is not overcrowded. Opportunities beckon throughout every day for innovative acts of servanthood.

as dying, and, behold, we live

“...as dying, and, behold, we live.” (2 Cor. 6:9)

The Bible is full of paradoxes, that is, truths that seem contrary to what we would normally suppose or truths that seem to contradict one another. G. K. Chesterton maintained that paradox is truth standing on its head to attract attention. Here are a few of the paradoxes trying to attract our attention.

We save our lives by losing them; we lose our lives by loving them (Mark 8:35).

We are strong when we are weak (2 Cor. 12:10), and powerless in our own strength (John 15:5).

We find perfect freedom in being Christ’s slave, and bondage when we are free from His yoke (Rom. 6:17-20).

We find more joy in sharing what we have than we do in getting more. Or, in the words of our Lord, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’ (Acts 20:35).

We increase what we have through scattering it, and experience poverty through hoarding it (Prov. 11:24).

We have a new nature that cannot sin (1 John 3:9), yet everything we do is stained by sin (1 John 1:8).

We conquer by yielding (Gen. 32:24-28) and experience defeat by fighting (1 Pet. 5:5c).

We are abased when we exalt ourselves, but He exalts us when we abase ourselves (Lu. 14:11).

We are enlarged by pressure (Psa. 4:1 JND) and shrunk by prosperity (Jer. 48:11).

We can possess all things, yet have nothing; we can be poor, yet make many rich (2 Cor. 6:10).

When we are wise (in man’s view) then we are fools (in God’s sight), but when we are fools for Christ’s sake, then we are truly wise (1 Cor. 1:20, 21).

The life of faith brings freedom from care and anxiety; the life of sight brings fear of loss through moths, rust and thieves (Matt. 6:19).

The poet sees the Christian life as paradox from start to finish:

How strange is the course that a person must steer,

How perplexed is the path he must tread;

The hope of his happiness rises from fear,

And his life he receives from the dead.

His fairest pretensions must wholly be waived,

And his best resolutions be crossed;
Nor can he expect to be perfectly saved
Till he finds himself utterly lost.
When all this is done, and his heart is assured
Of the total remission of sins;
When his pardon is signed and his peace is procured,
From that moment his conflict begins. (Selected).

you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher

“...you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ.” (Matt. 23:8-10 RSV)

The Lord Jesus warned His disciples against high-sounding titles that cater to the ego and put self in the place of the Trinity. God is our Father, Christ is our Master, the Holy Spirit is our Teacher. We should not arrogate these titles to ourselves in the assembly. In the world, of course, we have an earthly father, in our work we have a master or employer, and in school we have teachers. But in the spiritual realm, the members of the Godhead fill these roles and should be honored exclusively as such.

God is our Father in the sense that He is the Giver of life. Christ is our Master because we belong to Him and are subject to His direction. The Holy Spirit is our Teacher because He is the Author and Interpreter of Scripture; all our teaching must be guided by Him.

How strange, then, that churches perpetuate honorific titles just as if Christ had never warned against them. Priests and ministers are still called Father and Padre and are sometimes referred to as Dominie, meaning Lord. Clergymen regularly use the title “Reverend,” a word that is used in the Bible only of God (see Psa. 111:9, “...reverend and holy is his name.”) The title “Doctor” comes from the Latin docere, to teach. So doctor means teacher. The degree, whether earned or honorary, may come from an institution that is a pesthouse of infidelity rather than a bulwark of the Christian faith. Yet when a man is introduced as “Doctor” in the assembly, the implication is that his words have added authority because of his degree. This, of course, is completely unfounded. A hunchbacked garbage collector, filled with the Holy Spirit, may speak more truly as an oracle of God.

There is a place for titles in the so-called secular world. The principle that applies in that sphere is “Render therefore to all their dues: ...honour to whom honour” (Rom. 13:7). But the principle that applies in the assembly is laid down by the Lord in the words, “...you are all brethren” (Matt. 23:8 RSV).

For now we see through a glass, darkly

“For now we see through a glass, darkly...” (1 Cor. 13:12)

At few times in our Christian experience is this so evident as when we come to the Lord's Table to remember Him in His death for us. “We see through a glass, darkly.”

There seems to be a thick, impenetrable veil. We are on one side of it with all our finite limitations. On the other side is the whole great drama of our redemption—Bethlehem, Gethsemane, Gabbatha, Calvary, the empty tomb, the exalted Christ at God's right hand. We realize that there is something enormously vast there, and we try to take it in, but feel more like clods than like living beings.

We try to comprehend the Savior's sufferings for our sins. Our minds strain to take in the horror of His being forsaken by God. We know that He endured the torment that we should have endured for all eternity. Yet we are frustrated to realize that there is so much more beyond. We are standing at the edge of an unexplored sea!

We think of the love that sent Heaven's best for earth's worst. We are moved when we remember that God sent His only-begotten Son into this jungle of sin to seek and to save that which was lost. But we are dealing with a love that passes knowledge. We can know only in part.

We sing of the grace of the Savior, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich. It is enough to make angels gasp. Our eyes strain to see the vast dimensions of such grace. But it is in vain. We are limited by our human shortsightedness.

We know that we should be overcome by the contemplation of His sacrifice at Calvary, but we are too often strangely unmoved. If we really entered in to what lies beyond the veil, we would be reduced to tears. Yet we have to confess...

Oh, wonder to myself I am,

Thou loving, bleeding, dying Lamb,

That I can scan the mystery o'er

And not be moved to love thee more.

Or, in the words of another, we must ask:

Am I a stone, and not a man, that I can stand

O Christ, beneath Thy cross,

And number drop by drop,

Thy blood's slow loss,

And yet not weep?

Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, our eyes are beholden. We long with burning desire for the time when the veil will be removed and when we will see with better vision the awesome meaning of the broken bread and the outpoured wine.

These things have I written unto you

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” (1 John 5:13)

Some of us will be eternally thankful to God for this verse because it taught us that assurance of salvation comes first and foremost through the Word of God and not through feelings. The Bible was written, among other reasons, so that those who believe on the Name of the Son of God can know that they have eternal life.

We can be thankful that assurance does not come through feelings, because they fluctuate with every passing day. “God does not ask the soul to say, ‘Thank God I feel so good,’ but turns the eye another way, to Jesus and His Word.” When someone once asked Martin Luther, “Do you feel that your sins have been forgiven?” he replied, “No, but I’m as sure of it as that there’s a God in heaven. For feelings come and feelings go/ And feelings are deceiving/ My warrant is the Word of God/ Naught else is worth believing.” C. I. Scofield reminds us that “justification takes place in the mind of God and not in the nervous system of the believer.” H. A. Ironside used to say, “I don’t know I am saved because I feel happy, but I feel happy because I know I am saved.” And he knew he was saved by the written Word of God.

When we read that the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God (Rom. 8:16), we must remember that the Spirit witnesses to us primarily through the Scriptures. We read John 6:47, for instance, “He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” We know that we have trusted in Christ for our eternal salvation; He is our only hope for heaven. The Spirit of God therefore witnesses to us through this verse that we are sons of God.

Of course, there are other means of assurance. We know we are saved because we love the brethren; because we hate sin and practice righteousness; because we love the Word of God; and because we have the instinct of prayer. But the first and fundamental means of assurance is the surest, most dependable thing in the universe, the Word of God. George Cutting said it well in his memorable tract *Safety, Certainty and Enjoyment*: “It’s the blood that makes us safe; it’s the Word that makes us sure.”

If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works

“If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.” (Rom. 11:6 NASB)

When a person gets grounded early in the doctrine of grace, he saves himself from a host of problems in later life. It is so basic to understand that salvation is a free gift of God’s grace and that it is given to those who not only do not deserve it but who in fact deserve the very opposite. There is nothing meritorious a person can do or become to earn eternal life. It is given to those who abandon any thoughts of personal worthiness but who rest their case on the worthiness of the Savior alone.

If we see that salvation is all of grace, then we can have full assurance. We can know that we are saved. If salvation depended in the slightest degree on ourselves and our miserable attainments, then we could never know for sure. We wouldn’t know whether we had done enough good works or the right kind. But when it depends on the work of Christ, then there doesn’t have to be any nagging doubt.

The same is true of our eternal security. If our continued safety somehow depended on our own ability to hold out, then we might be saved today and lost tomorrow. But as long as our safety depends on the Savior’s ability to keep us, we can know we are eternally secure.

Those who live under grace are not helpless pawns of sin. Sin does have dominion over those under law because the law tells them what to do but doesn’t give them the power to do it. Grace gives a person a perfect standing before God, teaches him to walk worthy of his calling, enables him to do it by the indwelling Holy Spirit, and rewards him for doing it.

Under grace, service becomes a joyful privilege, not a legal bondage. The believer is motivated by love, not by fear. The memory of what the Savior suffered to provide salvation inspires the saved sinner to pour out his life in devoted service.

Grace also enriches life by inspiring thanksgiving, worship, praise and adoration. The knowledge of who the Savior is, of what sinners we are by nature and by practice, and of all He has done for us causes our hearts to overflow in loving adoration to Him.

There’s nothing like the grace of God. It’s the crown jewel of all His attributes. Get grounded in the truth of the sovereign grace of God and it will transfigure all of life.

The disciple is not above his master

“The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.” (Lu. 6:40)

In this passage the Lord Jesus was reminding the Twelve that when they went out to disciple others, they could not expect their disciples to progress further in the spiritual life than they themselves had attained. In other words, the extent of our positive influence on others is limited by what we ourselves are. Or as O. L. Clark said:

You cannot teach what you do not know;

You cannot lead where you do not go.

The Savior went on to reinforce the lesson by the story of the mote and the beam. A man is walking by a threshingfloor when a sudden gust of wind lands a tiny speck of chaff squarely in his eye. He rubs it, pulls the top lid down over the bottom one, and tries all the wellmeaning advice of his friends as to how to get the mote out of his eye. Then I come along with a telephone pole jutting out of my eye and say to him, “Here, my dear friend, let me help you get that atom out of your eye.” With his head at an angle, he looks up at me with his remaining good eye and says, “Don’t you think you ought to take the pole out of your own eye first?”

Of course! I can’t help someone who is struggling with a besetting sin if I am even more shackled by that particular sin. I can’t press on him obedience to some plain command of Scripture if I have not obeyed it myself. Any spiritual failure in my life seals my lips in that particular area.

When my disciple has become perfect, that is, when I have finished training him, I cannot expect him to be one centimeter above my own spiritual stature. He may progress up to my height, but I cannot lead him beyond it.

All of which emphasizes afresh that we must take heed to ourselves. Our ministry is to be a ministry of character. It’s what’s inside that counts. We may be eloquent, clever, and fast-talking but if there are blind-spots in our lives, areas of neglect and disobedience, then our discipling of others is a case of the blind leading the blind.

If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus

“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (Rom. 10:9)

This favorite Gospel verse zeroes in on the two basic truths that are so hard for fallen man to accept—the incarnation and the resurrection. There can be no salvation without accepting these doctrines and all that they signify.

First we must confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, that is, that the One who was born in Bethlehem’s stable is none other than God manifest in the flesh. The deity of the Lord Jesus is essential to the whole plan of salvation.

Second, we must believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead. But this means more than the simple fact of the resurrection. It includes the fact that the Lord Jesus died on the Cross as our Substitute. He paid the penalty that our sins deserved. He endured the wrath of God that we should have endured eternally. Then on the third day God raised Him from the dead as a proof of God’s entire satisfaction with Christ’s sacrifice for our sins.

When we receive Him as Lord and Savior, the Bible says that we are saved.

But someone may ask, “Why is confession put before believing? Don’t we believe first and then confess?”

In verse 9 Paul is emphasizing the incarnation and the resurrection, and he gives the historical order in which they occurred - the incarnation first and the resurrection thirty-three years later.

In the next verse he puts believing before confessing. “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Here the order is that which takes place when we are born again. First, we trust the Savior and are justified. Then we go out to confess the salvation which we have already received.

Our verse has an artless simplicity and perennial freshness about it. No wonder the children sing:

Romans ten and nine

Is a fav’rite verse of mine;

Confessing Christ as Lord,

I am saved by grace divine;

For there the words of promise

In golden letters shine:

Romans ten and nine.

What is that to thee? follow thou me

“What is that to thee? follow thou me.” (John 21:22)

The Lord Jesus had just told Peter that he would live to be an old man, and then die a martyr’s death. Peter immediately looked across at John and wondered out loud if John would receive preferred treatment. The Lord’s reply was, “What is that to thee? follow thou Me.”

Peter’s attitude reminds us of the words of Dag Hammar-skjold: “In spite of everything, your bitterness because others are enjoying what you are denied is always ready to flare up. At best it may lie dormant for a couple of sunny days. Yet, even at this unspeakably shabby level, it is still an expression of the real bitterness of death—the fact that others are allowed to go on living.

If we would take to heart the words of the Lord, they would solve many a problem among Christian people.

It is so easy to become resentful when we see others prospering more than we are. The Lord allows them to have a new home, a new car, a cottage by the lake.

Others whom we might consider less devoted have good health while we battle two or three chronic ailments.

That other family has fine looking children who excel in athletics and in academics. Our children are the common, garden variety.

We see other believers doing things that we don’t have liberty to do. Even if the things are not sinful, we become resentful at their liberty.

Sad to say, there is a certain amount of professional jealousy among Christian workers. One preacher is offended because another is more popular, has more friends, is more in the public eye. Or another is piqued because his colleague uses methods he does not approve.

To all of these unworthy attitudes, the words of the Lord come with striking forcefulness, “What is that to thee? follow thou me.” How the Lord deals with other Christians is really none of our business. Our responsibility is to follow Him in whatever pathway He has marked out for us.

The wind bloweth where it listeth

“The wind bloweth where it listeth.” (John 3:8)

The Spirit of God is sovereign. He moves as He pleases. We try to pour Him into our particular mold, but our attempts are invariably frustrated.

Most of the types of the Holy Spirit are fluid - wind, fire, oil, and water. We may try to hold these in our hands but they have a way of saying “Don’t fence me in.”

The Holy Spirit will never do anything that is morally wrong, but in other areas He reserves the right to act in exceptional and unconventional ways. For example, while it is true that God has given headship to man, we cannot say that the Holy Spirit cannot raise up a Deborah to lead God’s people if He wishes.

In days of declension, the Spirit permits behavior that ordinarily would be forbidden. Thus David and his men were allowed to eat the shewbread, which was reserved exclusively for the priests. And the disciples were justified in plucking grain on the Sabbath day.

People say that there is a definite, predictable pattern of evangelism in the Book of Acts, but the only pattern I can see is the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit.

The apostles and others did not follow a textbook; they followed His leading, which was often quite different from what common sense would have dictated.

For instance, we see the Spirit leading Philip to leave a successful revival in Samaria in order to witness to a lone Ethiopian eunuch on the road to Gaza.

In our own day, we must guard against dictating to the Holy Spirit what He can and cannot do. We know that He will never do anything that is sinful. But in other areas He can be counted on to do the extraordinary. He is not limited to a certain set of methods. He is not bound by our traditional ways of doing things. He has a way of protesting against formalism, ritualism and deadness by raising up new movements with reviving power. We should therefore be open to this sovereign working of the Holy Spirit and not be found sitting on the sidelines, criticizing.

The hatred with which he hated her was greater

“The hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her.” (2 Sam. 13:15)

Amnon burned with lust for his half-sister, Tamar. She was beautiful, and he was determined to have her. He was frustrated because he knew that what he wanted to do was clearly forbidden by the law of God. But he was so consumed by desire for her that no other considerations seemed important. So he pretended to be ill, lured her into his room and violated her. He was willing to sacrifice everything for that one moment of passion.

But then lust turned to hatred. After he had selfishly exploited her, he despised her and probably wished he had never seen her. He ordered her to be thrown out and the door locked behind her.

This vignette of history is being replayed every day. In our freewheeling society, moral standards have been largely abandoned. Premarital sex is accepted as normal. Couples live together without the formality of marriage. Prostitution is legalized. Homosexuality has become an accepted alternative life style.

Young and old alike see someone they like and that settles it. They recognize no higher law. They are bound by no inhibitions. They are determined to get what they want. They wave off any thought of right or wrong, and rationalize that they cannot live a normal life in any other way. So they take the plunge, as Amnon did, and think that they have achieved fulfillment.

But what had looked so beautiful in prospect often looks very hideous in retrospect. Guilt is inevitable, no matter how hotly it is denied. A mutual loss of self-respect leads to resentment. That in turn often boils over into quarreling and then into hatred. The person who once seemed so indispensable is now positively repulsive. From there it is an easy step to beatings, court-battles and even murder.

Lust lays a rotten foundation on which to build a lasting relationship. Men ignore God's law of purity to their own loss and destruction. Only the grace of God can bring forgiveness, healing and restoration.

No man that warreth entangleth himself

“No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” (2 Tim. 2:4)

The Christian has been enlisted by the Lord, and is on active service for Him. He must not entangle himself in the affairs of everyday life. The emphasis here is on the word entangle. He cannot completely divorce himself from worldly business. He must work in order to provide the necessities of life for his family. There is a certain amount of involvement in everyday interests that is unavoidable. Otherwise he would have to go out of the world, as Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 5:10.

But he mustn't allow himself to become entangled. He must keep his priorities straight. Even things that are good in themselves can sometimes become the enemies of the best.

Wm. Kelly says that “to entangle oneself in the businesses of life means really to give up separation from the world by taking one's part in outward affairs as a bona fide partner in it.”

I have become entangled when I become involved in the world's politics as a means of solving man's problems. That would be like spending my time “rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.”

Or I have become entangled when I put more emphasis on social service than on the Gospel as a panacea for the world's ills.

I have become entangled when business gets such a grip on me that I give my best efforts to the making of money. In thus gaining a living, I lose a life.

I have become entangled when the kingdom of God and His righteousness cease to have first place in my life.

I have become entangled when I am caught up by things that are too small for a child of eternity—like the mineral deficiencies in the tomato and cocklebur, the summer habits of Wyoming antelope, the microbic content of cotton T-shirts, the browning reaction in potato chips or the post-rotational movements of a pigeon's eye. These studies may be all right as a means of livelihood but they aren't worthy of a life passion.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (Rom. 8:28 NASB)

This is one of those verses that perplex us most when the going is roughest. As long as the wind blows gently, we have no trouble saying, “Lord, I believe.” But when the storms of life arise, we say, “Help Thou my unbelief.”

And yet we know the verse is true. God does work all things together for good. We know it because the Bible says it. Faith appropriates it, even when we cannot see or understand.

We know it is true because of the character of God. If He is a God of infinite love, of infinite wisdom and of infinite power, then it follows that He is planning and working for our highest good.

We know it is true because of the experience of God’s people. In *Choice Gleanings* the story is told of an only survivor of a wreck who was thrown on an uninhabited island. He managed to build himself a hut, in which he placed all that he saved from the wreck. He prayed to God for deliverance and anxiously scanned the horizon each day to hail any passing ship. One day he was horrified to find his hut in flames; all he had went up in smoke. But that which seemed the worst was in reality the best. “We saw your smoke signal,” said the captain of the ship that came to his rescue. Let us remember that if our lives are in God’s hands, “All things work together for good.”

Admittedly there are times when faith falters, when the burden seems unbearable and the darkness unendurable. We ask in our extremity, “What good can possibly come out of this?” There is an answer. The good that God is working out is found in the next verse (Rom. 8:29)—that we should be “conformed to the image of His Son.” It is as the sculptor’s chisel wastes away the marble that the image of the man appears. And it is as the blows of life chip away all that is unworthy in us that we become changed into His blessed likeness. So if you cannot find any other good in the crises of life, remember this one—conformity to Christ.

Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride

“Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.” (1 Tim. 3:6)

In listing the qualifications of an elder, the Apostle Paul cautions against the assumption of this work by one who is young in the faith. Overseership requires the wisdom and sound judgment that come only by spiritual maturity and godly experience. Yet how often this principle is violated! A successful young businessman, politician or professional man comes into the fellowship of the local church. We feel that if we don't get him involved immediately, he might leave and go elsewhere, so we catapult him into a place of leadership. We would be better advised to follow Paul's dictum for deacons, "...let these also first be proved."

A more glaring violation of this spiritual principle is seen in the way that newly-converted stars are publicized and glamorized in the evangelical firmament. It may be a football hero who has just come to saving faith in Christ. Some religious promoter gets a hold of him and has him billed all the way from Dan to Beersheba. As soon as word gets out that a Hollywood actress has been born again, she becomes headline news. Her opinions are sought on everything from capital punishment to premarital sex—as if conversion has given her instant wisdom on all subjects. Now it is an ex-criminal who has come to know the Lord. One fears for him as he is exploited by covetous agents who are out for a fast buck.

Says Dr. Paul Van Gorder, "I have never been in favor of getting a sinner up from his knees and showing him off in front of a crowd. Irreparable harm has been done to the cause of Christ by parading noted figures of the entertainment, sports, and political world across the evangelical platform before sufficient time has elapsed to indicate whether the seed of the Word of God has penetrated and really taken root."

It probably gives some Christians a boost to their religious ego when a drug addict or a politician is heralded as the latest addition to the faith. Perhaps they suffer from feelings of insecurity or inferiority, and every converted celebrity helps to boost their sagging confidence.

But these exploited heroes and heroines often become sitting ducks for the Devil's potshot. Unaware of his subtle devices, they fall into sin and bring enormous reproach on the testimony of the Lord Jesus.

We are thankful for everyone who is genuinely saved, whether famous or obscure. But we are mistaken if we think we can best advance the cause of Christ by pushing novices to the pulpit or TV camera.

in Him you have been made complete

“...in Him you have been made complete.” (Col. 2:10 NASB)

Contrary to popular opinion, there are no degrees of fitness for heaven. A person is either absolutely fit or he is not fit at all. This goes counter to the common notion that at the top of God’s totem pole are good, clean-living people, at the bottom are the crooks and mobsters, and in between are those with varying degrees of fitness for heaven. It is an enormous mistake. We are either fit or we aren’t. There is nothing in between.

Actually none of us is fit in himself. We are all guilty sinners, deserving eternal punishment. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. We have all gone astray and turned to our own way. We are all unclean, and all our best works are like filthy rags.

Not only are we totally unfit for heaven, but there is nothing we can do by ourselves to make us fit. Our best resolutions and noblest endeavors cannot avail to put away our sins or to provide us with the righteousness that God demands. But the good news is that God’s love provides what His righteousness demands, and He provides it as a free gift. “It is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast,” (Eph. 2:8, 9).

Fitness for heaven is found in Christ. Whenever a sinner is born again, he receives Christ. God no longer sees him as a sinner in the flesh; He sees him in Christ, and accepts him on that basis. God has made Christ to be sin for us, He who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

So what it comes down to is this. Either we have Christ or we don’t. If we have Christ, we are as fit for heaven as God can make us. Christ’s fitness becomes ours. We are as worthy as He is, because we are in Him.

On the other hand, if we don’t have Christ, we are as lost as we can possibly be. To be without Him is the fatal deficiency. Nothing else can ever make up for this crucial lack.

It should be clear then that no believer is any more fit for heaven than another believer. All believers have the same title to glory. That title is Christ. No believer has more of Christ than another. Therefore none is more fit for heaven than another.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” (2 Cor. 5:10)

While it is true, as we have seen on the previous page, that there are no degrees of fitness for heaven, it is also true that there will be degrees of reward in heaven. The Judgment Seat of Christ will be a place of review and reward where some will be rewarded more than others.

Also there will be differing capacities for enjoying the glories of heaven. Everyone will be happy but some will have greater capacity for happiness than others. Everyone’s cup will be full but some will have bigger cups than others.

We must get away from the idea that we will all be exactly alike when we reach the glorified state. The Bible nowhere teaches such dull, faceless uniformity. Rather it teaches that crowns will be awarded for lives of faithfulness and devotedness, and that while some are being rewarded, others will suffer loss.

Here are two young men who are the same age and who are converted at the same time. One goes out and lives the next forty years by giving top priority to the kingdom of God and His righteousness. The other gives the best of his life to making money. The first talks enthusiastically about the things of the Lord, the second about activity in the market. The first has a greater capacity for enjoying the Lord now, and he will take that greater capacity to heaven. The second, though equally fit for heaven through the Person and work of Christ, is spiritually dwarfed, and he takes that reduced capacity to heaven.

Day by day we are determining the rewards that we will receive and the measure to which we will enjoy our eternal home. We determine it by our knowledge of the Bible and our obedience to it, by our prayer life, by our fellowship with God’s people, by our service for the Lord, and by our faithful stewardship of all that God has given to us. As soon as we realize that we are building for eternity with every passing day, it should have a profound effect on the choices we make and the priorities we set.

Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule

“Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule.” (Psa. 32:9)

It seems to me that the horse and the mule picture two wrong attitudes we might have when we are seeking the Lord’s guidance. The horse wants to charge ahead; the mule wants to lag behind. The horse tends to be impatient, high-spirited and impetuous. The mule on the other hand is stubborn, intractable and lazy. The psalmist says that neither animal has understanding. Both have to be controlled by bit and bridle, otherwise they will not come near to their master.

God’s desire is that we be sensitive to His leading, not plunging ahead in our own wisdom and not holding back when He has shown His will.

Here are a few rules-of-thumb that might be helpful in this regard.

Ask God to confirm His guidance in the mouths of two or three witnesses. He has said, “In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (Mt. 18:16b). These witnesses may include a verse of Scripture, the counsel of other Christians and the marvelous converging of circumstances. If you get two or three distinct indications of His will, you will not have any doubts or misgivings.

If you are seeking God’s guidance and no guidance comes, then God’s guidance is for you to stay where you are. It is still true that “darkness about going is light about staying.”

Wait until the guidance is so clear that to refuse would be positive disobedience. The children of Israel were forbidden to move until the pillar of cloud and fire moved. No rationalizations on their part could excuse independent action. Their responsibility was to move when the cloud moved—not sooner and not later.

Finally, let the peace of Christ umpire in your heart. That is a free translation of Colossians 3:15. It means that when God is really guiding, He so influences our intellects and emotions that we have peace about the right way and no peace about any other way.

If we are anxious to know the divine will and quick to obey it, we will not need the bit and bridle of God’s discipline.

Do not merely look out for your own personal interests

“Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” (Phil. 2:4 NASB)

The key word in Philippians 2 is “others.” The Lord Jesus lived for others. Paul lived for others. Timothy lived for others. Epaphroditus lived for others. We too should live for others.

We are told to do this not only because it is right but also because it is for our own good. If it is sometimes costly to live for others, it is more costly not to do so.

Our society is filled with people who live only for their own personal interests. Rather than keeping busy in serving others, they sit at home brooding. They think about every minor ache and pain and soon become confirmed hypochondriacs. In their loneliness they complain that no one takes an interest in them and soon they wallow in self-pity. The more time they have to think about themselves, the more depressed they become. Life becomes one great introspective horror of darkness. Soon they go off to the doctor and gulp enormous quantities of pills—pills that can never cure self-centeredness. Then they frequent the psychiatrist’s couch to somehow find relief for their boredom and weariness with life.

The best therapy for people like that is a life of service for others. There are shut-ins to be visited. There are senior citizens who need a friend. There are hospitals that welcome volunteer help. There are people who could be cheered by a letter or a card. There are missionaries who welcome news from home (and perhaps they could use a little greenery to brighten up the scenery). There are souls to be saved and Christians to be taught. In short there is no excuse for anyone to be bored. There is enough to do to fill one’s life with productive activity. And in the very process of living for others, we widen our circle of friends, make our own lives more interesting, and find fulfillment and satisfaction. P.M. Derham said, “A heart that is full of compassion for others is less likely to be absorbed in its own sorrows and poisoned by its own self pity.”

Others, yes, Lord, others,

Let this my motto be.

Help me to live for others

That I may live like Thee.

Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord

“Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.” (Judges 5:23)

The Song of Deborah rehearses the curse on Meroz for staying on the sidelines while the army of Israel was locked in combat with the Canaanites. The people of Reuben also come in for withering scorn; they had good intentions but never left the sheepfolds. Gilead, Asher and Dan receive dishonorable mention for their non-intervention.

Dante said, “The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who remain neutral in a time of great moral crisis.”

The same sentiments are echoed in the book of Proverbs, where we read, “If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?” (Prov. 24:11, 12). Kidner comments, “It is the hireling, not the true shepherd, who will plead bad conditions (10), hopeless tasks (10) and pardonable ignorance (12); love is not so lightly quieted—nor is the God of love.”

What would we do if a great wave of anti-Semitism swept over our country, if Jewish people were herded off to concentration camps, to gas chambers, to ovens? Would we risk our own lives in order to grant them asylum?

Or if some of our fellow-Christians were being persecuted, and if it was a capital offense to shelter them, would we welcome them into our homes? What would we do?

Or perhaps we could take a less heroic but more contemporary case. Suppose you are a director of a Christian organization where a faithful employee is being railroaded to satisfy the spleen of another director who is wealthy, and influential. When the final vote is taken, would you sit on your hands and remain silent?

Suppose we had been on the Sanhedrin when Jesus was tried, or at the Cross when He was crucified? Would we have been neutral or would we have identified ourselves with Him?

“Silence is not always golden; sometimes it is just plain yellow.”

Father, I have sinned

“Father, I have sinned...” (Lu. 15:21)

It was not until the prodigal son returned repentant that the father ran out to meet him, fell on his neck and kissed him. It would not have been righteous to administer forgiveness until first there was repentance. The scriptural principle is, “... if he repent, forgive him” (Lu. 17:3).

There is no record that the father sent help to the prodigal as long as he was in the far country. Actually to have done so would have been to obstruct the work of God in the rebel’s life. The Lord’s goal was to bring the wayward one down to the dregs. He knew that the son had to come to the end of himself, that he would never look up until first he had hit bottom. The sooner the wanderer got to the husks, the sooner he would be ready to break. So the father had to commit his son to the Lord, and wait for the crisis of extremity.

This is one of the hardest things for parents to do—especially for mothers. The natural tendency is to bail out a rebellious son or daughter from every emergency that the Lord sends along. But all that such parents succeed in doing is hinder the Lord in His purpose and prolong the agony for the loved one.

Spurgeon once said, “The truest love to those who err is not to fraternize with them in their error but to be faithful to Jesus in all things.” It is not love to indulge a person in his wickedness. Love rather turns the person over to the Lord and prays, “Lord, restore him, no matter what the cost may be.”

One of the biggest mistakes David made was bringing Absalom back before there was any repentance. Before long Absalom was winning the hearts of the people and plotting a revolt against his father. Finally he drove his father from Jerusalem and was anointed king in his place. Even when he set out with his army to destroy David, the latter instructed his men to spare Absalom in the event of a confrontation. But Joab thought better of it and slew Absalom.

Parents who are willing to bear the pain of watching God reduce their son or daughter to life in a pig-pen are often spared a greater sorrow.

Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee

“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shall thou restrain.” (Psa. 76:10)

One of the fascinating features of human history is the way in which God makes man’s wrath praise Him. Ever since the Fall, man has shaken the fist against God, against His people and against His cause. Instead of judging such wrath on the spot, the Lord lets it work itself out, harnessing it for His glory and for the blessing of His people.

A group of men devised evil against their brother, selling him to a band of nomads who took him to Egypt. God raised him up to be second in power and the savior of his people. Joseph later reminded his brothers, “You meant evil against me but God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20 NASB).

Haman’s rage against the Jews resulted in his own destruction and in the exaltation of those he sought to destroy.

Three young Hebrews were thrown into a furnace of fire so hot that it consumed those who threw them in. But the Hebrews emerged unscathed and without even the smell of smoke on them. The heathen king then decreed death for anyone who said a word against the God of the Jews.

Daniel was cast into the den of lions for praying to the God of heaven. But his miraculous deliverance resulted in another decree by his pagan ruler, demanding reverence and respect for the God of Daniel.

Coming over to the New Testament era, the persecution of the church resulted in the more rapid dissemination of the Gospel. The martyrdom of Stephen had within it the seeds of Saul’s conversion. The imprisonment of Paul produced four letters that became part of the Holy Bible.

Later, the ashes of John Hus were thrown into the river, and everywhere the river flowed, the Gospel followed shortly thereafter.

Men tear up the Bible and throw it to the wind, but someone picks up a random page, reads it and is gloriously saved. Men scoff at the doctrine of Christ’s second coming, and thereby fulfil the prophecy that scoffers will come in the last days (2 Pet. 3:3,4).

So God makes the wrath of man to praise Him—and what won’t praise Him He restrains.

Thou didst well in that it was in thine heart

“Thou didst well in that it was in thine heart.” (1 Kings 8:18)

One of the great desires of David’s heart was to build a Temple for Jehovah in Jerusalem. The Lord sent word that he would not be permitted to build the Temple because he was a man of war, but the Lord added these significant words, “Thou didst well in that it was in thine heart.” It seems clear from this that God counts the desire for the act when we are unable to carry out our desires for Him.

This does not apply when our failure to perform is due to our own procrastination or inaction. Here the desire is not enough. As has been said, the streets of hell are paved with good intentions.

But there are many occasions in the Christian life when we want to do something to please the Lord but are prevented by circumstances beyond our control. A young convert, for instance, desires to be baptized but is forbidden by unbelieving parents. In such a case, God counts his unbaptism for baptism until he leaves home and can obey the Lord without being insubordinate to his parents.

A Christian wife desires to attend all the meetings of the local assembly but her drunken husband insists that she stay at home. The Lord rewards both her subjection to her husband and her desire to meet with others in His Name.

An aged sister wept as she watched others serving meals at a Bible Conference. It had been her great joy to do this for many years, but now she was physically unable. As far as God is concerned she receives as rich a reward for her tears as the others do for their labors.

Who knows how many there are who have willingly offered themselves for service on the mission fields, yet they were never able to travel beyond their own hometown? God knows—and all of these holy aspirations will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The principle also applies in the matter of giving. There are those who are already investing sacrificially in the work of the Lord and just wish they could give more. In a coming day, the divine ledger will show that they did give more.

The ill, the handicapped, the shut-ins, the aged are not cut off from first-place honors, because, “in His mercy, God judges us, not only by our achievements, but by our dreams.”

Neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord

“Neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.” (2 Sam. 24:24)

When David was instructed to offer burnt offerings where the Lord had stopped the pestilence, Araunah offered as an outright gift a threshing floor, oxen, and wood for the fire. But David insisted on buying these things. He would not offer to the Lord something that cost him nothing.

We know that it costs nothing to become a Christian, but we should also know that a life of genuine discipleship costs plenty. “A religion that costs nothing is worth nothing.”

Too often the extent of our commitment is determined by considerations of convenience, cost, and comfort. Yes, we’ll go to the prayer meeting if we aren’t tired or if we don’t have a headache. Yes, we’ll teach the Bible Class as long as it doesn’t conflict with a weekend in the mountains.

It makes us nervous to pray in public, to give a testimony, to preach the Gospel—therefore, we remain silent. We have no desire to help at the rescue mission for fear of picking up lice or fleas. We shut out any thought of the mission field because of a horror of snakes or spiders.

Our giving is too often a tip instead of a sacrifice. We give what we will never miss—unlike the widow who gave all. Our hospitality is determined by the measure of expense, inconvenience and mess to our homes—unlike the soul winner who said that every rug in his house has been stained by drunks throwing up on them. Our availability to people in need ceases when we lie down on our water bed—unlike the elder who was willing to be roused at any time in order to be of spiritual or material assistance.

Very often when the call of Christ comes to us, we are prone to ask ourselves, “What’s in it for me?” or “Will it pay?” The question is rather, “Is this an offering that really costs?” It has been well said, “It is better in the spiritual life that things should cost than that they should pay.”

When we think of what our redemption cost our Savior, it seems a poor return that we should hold back from cost and sacrifice for Him.

Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ

“Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” (Eph. 4:7)

We must always remember that whenever the Lord tells us to do something, He gives us the needed power. All His commands include His enablement, even when His commands are in the realm of the impossible.

Jethro said to Moses, “If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure”(Ex. 18:23). “The principle is that God assumes full responsibility for enabling His man to fulfill every task to which He has appointed him” (J. O. Sanders).

In His ministry the Lord Jesus met at least two men who were paralyzed (Mt. 9:6, Jn. 5:9). On both occasions He told them to get up and carry their pad. As they exercised the will to obey, power flowed into their helpless limbs.

Peter sensed that if the Lord Jesus called him to come on the water, then he could walk on water. As soon as Jesus said “Come,” Peter went down out of the ship and walked on the water.

It is doubtful that the man with the withered hand could stretch it out; yet when our Lord told him to do it, he did and the hand was restored.

The idea of feeding 5000 with a few loaves and fishes is out of the question. But whenever Jesus said to the disciples, “Give them to eat,” the impossibility vanished.

Lazarus had lain in the grave for four days when Jesus called, “Lazarus, come forth.” The command was accompanied by the necessary power. Lazarus came forth.

We should appropriate this truth. When God leads us, we should never cop out with the plea that we can’t do it. If He tells us to do something, He will supply the power. It has been well said, “The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God will not sustain you.”

It is equally true that when God orders something, He pays for what He orders. If we are sure of His leading, we need not worry about the finances. He will Provide.

The God who opened the Red Sea and the Jordan so that His people could pass over is the same today. He is still in the business of removing impossibilities when His people obey His will. He still supplies all needed grace to do whatever He commands. He still works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

In the beginning God

“In the beginning God—” (Gen. 1:1)

If we separate the first four words of Genesis 1:1 from the rest of the verse, they form a sort of motto for all of life. They say, “God first.”

We find this motto suggested in the first commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” No one and nothing must take the place of the true and living God.

We find it taught in the story of Elijah and the widow who had only enough flour and oil left to make one final loaf for her son and herself (1 Kings 17:12). Surprisingly Elijah said, “Make me a little loaf first.” Though this might sound like gross selfishness, it wasn’t. Elijah was a representative of God. He was saying, “Just put God first and your supply of the necessities of life will never fail.”

The Lord Jesus taught the same thing centuries later on the Mount when He said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). The central priority of life is the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Again the Savior asserted His prior claim in Luke 14:26, “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” Christ must have first place.

But how do we put God first? We have our family to care for. We have our secular employment to think of. We have a multitude of duties crying out for our time and resources. We put God first by loving Him with a love beside which all other loves are hatred in comparison. By using all material things as a trust from Him, holding onto only those things which can be used in connection with His kingdom. By giving top priority to matters of eternal consequences, remembering that even good things are sometimes enemies of the best.

Man’s best interests lie in a right relationship with God. The right relationship is when God is given first place. Even when man puts God first, he will have some problems, but he will find fulfillment in life. But when he puts God second, he will have nothing but problems—and a miserable existence.

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”
(Mt. 25:40)

Here is both a rewarding encouragement and a warning that should bring us up short. Whatever we do to Christ’s brethren is reckoned as being done unto Himself.

We can show kindness to the Lord Jesus any day by showing kindness to a fellow-believer. When we show hospitality to God’s people, it is the same as if we entertain Him in our homes. If we give them the master bedroom, we are giving it to Him.

Almost anyone would be quick to do everything possible for the Savior if He came as King of kings and Lord of lords. But He commonly comes to our door in very humble guise, and it is this that puts us to the test. The way we treat the least of His brethren is the way we treat Him.

A godly old preacher visited an assembly in hopes of being able to share with the saints from the Word. He did not have personal charisma and may not have had a dynamic pulpit style. But he was a servant of God and did have a message from the Lord. The elders told him that they could not ask him to stay for meetings and suggested that he go to a meeting in the black ghetto. He did, and was warmly received by the brethren there. During his week of meetings, he took a heart attack and died. It was as if the Lord was saying to the brothers in the fashionable assembly, “You may not have wanted him but I did. In refusing him you refused Me.”

In his poem “How the Great Guest Came,” Edwin Mark-ham tells of an old cobbler who made elaborate preparations for a dreamed-of visit from the Lord. The Lord never came. But when a beggar came, the cobbler put shoes on his feet. When an old lady came, the cobbler helped her with her load and gave her food. When a lost child came, the cobbler took her back to her mother.

Then soft in the silence a voice he heard:

Lift up your heart, for I kept my word.

Three times I came to your friendly door;

Three times my shadow was on your floor.

I was the beggar with bruised feet,

I was the woman you gave to eat,

I was the child in the homeless street.

Take heed what ye hear

“Take heed what ye hear.” (Mk. 4:24)

The Lord Jesus cautions us to be careful what we hear. We are responsible to control what enters through the eargate, and equally responsible to put what we do hear to proper use.

We should not listen to what is blatantly false. The cults are spewing out their propaganda in unprecedented volume. They are always looking for someone who is willing to listen. John says we should not receive cultists into our house or even greet them. They are against Christ.

We should not listen to what is deceitfully subversive. Young people in colleges, universities and seminaries are often subjected to a daily barrage of doubts and denials concerning the Word of God. They hear the miracles explained away, the Lord Jesus condemned with faint praise and the plain meaning of Scripture watered down. It is impossible to sit under subversive teaching and not be affected by it. Even if the student’s faith is not destroyed, his mind is defiled. “Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?” (Prov. 6:27, 28 NASB). The obvious answer is “No.”

We should not listen to what is impure or suggestive. The worst form of pollution in today’s society is mind pollution. The one word that describes most newspapers, magazines, books, radio and TV programs, movies and human conversations is filth. Through constant exposure to this, the Christian is in danger of losing his sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. And that is not the only danger! When we receive vile and suggestive stories in our minds, they have a way of coming back to haunt us during our most holy moments.

We should not fill our minds with things that are worthless or trifling. Life is too short and the task too urgent for that. “All must be earnest in a world like ours.”

Positively, we should be careful to hear the Word of God. The more we saturate our minds with the Word of God and obey its sacred precepts, the more we will think God’s thoughts after Him, the more we will be transformed into the image of Christ, and the more we will be separated from the moral pollution of our environment.

Take heed therefore how ye hear

“Take heed therefore how ye hear.” (Lu. 8:18)

In the Christian life it is a question not only of what we hear but also of how we hear.

It is possible to hear the Word of God with an attitude of indifference. We can read the Bible as we would read any other book, seemingly unconcerned that the Almighty God is speaking to us in it.

We can hear with a critical attitude. Here we put human intellect above the Scriptures. We sit in judgment on the Bible instead of letting the Bible judge us.

We can hear with a rebellious attitude. When we come to portions that deal with the stern demands of discipleship or with women’s subjection and head-covering, we become enraged and utterly refuse to obey.

We can be forgetful hearers, like the man in the Book of James “who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was” (1:23, 24 NASB).

Perhaps the most common class is the callous hearers. These people have heard the Word so much that they have become insensitive. They listen to a sermon mechanically. It has become a ho-hum routine. Their ears are jaded. Their attitude is “What can you tell me that I haven’t already heard?”

The more we hear the Word of God without obeying what we hear, the more we become judicially deafened. If we refuse to hear, we lose the capacity to hear.

The best way to hear is to hear reverently, obediently and seriously. We should approach the Bible with the determination to do what it says, even if no one else is doing it. The wise man is the one who not only hears but does. God is looking for men who tremble at His word (Isa. 66:2).

Paul commended the Thessalonians because when they heard the word of God, they did not receive it “as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God” (1 Th. 2:13). In the same manner we should be careful how we hear.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.” (Lu. 9:24)

Basically there are two attitudes we believers can take toward our life. We can try to save it or we can purposefully lose it for Christ’s sake.

The natural thing is to try to save it. We can live a self-centered life, trying to protect ourselves from effort and inconvenience. We can make careful plans to cushion ourselves from shocks, to guard against loss, to avoid any form of discomfort. Our house becomes like a private estate posted with “No Tres; passing” signs. It is for the family only—with minimal hospitality shown to others. Our decisions are made on the basis of how things will affect us. If they disrupt our plans or involve a lot of work or require expenditure of funds to help others, we turn thumbs down. We tend to devote inordinate attention to our personal health, refusing any service that might call for sleepless nights, for contact with sickness, or death, for any physical risks. We also give a higher priority to personal appearance than to the needs of those around us. In short, we live to cater to the body, which, in a few short years, will be eaten by worms if the Lord doesn’t come.

In trying to save our life, we lose it. We suffer all the miseries of a selfish existence and miss out on all the blessings of living for others.

The alternative is to lose our life for Christ’s sake. This is a life of service and of sacrifice. While we do not take needless risks or court martyrdom, we do not turn away from duty with the plea that we have to live at all cost. There is a sense in which we “fling our soul and body down for God to plow them under.” We count it our greatest joy to spend and be spent for Him. Our home is open, our possessions are expendable, our time is available to those in need.

In thus pouring out our lives for Christ and for others, we find life that is life indeed. In losing our lives, we actually save them.

unto every one which hath shall be given

“For I say unto you, that unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.” (Lu. 19:26)

The word “hath” at the beginning of this verse means more than mere possession. It includes the idea of obeying what we have been taught and of using what we have been given. In other words, it is not just what we have but rather what we do with what we have.

Here is a great principle for us, then, in the study of the Bible. As we follow the light which we receive, God gives us more light. The man who makes the best progress in the Christian life is the one who is determined to do what the Bible says, even if he doesn't see anyone else around him doing it. In other words, it isn't a matter of one's intelligence quotient. What really counts is his obedience quotient. The Scriptures open up their treasures most readily to the obedient heart. Hosea said it well: “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord” (6:3). The more we practice what we have been taught, the more the Lord will reveal to us. Information plus application leads to multiplication. Information without application leads to stagnation.

The principle applies also to the use of our gifts and talents. The man whose pound increased to ten pounds was given authority over ten cities, and the man whose talent gained five pounds was given rule over five cities (Mt. 25:16-19).

This shows that the proper discharge of our responsibilities is rewarded with greater privileges and responsibilities. The man who did nothing with his pound lost it. So those who refuse to use what they have for the Lord eventually lose the ability to do so. “If you don't use it, you lose it.”

We know that when we fail to use any part of the body it atrophies or wastes away. It is through constant use that normal development takes place. So it is in spiritual life. If we bury our gift, either through timidity or laziness, we will soon find that God has put us on the shelf and is using others in our place.

Therefore it is of utmost importance that we obey the precepts of Scripture, claim the promises and use whatever abilities God has given us.

The fruit of the Spirit is love

“The fruit of the Spirit is love...” (Gal. 5:22)

The phrase “the fruit of the Spirit” teaches us at the outset that the virtues that follow can be produced only by the Holy Spirit. An unconverted man is incapable of manifesting any of these graces. Even a true believer is powerless to reproduce them by his own strength. So when we think of these graces, we must remember that they are supernatural and other-worldly.

The love spoken of here, for instance, is not the eros of passion, or the philia of friendship, or the storge of affection. It is agape love—the kind of love which God has shown to us and which He wants us to show to others.

Let me illustrate! Dr. T. E. McCully was the father of Ed McCully, one of the five young missionaries martyred by the Auca Indians in Ecuador. One night when Dr. McCully and I were on our knees together in Oak Park, Illinois, his thoughts went back to Ecuador and to the Curaray River that holds the secret of the whereabouts of Ed’s body. He prayed, “Lord, let me live long enough to see those fellows saved who killed our boys, that I may throw my arms around them and tell them I love them because they love my Christ.” When we arose I saw rivulets of tears zig-zagging down his cheeks.

God answered that prayer of love. Some of those Auca Indians later professed faith in Christ. Dr. McCully went to Ecuador, met these men who murdered his son, threw his arms around them, and told them he loved them because they loved his Christ.

That is agape love. It is impartial, seeking the highest good of all—the homely as well as the handsome, foes as well as friends. It is unconditional, asking for nothing in return for its constant giving. It is sacrificial, never minding the cost. It is unselfish, more concerned with the needs of others than its own. It is pure, free from any trace of impatience, envy, pride, vindictiveness or spite.

Love is the greatest virtue of the Christian life. Without it our noblest endeavors are worthless.

The fruit of the spirit is.. .joy

“The fruit of the spirit is.. .joy.” (Gal. 5:22)

Man never finds real joy till he finds the Lord. Then he enters in to what Peter calls “joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8).

Anyone can rejoice when circumstances are favorable, but the joy which is the fruit of the Spirit is not the result of earthly circumstances. It springs from our relationship to the Lord and from the precious promises He has given to us. Christ would have to be dethroned before the Church could be finally robbed of its joy.

Christian joy can coexist with suffering. Paul weds the two when he speaks of “all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Col. 1:11). The Thessalonian saints had received the word “in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost” (1 Th. 1:6). Suffering saints down through the centuries have testified how the Lord has given them songs in the night.

Joy can coexist with sorrow. The believer can stand by the grave of a loved one, shed tears of sorrow at the loss, yet rejoice at the knowledge that the loved one is in the presence of the Lord.

But joy cannot coexist with sin. Whenever a Christian sins, he loses his song. Not until he confesses and forsakes that sin is the joy of his salvation restored.

The Lord Jesus told His disciples to rejoice when they were reviled, persecuted and falsely accused (Mt. 5:11, 12). And they did! Not many years later we read of them leaving the courtroom, “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41).

Our joy increases as we grow in the knowledge of the Lord. At first, perhaps, we can rejoice in minor irritations, chronic ailments and trivial inconveniences. But the Spirit of God wishes to bring us to the point where we can see God when circumstances are at their worst and rejoice in the knowledge that His way is perfect. We are spiritually mature when we can say with Habakkuk, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab. 3:17, 18).

The fruit of the Spirit is... peace

“The fruit of the Spirit is... peace...” (Gal. 5:22)

As soon as we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1). That means that the hostility between ourselves and God has ceased since Christ has effectively dealt with the cause of that hostility—our sins.

We also have peace of conscience knowing that the work is finished, Christ has paid the penalty of our sins, and God has forgotten them.

But then the Holy Spirit also wants us to enjoy the peace of God in our hearts. This is the serenity and tranquility that come from knowing that our times are in the hands of God and that nothing can happen to us apart from His permissive will.

So we can remain calm when we have a tire blowout on the busy freeway. We don't have to lose our composure when heavy traffic causes us to miss the plane. Peace means remaining cool in a car crash. Or when grease ignites on the kitchen range.

This fruit of the Spirit enables a Peter to sleep soundly in jail, a Stephen to pray for his murderous assailants, a Paul to comfort others in a shipwreck.

When a plane flies into clear air turbulence, and is thrown around like a feather in the gale, when the wing tips flex thirteen feet, when most of the passengers are screaming as the plane lurches, falls, rises and dips, peace enables a believer to bow his head, commit his soul to God, and praise God for whatever may be the outcome.

Or to change the illustration, the Spirit of God can give peace to us when we sit in the doctor's office and hear him say, “I'm sorry to tell you but it's malignant.” He can enable us to reply, “I'm ready to go, Doctor. I'm saved by the grace of God, and for me it will be 'absent from the body, at home with the Lord.'”

And so in the words of Bickerstith's lovely hymn, we can have “Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin...by thronging duties pressed...with sorrows surging round...with loved ones far a way...our future all unknown” because “Jesus we know, and He is on the throne.”

The fruit of the Spirit is...longsuffering

“The fruit of the Spirit is...longsuffering...” (Gal. 5:22)

Longsuffering is the virtue that bears up patiently and even triumphantly under the aggravations of life. While it may refer to a patient response to adverse circumstances, it usually refers to a merciful endurance of the provocations of people.

God is longsuffering with man. Think for a moment of the gross sinfulness of the human race at the present time—the legalization of prostitution, the popularization of homosexuality, the laws permitting abortions, the breakdown of marriage and the home, the wholesale rejection of moral standards, and, of course, man’s crowning sin—the utter rejection of God’s Son as only Lord and Savior. One could scarcely blame God if He were to wipe out mankind with a stroke. But He doesn’t do it. His goodness is designed to lead men to repentance. He is not willing that any should perish.

And His will is that this longsuffering should be reproduced in the lives of His people as they yield to the Holy Spirit. This means that we should not be quick-tempered. We should not fly off the handle easily. We should not try to get even with people when they have wronged us. Instead we should display what someone has called “a kind of conquering patience.”

When Corrie and Betsie ten Boom were enduring indescribable sufferings in the concentration camp, Betsie would often say that they must help these people after they were released. They simply had to find a way to help them. Corrie thought, of course, that her sister was planning some program to rehabilitate the victims of the Nazis. It wasn’t till later that Corrie realized that Betsie meant her persecutors. She wanted to find some way to teach them to love. Corrie commented, “And I wondered, not for the first time, what sort of a person she was, this sister of mine...what kind of road she followed while I trudged beside her on the all-too-solid earth” (The Hiding Place, p. 175).

The road Betsie followed was the road of longsuffering. And Corrie walked it too, in spite of her humble disclaimer.

The fruit of the Spirit is...kindness

“The fruit of the Spirit is...kindness...” (Gal. 5:22 NASB)

The King James Version has the word “gentleness” here but almost all modern versions read “kindness.” “The fruit of the Spirit is...kindness.”

Kindness describes the gentle, gracious, generous disposition that results in the doing of favors, the showing of mercies, and the bestowing of benefits on others. The kind person is gracious, not harsh; sympathetic, not indifferent; and helpful, not uninvolved. He is considerate, compassionate and charitable.

There is a natural kindness which even the people of the world show to one another. But the kindness which is produced by the Spirit is supernatural. It goes above and beyond anything that man is capable of doing by himself. It enables a believer to lend, hoping for nothing in return. It enables him to show hospitality to those who cannot repay him. It enables him to reward every insult with a courtesy. A Christian university student displayed this supernatural kindness toward another student who was an alcoholic. The latter had become so disgusting that he had been rejected by his classmates and finally was evicted from his quarters. The Christian had an extra bed in his room and so invited the drunk to live with him. Many nights the believer had to clean up his roommate's vomit, take his clothes off, bathe him and put him to bed. It was a magnificent display of Christian kindness.

And—to complete the story—it paid off. Once, during a sober period, the dissolute fellow asked with irritation, “Say, look here, why are you doing all this for me? What are you after?” The Christian replied, “I'm after your soul”—and he got it.

When Dr. Ironside was cleaning out the cellar one day, he called a Jewish junk dealer to cart away the papers, magazines, rags and scrap metal. Dr. Ironside pretended to bargain seriously for a good price for the junk, but the junk man won, of course. When he was taking the last load out to his truck, kindly H. A. I. called him back, saying, “Oh, I forgot something. I want to give you this in the Name of the Lord Jesus.” And he handed him fifty cents.

The junk dealer went away, saying, “No one ever gave me anything in the Name of Jesus before.”

“The fruit of the Spirit is...kindness.”

The fruit of the Spirit is...goodness

“The fruit of the Spirit is...goodness...” (Gal. 5:22)

Goodness means excellence of character. Someone has defined it as “virtue equipped at every point,” which simply means that the person possessing it is kind, virtuous and righteous in every area of life.

Goodness is the opposite of badness. A bad man may be deceitful, immoral, treacherous, unjust, cruel, selfish, hateful, covetous, and/or intemperate. The good man, though not perfect, exemplifies truth, justice, purity and other similarly desirable traits.

The Apostle Paul distinguishes between a righteous man and a good man in Romans 5:7. The righteous man is just, honest and straightforward in his dealings, but he may be icily detached from others. The good man, on the other hand, is affectionate and lovable. One would scarcely die for a righteous man, but one might die for a good man.

And yet we must remember that goodness can be firm. It would not be good to condone or overlook sin. And so goodness can rebuke, correct and discipline. We see this when the Lord Jesus, who is goodness incarnate, cleansed the Temple.

A unique feature of goodness is that it can overcome evil. Paul wrote to the Roman believers, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). When we allow someone else’s hatred to ruin our disposition, we have been overcome by his evil. But when we rise above it and show grace, mercy and love, we have overcome evil with good.

Murdoch Campbell tells of a godly Highland minister whose wife tried to make life miserable for him. One day as he was reading his Bible, she snatched it from his hands and threw it in the fire! He looked up into her face and said quietly, “I don’t think I’ve ever sat by a warmer fire.” His goodness overcame her evil. She became a lovely, gracious wife. As Campbell comments, “His Jezebel became a Lydia. His thorn became a lily.” Goodness had conquered!

The fruit of the Spirit is...faith

“The fruit of the Spirit is...faith...” (Gal. 5:22)

This fruit of the Spirit is generally understood as being faithfulness. It is not the faith that saves, or the trust we exercise in God day by day (although it may include that). Rather it is our fidelity and dependability in our dealings with the Lord and with one another. Someone has defined it as being “true to oneself, to one’s nature, to any promise given, to any trust committed.”

When we say that a man’s word is his bond, we mean that in dealing with him, no written contract is necessary. If he has agreed to do something, he can be depended on to do it.

The faithful man keeps appointments on time, pays his bills on schedule, attends the meetings of the local fellowship regularly, performs tasks assigned to him without having to be constantly reminded. He is unswervingly true to his marriage vows and unfailing in the discharge of his family responsibilities. He is conscientious in setting money aside for the work of the Lord and careful also in his stewardship of time and talents.

Faithfulness means being true to one’s word, even at great personal cost. The faithful man “swears to his own hurt, and does not change” (Psa. 15:4c NASB). In other words, he does not cancel one supper engagement when he receives another that promises a better menu or more congenial company. He does not renege on a work assignment to go on a recreational trip (unless he first arranges for a satisfactory substitute). He sells his house at the agreed price even if someone later offers him \$10,000 more.

The ultimate in faithfulness is being willing to die rather than renounce one’s loyalty to Christ. When the king demanded that a faithful Christian retract his confession of Christ, the man replied, “The heart thought it; the mouth spoke it; the hand subscribed it; and if need be, by God’s grace the blood shall seal it.” When Polycarp was offered life in exchange for a denial of the Lord, he chose rather to be burned at the stake, saying, “These eighty-six years have I served my Lord. He never did me any harm, and I cannot deny my Lord and Master now.”

The martyrs were faithful unto death, and will receive a crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

The fruit of the Spirit is...meekness

“The fruit of the Spirit is...meekness...” (Gal. 5:23)

When we think of meekness, we are apt to think of Caspar Milquetoast, the comic strip character who was the embodiment of timidity and weakness. But this fruit of the Spirit is something very different. It comes from supernatural power, not from weakness.

It refers first of all to a believer’s loving submission to all God’s dealings in his life. The meek man bows to the will of God without rebellion, questioning or complaint. He reckons that “God is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind.” Realizing that there is no chance or accident, he believes that God is working everything together for good in his life.

Meekness also includes the believer’s relationship with others. Here he is self-effacing, not self-assertive and humble, not haughty. The meek man is one who practices brokenness. When he has said or done something wrong, he conquers pride by saying, “I am sorry. Please forgive me!” He would rather lose face than self-respect. When he suffers for doing what is right, he endures it patiently without any thought of fighting back. When he is falsely accused, he refrains from defending himself. As Trench says, the meek man accepts the injuries and insults of others as permitted by God for his chastening and purifying.

Someone has defined a meek man as “one who accepts the will of God without resentment, who can afford to be gentle and mild because of inward strength, and who is under the perfect control of God.” When a parishioner told Dr. Alexander Whyte that a fellow minister was being castigated as an unbeliever, Dr. Whyte blazed with indignation. When the parishioner added that the critic said that Dr. Whyte himself was not a true believer, he said, “Please leave the office so that I can be alone and examine my heart before the Lord.” THAT is meekness.

We are all called to take the yoke of Him who is “meek and lowly in heart.” As we do so, we find rest for our souls and will ultimately inherit the earth.

The fruit of the Spirit is...temperance

“The fruit of the Spirit is...temperance...” (Gal. 5:23)

The preferred rendering of this last fruit of the Spirit is self-control. Temperance has become associated particularly with restraint in the use of intoxicating drinks. Self-control carries the thought of moderation or abstinence in every area of life.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, the believer is enabled to exercise self-control over his thought life, his appetite for food and drink, his speech, his sex life, his temper and every other power that God has given him. He need not be enslaved by any passion or desire.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that an athlete practices self-control in all things (1 Cor. 9:25). He himself was determined that he would not be enslaved by anything (1 Cor. 6:12) and so he pommelled his body and subdued it, lest after preaching to others, he himself should be disqualified (See 1 Cor. 9:27 RSV).

The disciplined Christian avoids overeating. If coffee, tea or Cokes have a grip on him, he kicks the habit. He refuses to be mastered by tobacco in any form. He carefully avoids use of tranquilizers, sleeping pills or other pharmaceuticals, except where medically prescribed. He controls the time given to sleeping. If he is plagued by the problem of lust, he learns to expel impure thoughts, concentrate on a clean thought life, and keep busy with constructive activity. To him every addiction or besetting sin is a Goliath to be conquered.

We often hear Christians complain that they can't break a certain habit. Such defeatism guarantees failure. It means that the Holy Spirit is not able to give the needed victory. The fact is that unconverted people, who do not have the Spirit, are often able to quit smoking or drinking or gambling or swearing. How much more easily should Christians be able to do it through the indwelling Spirit!

Self-control, like the other eight fruits of the Spirit, is supernatural. It enables believers to exercise discipline over themselves in ways that others cannot match.

Make friends quickly with your opponent

“Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way; in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison” (Mt. 5:25 NASB)

One of the surface lessons we learn from this passage is that Christians should not be prone to engage in lawsuits. It is a natural reaction to rush to court to seek redress for grievances and damages. But the believer is guided by higher principles than natural reactions. The will of God often cuts across the grain of nature.

Our law courts today are glutted with accident claims, malpractice suits, divorce cases and inheritance claims. In many cases, people rush to the lawyer in the hope of getting rich quick. But the Christian must settle things by the power of love and not by the processes of law. As someone has said, “If you go in for legal processes, then legal processes will get you, and you will pay the last penny.”

The only one who is sure to win is the lawyer; his fee is assured. A cartoon pictured the process this way. A plaintiff was pulling the head of a cow, the defendant was pulling the tail—and the lawyer was milking the cow.

In 1 Corinthians 6 Christians are positively forbidden to go to law against other Christians. For one thing they should take their disputes to some wise man in the church. But even beyond that they should be willing to be wronged and cheated rather than go to law before the judges of this world’s system. This, incidentally, would rule out all cases of divorce involving believing partners.

But what about cases between a believer and an unbeliever? Doesn’t the Christian have to stand up for his rights? The answer is that it is far better to forego his rights in order to demonstrate that Christ makes a difference in a person’s life. It does not require divine life to institute a suit against someone who has wronged him. But it does take divine life to commit his cause to God and use the case as an opportunity to witness to the saving, transforming power of Christ. As much as possible, he should live at peace with all men (Rom. 12:18).

“A man started to build a fence between himself and his neighbor. The neighbor came and said; ‘When you bought that lot you bought a court case along with it. That fence is going to be five feet in my land.’ The man replied, ‘I knew I would always have a nice neighbor next to me. I’ll tell you what I suggest: You put up the fence where you think it should go, send me the bill and I’ll pay for it.’ The fence was never put up. No need!” (E. Stanley Jones).

Are there not twelve hours in the day?

“Are there not twelve hours in the day?” Qohn 11:9)

When Jesus suggested going back to Judea, the disciples were terrified. The Jews had tried to stone Him there only recently, and now He was talking about a return visit. In answer to the disciples' apprehension, Jesus said, “Are there not twelve hours in the day?” At first glance, the question seems to be completely disconnected from the conversation. But what the Savior was saying was this! The working day is made up of twelve hours. When a person is yielded to God, every day has its appointed program. Nothing can thwart the accomplishing of that program. So even if Jesus went back to Jerusalem, and even if the Jews tried to kill Him again, they could not succeed. His work was not finished. His hour had not yet come.

For every child of God it is true that he is “immortal till his work is done.” This should impart great peace and poise to our lives. If we are living in the will of God, and if we follow reasonable rules of health and safety, we will never die a moment ahead of time. Nothing can come to us apart from His permissive will.

Many Christians worry themselves sick over the food they eat, the water they drink, the air they breathe. In our pollution-conscious society there is always something to suggest that death is knocking at the door. But this anxiety is unnecessary. “Are there not twelve hours in the day?” Hasn't God placed a hedge around the believer (Job 1:10) which the devil is powerless to penetrate?

If we believe this, it will save us from a lot of second-guessing. We will not say, “If the ambulance had only arrived sooner” or “If the doctor had only detected the growth four weeks earlier” or “If my husband had only taken a different airline.” Our lives are planned by infinite wisdom and in infinite power. He has a perfect timetable for each of us, and His trains run on perfect schedule.

Adam...begat a son in his own likeness

“Adam...begat a son in his own likeness, after his image.” (Gen. 5:3)

It is a basic fact of physical life that we beget children in our own likeness, after our image. Adam begat a son in his own likeness, and called his name Seth. When people saw Seth they probably said what people have been saying ever since: “Like father, like son.”

It is also a sobering fact of spiritual life that we beget children in our own image. When we are used to introduce others to the Lord Jesus, they insensibly take on characteristics similar to our own. Here it is not a matter of heredity but of imitation. They look up to us as the ideal of what Christians should be and unconsciously pattern their behavior after ours. Soon they manifest the family likeness.

This means that the place I give to the Bible in my life will set the standard for my children in the faith. It means that my emphasis on prayer will become theirs also. If I am a worshiper, this characteristic will probably rub off on them too.

If I adhere to the stern demands of discipleship, they will figure that this is the norm for all believers. On the other hand, if I water down the Savior's words and live for wealth, fame and pleasure, I can expect them to follow my lead.

Zealous soul winners tend to beget on-fire personal workers. Those who find pleasure and profit in Scripture memory pass on the vision to their spiritual children.

If you are irregular about attendance at the meetings of the assembly, you can hardly expect your proteges to be any different. If you are usually late, they will probably be late too. If you sit in the back row, don't be surprised if that influences them to do likewise.

On the other hand, if you are disciplined, dependable, punctual and vitally involved, your Timothys will follow your faith.

So the question for each of us is, “Am I content to beget children in my own image?” The Apostle Paul could say, “Be followers of me” (1 Cor. 4:16). Can we say that?

According to your faith be it unto you

“According to your faith be it unto you.” (Mt. 9:29)

When Jesus asked two blind men if they believed that He was able to give them sight, they replied that they did. As He touched their eyes, He said, “According to your faith be it unto you,” and their eyes were opened.

It would be easy to conclude from this that if we just have enough faith, we can get anything we want, whether wealth, healing, or whatever. But that is not the case. Faith must be based upon some word of the Lord, some promise of God, some command of Scripture. Otherwise it is nothing more than wishful credulity.

What we learn from our text is that the extent to which we appropriate the promises of God depends on the measure of our faith. After promising King Joash that he would have victory over the Syrians, Elisha told him to smite the ground with his arrows. Joash smote three times, then stopped. Elisha angrily announced that the king would have only three victories over Syria whereas he could have had five or six (2 Kgs. 13:14-19). The measure of his victory depended on his faith.

It is that way in the life of discipleship. We are called to walk by faith, to forsake all. We are forbidden to lay up treasures on earth. How far do we dare to go in obeying these commands? Should we do away with life insurance, health insurance, savings accounts, stocks and bonds? The answer is, “According to your faith be it unto you.” If you have faith to say, “I will work hard for my current needs and the needs of my family, put everything above that in the work of the Lord, and trust God for the future,” then you can be absolutely certain that the Lord will take care of your future. He has said that He would and His word cannot fail. If, on the other hand, we feel we should exercise “human prudence” by providing for a rainy day, God will still love us and will still use us according to the measure of our faith.

The life of faith is like the waters that flow from the Temple in Ezekiel 47. You can go in to your ankles, to your knees, to your loins—or, better still, you can swim in them.

God’s choicest blessings, of course, are for those who trust Him most fully. Once we have proved His faithfulness and sufficiency, we want to put away the crutches, props and pillows of “common sense.” Or, as someone has said, “Once you walk on the water, you never want to ride in a boat again.”

How can ye believe

“How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?” (John 5:44)

By these words our Lord indicates that we cannot at the same time seek man’s approbation and the approval of God. He also affirms that once we embark on a quest for human accreditation, we have dealt a body-blow to the life of faith.

In similar vein the Apostle Paul expresses the moral inconsistency between coveting man’s praise and God’s: “...for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10b).

Let me illustrate. Here is a young believer who wants an advanced degree in some area of theology. But he wants the degree from an accredited university. It must be from an accredited institution. Unfortunately the only accredited universities offering that degree are ones that deny the great fundamental truths of the faith. To list that degree after his name means so much to him that he is willing to take it from men who, though known as scholars, are enemies of the Cross of Christ. Almost inevitably he becomes defiled in the process. He never again speaks with the same conviction.

The desire to be known in the world as a scholar or a scientist has built-in hazards. There is the subtle danger to compromise, to sacrifice Biblical principles for a more liberal stance, to become more critical of fundamentalists than of modernists.

Christian schools face an agonizing choice—whether or not to seek accreditation from a recognized agency in the educational world. The lust to be “accredited” often results in a watering down of their Bible emphasis and the adoption of carnal principles laid down by men who do not have the Spirit.

The thing to be greatly desired is to be “approved unto God.” The alternative is too costly, for “on the coin for which we sell the truth, there is at all times, faint as it may be, the image of Anti-christ” (F. W. Grant)

But God hath chosen

“But God hath chosen...the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.” (1 Cor. 1:27)

If a carpenter can take waste, scrap lumber and make a splendid piece of furniture out of it, it brings more credit to him than if he uses only the finest of materials. So when God uses things that are foolish, worthless and weak to accomplish glorious results, it magnifies His skill and power. People cannot attribute the success to the raw materials; they are forced to confess that it can only be the Lord who deserves the credit.

The book of Judges provides repeated illustrations of God using the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. Ehud, for example, was a lefthanded Benjamite. The left hand in Scripture speaks of weakness. Yet Ehud brought down Eglon, king of Moab and won rest for Israel for eighty years (Judg. 3:12-30).

Shamgar went into battle wielding an oxgoad, and yet with this unlikely weapon he slew 600 Philistines and delivered Israel (3:31). Deborah was a member of the “weaker sex,” yet by the power of God she won a smashing victory over the Canaanites (4:1; 5:31). Barak’s 10,000 foot soldiers were a poor match, humanly speaking, against Sisera’s 900 chariots of iron, yet Barak swept the field (4:10, 13). Jael, another member of the “weaker sex,” killed Sisera with such a non-weapon as a tent pin (4:21). According to the Septuagint, she held the pin with her left hand. Gideon marched against the Midianites with an army that the Lord had reduced from 32,000 to 300 (7:1-7). His army is pictured under the figure of a cake of barley bread. Since barley bread was the food of the poor, the picture is one of poverty and feebleness (7:13). The unconventional weapons of Gideon’s army were earthenware pitchers, torches and trumpets (7:10). And as if that were not enough to insure defeat, the pitchers had to be broken (7:19). Abimelech was felled by a woman’s hand hurling a piece of millstone (9:53). The name Tola means a worm, an inauspicious title for a military deliverer (10:1). When we first meet Samson’s mother, she is a nameless, barren woman (13:2). Finally, Samson killed 1000 Philistines with nothing more lethal than the jawbone of an ass (15:15).

He will destroy them

“He will destroy them...so that you may drive them out and destroy them.” (Deut. 9:3 NASB)

In all of God’s dealings with mankind, there is a curious merging of the divine and the human.

Take the Bible, for example. There is the divine Author, and there are human authors, who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

As far as salvation is concerned, it is of the Lord from start to finish. There is nothing a man can do to earn or deserve it. And yet he must receive it by faith. God clearly elects individuals to salvation, but they must enter in at the strait gate. And so Paul writes to Titus of “the faith of God’s elect (Tit. 1:1).

From the divine standpoint, we are “kept by the power of God.” Yet there is also the human side—“through faith” (1 Pet. 1:5). “Kept by the power of God through faith.”

Only God can make me holy. Yet He will not make me holy without my cooperation. I must add to my faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love (2 Pet. 1:5-7). I must put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:13-18). I must put off the old man and put on the new man (Eph. 4:22-24). I must walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16).

You find the merging of the divine and the human in the whole area of Christian ministry. Paul plants, Apollos waters, but God gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6).

When we come to leadership in the local church, we learn that only God can make a man an elder. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that it was the Holy Spirit who had made them overseers (Acts 20:28). Yet a man’s own will is involved. He must desire to exercise oversight (1 Tim. 3:1 JND).

Finally, in the text with which we began, we see that it is God who destroys our enemies, but we must drive them out and destroy them (Deut. 9:3 NASB).

In order to be balanced Christians, we must recognize this merging of the divine and human. We must pray as if everything depended on God but work as if everything depended on us. Or to borrow the wartime exhortation, “Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition.” As someone suggested, we must pray for a good harvest but keep on hoeing.

Jesus Christ...is Lord of all

“Jesus Christ...is Lord of all “(Acts 10:36)

One of the great themes of the New Testament is the lordship of Jesus Christ. Over and over we are reminded that He is Lord and that we should give Him that place in our lives.

To crown Jesus as Lord means to surrender our lives to Him. It means to have no will of our own, but to want His will supremely. It means the willingness to go anywhere, do anything, and say whatever He desires. When Joshua asked the captain of the Lord’s army, “Are you for us or against us?” the captain replied, in effect, “I didn’t come either to assist or hinder you. I came to take over” (see Josh. 5:14). So the Lord doesn’t come as sort of a glorified assistant; He comes to take supreme command of our lives.

The importance of lordship can be seen in the fact that whereas the word “Savior” occurs only 24 times in the New Testament, the word “Lord” occurs 522 times. It is also significant that whereas men invariably say “Savior and Lord,” in that order, the Scriptures always say “Lord and Savior.”

To make Jesus our Lord is the most reasonable, logical thing we can do. He died for us; the least we can do is live for Him. He bought us; we are no longer our own. “Love so amazing, so divine, demands our souls, our lives, our all.”

If we can trust Him for our eternal salvation, can we not trust Him for the management of our lives? “There is a lack of sincerity about committing the eternal soul to God and holding back the mortal life—professing to give Him the greater and withholding the lesser” (R. A. Laidlaw).

How then, do we crown Jesus as Lord? There must be a crisis experience when for the first time we turn over the controls to Him, when every area of our life is placed under His sovereign sway. It is a total commitment with “no reserve, no retreat, no regrets.”

From then on it becomes a matter of moment by moment yielding to His guidance, presenting our bodies to Him so that He can live His life through us. The crisis becomes a process.

It makes good sense! With His wisdom, love and power, He can do a far better job of running our lives than we can.

For the equipping of the saints

“For the equipping of the saints for the work of service,” (Eph. 4:12, NASB)

A revolutionary insight! The gifts in Ephesians 4 are given to perfect the saints for the work of the ministry. As soon as the saints can carry on, the gift can move on.

This means that success in Christian work is working one’s self out of a job in the shortest possible time, then looking for new worlds to conquer.

This is what Paul did. He went to Thessalonica, for instance, preached to the Jews for three Sabbaths, and left behind a functioning assembly. No doubt that was an exception as far as speed in the establishing of a work was concerned. The longest Paul ever stayed in one place at a time was two years. That was at Ephesus.

God never intended that His saints should be perpetually dependent on any of the gifts mentioned. The gifts are expendable. If the saints remain professional sermon-tasters, never becoming involved in the work of service, they never develop spiritually the way they should and the world will never be evangelized the way God intended.

William Dillon said that a successful foreign missionary never has a foreign successor. That should be equally true of workers in the homeland—when the worker’s task is completed, the saints themselves should take over, not start looking for another pulpiteer.

Too often we preachers look at our position as a lifetime appointment. We reason that others couldn’t do the work as well. We excuse our permanence by the fact that the attendance would drop if we left. We complain that others can’t do things right and that they’re not dependable. But the fact is that they have to learn. And in order to learn they have to be given opportunities. There must be training, delegation of responsibilities, and evaluation of progress.

When the saints reach the point where they feel they can carry on without a particular preacher or teacher, that’s no reason for him to sulk or nurse wounded feelings. It’s cause for celebration. The worker is released to go where he’s more needed.

It’s a bad scene when the work of God is permanently built around a man, no matter how gifted he is. His great aim should be to multiply his effectiveness by building up the saints to the point where they are no longer dependent on him. In a world like ours, he never needs to be without work in other places.

A wise man will hear

“A wise man will hear.” (Prov. 1:5)

The essential difference between the wise man and the fool in the book of Proverbs is that the wise man will hear and the fool won't.

It isn't a question of the fool's mental capacity. Actually he may have unusual intellectual ability. But he just cannot be told anything. He labors under the fatal delusion that his knowledge is infinite and his judgments are infallible. If his friends try to counsel him, they receive scorn for their efforts. They watch him trying to escape the inevitable results of sinful and stupid actions, but they are helpless to avert the crash. And so he goes on from one crisis to another. Now his finances are a disaster. Now his personal life is in shambles. Now his business totters on the edge of chaos. But he rationalizes that life is giving him a bad deal. It never occurs to him that he is his own worst enemy. He is generous in dispensing advice to others, oblivious of his inability to run his own life. A compulsive talker, he holds forth with the aplomb of an oracle.

The wise man is made of better stuff. He realizes that everyone's mental wires have been somewhat crossed by the Fall. He knows that others can sometimes see aspects of a problem that he has overlooked. He is willing to acknowledge that his memory may be faulty at times. He is teachable, welcoming any input that will help him make the right decisions. Actually he solicits the advice of others because he knows that “in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov. 11:14). Like everyone else, he sometimes makes mistakes. But he has this saving virtue that he learns from his mistakes and makes every failure a springboard to success. He is grateful for a deserved rebuke and is willing to say, “I was wrong. I am sorry.” Wise children submit to parental discipline; fools rebel. Wise young people obey the scriptural precepts concerning moral purity; fools do their own thing. Wise adults judge everything by whether it is well-pleasing to the Lord; fools act according to what pleases themselves.

And so it is that the wise grow wiser, and the fools are stuck fast in the rut of their own folly.

I dwell among mine own people

“I dwell among mine own people.” (2 Kings 4:13)

A prominent woman in Shunam showed hospitality to Elisha whenever he passed that way. Eventually she suggested to her husband that they build an extra bedroom so that the prophet would have his own room. Desiring to reward this gracious hostess, Elisha asked what he could do for her—perhaps an introduction to the king or to the commander-in-chief. Her simple reply was “I dwell among my own people.” In other words, “I am happy with my lot in life. I love the common people among whom I live. I don’t particularly desire to move among the upper crust. Hobnobbing with famous people holds no special attraction for me.”

She was a wise woman! Those who are never content unless they’re socializing with the famous, the wealthy, the aristocratic often have to learn that most of earth’s choicest people never make the front page—or the society page, for that matter.

I have had some contact with big names in the evangelical world, but I have to confess that, for the most part, the experience has been disappointing. And the more I have seen of what is ballyhooed in the Christian press, the more disillusioned I have become. If I have to make a choice, give me those humble, godly, solid citizens who are unknown in this world but well-known in heaven.

A. W. Tozer mirrored my sentiments well when he wrote, “I believe in saints. I’ve met the comics; I’ve met the promoters; I’ve met the founder who puts his name on the front of the building so people will know he founded it. I’ve met converted cowboys not too well converted. I have met all kinds of weird Christians throughout the United States and Canada, but my heart is looking for saints. I want to meet the people who are like the Lord Jesus Christ...Actually, what we want and ought to have is the beauty of the Lord our God in human breasts. A winsome, magnetic saint is worth 500 promoters and gadgeteers and religious engineers.”

Charles Simeon voiced similar sentiments. “From the first day I set off to the present hour...my intercourse has been with the excellent of the earth, and every one of them striving to the utmost of his power to show me kindness for the Lord’s sake.”

So—orchids to the woman of Shunem for the spiritual insight in her words, “I dwell among mine own people.”

I will not eat until I have told my errand

“I will not eat until I have told my errand.” (Gen. 24:33)

Just as Abraham’s servant had a sense of urgency in connection with his mission, so should we. This does not mean we must race around in all directions at once. It does not mean that we must do everything in nervous haste. But it does mean that we should give ourselves to the task before us as a matter of top priority.

We should adopt the attitude expressed in Robert Frost’s lines:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,

But I have promises to keep

And miles to go before I sleep.

Amy Carmichael captured the spirit when she wrote: “The vows of God are on me. I may not stay to play with shadows or pluck earthly flowers till I my work have done and rendered up an account.”

In another place, she wrote:

Only twelve short hours—O never

Let the sense of urgency

Die in us, Good Shepherd, ever

Let us search the hills with Thee.

It is said that Charles Simeon kept a picture of Henry Martyn in his study, and that everywhere he went in the room, it seemed that Martyn was looking at him and saying, “Be earnest, be earnest; don’t trifle, don’t trifle.” And Simeon would reply, “Yes, I will be in earnest; I will, I will be in earnest; I will not trifle, for souls are perishing, and Jesus is to be glorified.”

Hear the urgency in the words of the intrepid Apostle Paul: “This one thing I do... I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13, 14).

And did not our blessed Savior live with a sense of urgency. He said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished” (Luke 12:50).

There is no excuse for Christians to rest on their oars.

Lord, behold their threatenings

“And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.” (Acts 4:29)

When the early Christians were undergoing persecution, they did not wait for their circumstances to change. Instead they glorified God in the circumstances.

Too often we fail to follow their example. We postpone action until conditions are more favorable. We see roadblocks as hindrances rather than as stepping-stones. We excuse our copping-out on the ground that our circumstances are not ideal.

The student remains uninvolved in Christian service until he graduates. Then he is preoccupied with romance and marriage. After that the pressures of employment and family life keep him from throwing himself into the work. He decides to wait for retirement; then he will be free to give the rest of his life to the Lord. By the time he retires his energy and vision are gone and he succumbs to a life of leisure.

Or it may be that we find ourselves having to work with people who rub us the wrong way. Perhaps these people have positions of leadership in the local church. Though they are faithful and hardworking, we find them objectionable. So what do we do? We sulk on the sidelines, waiting for a few first-class funerals. But it doesn't work. People like that always have surprising longevity. Waiting for funerals is unproductive.

Joseph didn't wait to get out of prison to make his life count; he had a ministry for God in prison. Daniel became a power for God during the Babylonian captivity. If he had waited till the exile was over it would have been too late. It was during Paul's imprisonment that he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. He didn't wait for his circumstances to improve.

The simple fact is that circumstances are never ideal in this life. And for the Christian, there is no promise that they are going to improve. So in service, as in salvation, now is the accepted time.

Luther said, “He who desires to wait until the occasion seems completely favorable for his work will never find it.” And Solomon warned that “he who watches the wind will not sow, and he who looks at the clouds will not reap” (Eccl. 11:4 NASB).

Cast thy bread upon the waters

“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.” (Eccl. 11:1)

Bread here is probably used, figuratively, for the grain from which it is made. In Egypt, seed was sown on flooded areas. As the waters receded, the crop came forth. But it did not happen immediately. The harvest came “after many days.”

Today we live in an “instant” society, and we want instant results. We have instant mashed potatoes, instant tea, coffee and cocoa, instant soup and instant oatmeal. Also, we have instant credit at the bank and instant replays on TV.

But it is not like that in Christian life and service. Our kindnesses are not rewarded immediately. Our prayers are not always answered right away. And our service does not usually produce immediate results.

The Bible repeatedly uses the agricultural cycle to illustrate spiritual service. “A sower went forth to sow...” “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” “First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.” It is a gradual process, over an extended period of time. The squash grows more quickly than an oak tree, but it still takes time.

Therefore, to expect instant results from our uncalculating deeds of kindness is unrealistic. To expect immediate answers to prayer is immature. To press for a decision the first time a person hears the Gospel is unwise. Certainly the normal experience is to give, pray and serve untiringly over a protracted period of time. You do so with the confidence that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. After a while, you see results, not enough to inflate you with pride, but enough to encourage you to press on. The full results will not be known till we reach heaven—which is—after all, the best and safest place to see the fruit of our labors.

Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful

“Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful.” (Prov. 14:13)

Nothing is perfect in this life. All laughter is mingled with sorrow. Every diamond has a flaw. Each person has some character defect. In all of life, there’s a worm in the apple.

It is good to be idealistic; God has set within us a longing for perfection. But it is also good to be realistic; we never will find absolute perfection under the sun.

It is easy for young people to think that their family is the only one that has quarrels. Or that their parents are the only ones who don’t have scintillating TV personalities.

It is easy to be disappointed with our local church fellowship, all the time supposing that everything is rosy in the church across the street.

Or it is easy to go through life forever looking for friends who are absolutely ideal. We expect perfection in others even though we can’t produce it ourselves.

We should face the fact squarely that everyone has personality flaws, some more glaring than others. Often the more outstanding a person is, the more obvious his faults are. Instead of being disappointed with the flaws, we would do well to emphasize the good qualities in other believers. Everyone has some of these too. But only one Person has all of them combined, that is, the Lord Jesus.

I often think that the Lord has purposely left us with an unsatisfied desire for Perfection down here so that we will look off to Him in whom there is neither spot nor blemish. He represents the sum of all moral beauties. There is no disappointment in Him.

In pressure thou hast enlarged me

“In pressure thou hast enlarged me.” (Psa. 4:1 Darby)

It is true that “calm seas never made a sailor.” It is through tribulation that we develop patience. It is through pressure that we are enlarged.

Even men of the world have realized that difficulties have educative and broadening values. Charles Kettering once said, “Problems are the price of progress. Don’t bring me anything but problems. Good news weakens me.”

But especially from the Christian world come testimonies to the profit derived from trials.

We read, for instance, “To suffer passes, but to have suffered endures for eternity.”

The poet adds this confirmation:

And many a rapturous minstrel among those sons of light

Will say of his sweetest music, “I learnt it in the night;”

And many a rolling anthem that fills the Father’s home

Sobbed out its first rehearsal in the shade of a darkened room.

Spurgeon wrote, in his inimitable way:

“I am afraid that all the grace I have got out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost lie on a penny. But the good I have received from my sorrows and pains and griefs is altogether incalculable. What do I not owe to the hammer and the file? Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house.”

And yet why should we be surprised? Does not the unnamed writer to the Hebrews tell us, “Now obviously no ‘chastening’ seems pleasant at the time: it is in fact most unpleasant. Yet when it is all over we can see that it has quietly produced the fruit of real goodness in the character of those who have accepted it” (Heb. 12:11, Phillips).

Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

“Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25)

When there are mysteries in life too deep for us to fathom, we can relax in the confidence that the Judge of all the earth is the God of absolute and infinite righteousness.

There is the question of the status of children who die before reaching the age of accountability. For many of us, it is enough to know that “of such is the kingdom of God.” We believe that they are safe through the blood of Jesus. But for others who are still not satisfied, the words of our verse should be sufficient. God can be counted on to do what is right.

There is the perennial problem of election and predestination. Does God choose some to salvation without at the same time choosing some to be damned? After the Calvinists and Arminians have all had their say, we can have full confidence that there is no unrighteousness with God.

Again there is the seeming injustice that the wicked often prosper while the righteous are passing through deep tribulation. There is the recurring question as to the fate of the heathen who have never heard the Gospel. Men puzzle over why God ever allowed sin to enter. We often stand dumb in the face of tragedies, of poverty and hunger, of horrible physical and mental impairments. Doubt continually murmurs, “If God is in control, why does He permit it all?”

Faith replies, “Wait till the last chapter is written. God hasn’t made His first mistake. When we are able to see things from a clearer perspective, we will realize that the Judge of all the earth has done right.”

God writes in characters too grand
For our short sight to understand;
We catch but broken strokes, and try
To fathom all the mystery
Of withered hopes, of death, of life,
The endless war, the useless strife,—
But there, with larger, clearer sight,
We shall see this—His way was right.
John Oxenham

When a man's folly brings his way to ruin

“When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord.” (Prov. 19:3, RSV)

There is no book on psychology like the Bible. It gives insights on human behavior that you cannot find in any other place. Here, for instance, it describes a man whose own waywardness wrecks his life, yet rather than shoulder the blame himself, he turns around and vents his spleen on the Lord.

How true to life! We have known people who made a profession of being Christians but who then became involved in vile forms of sexual immorality. This brought them to shame, disgrace and financial ruin. But would they repent? No, they turned against Christ, renounced the faith, and became militant atheists.

More often than we probably realize, apostasy has its roots in moral failure. A. J. Pollock told of meeting a young man who began to spew out all kinds of doubts and denials concerning the Scriptures. When Pollock asked him, “What sin have you been indulging in?” the young man broke down and poured out a lurid story of sin and indecency.

The gross injustice lies in man's perverse way of raging against the Lord for the consequences of his own sins. W. F. Adeney said, “It is monstrous to charge the providence of God with the consequences of actions which He has forbidden.”

How true it is that “everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd,”(John 3:20)! The Apostle Peter reminds us that scoffers “walking after their own lusts” are “willingly ignorant”. Pollock comments, “This brings out a most important truth that the inability and reluctance to receive the truth of God is very largely because of what is moral. Often a man wants to go on with his sin, or the flesh has a natural dislike to God. Maybe the searching character of the light, and the restraining influence of the Bible are resented. It is not the head that is so much at fault as the heart.”

the division of soul and spirit

“...the division of soul and spirit.” (Heb. 4:12 NASB)

When the Bible speaks of man in his tripartite being, the order is always spirit, soul and body. When men use these terms together, the order almost invariably is body, soul and spirit. Sin has turned God’s order upside down. Now man puts the body first, then the soul, and the spirit last of all.

The two non-material parts of man’s being are his spirit and his soul. The spirit enables him to have fellowship with God. The soul has to do with his emotions and passions. Although it is not possible for us to distinguish the spirit and soul in minute detail, we can and should learn to distinguish between what is spiritual and soulish.

What then is spiritual? Preaching that exalts Christ is. Prayer to God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit is. Service that is motivated by love to the Lord and empowered by the Spirit is. Worship that is in spirit and truth is.

And what is soulish? Preaching that draws attention to man, to his oratory, commanding presence or wit. Mechanical prayers with no real heart involvement but designed to make an impression on others. Service that is self-appointed, carried on for monetary reward, or employing carnal methods. Worship that revolves around visible, material aids rather than the unseen spiritual realities.

What does the Church of God have to do with consecrated buildings, stained glass windows, ecclesiastical vestments, honorific titles, candles, incense and all such trappings? Or, coming closer to home, what does the Church have to do with Madison Avenue promotional efforts, with fund raising for hire, with evangelistic gimmickry, with personality cults, with musical extravaganzas?

The advertising in the average Christian magazine is enough to show how soulish we have become.

Paul draws a distinction between service that is gold, silver, precious stones and that which is wood, hay and stubble (1 Cor. 3:12). Everything that is spiritual will resist the fire of God’s discerning judgment. All that is soulish will go up in flames.

neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem

“...neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem.” (John 4:21)

For the Samaritans, the center of worship was on Mt. Gerizim. For the Jews, Jerusalem was the place on earth where God had placed His Name. But Jesus announced a new order to the woman of Samaria, “...the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.”

There is no longer a single place on earth which is designated for worship. In our dispensation, a Holy Person has taken the place of a holy site. The Lord Jesus Christ is now the gathering center of His people. Jacob’s words have found their fulfillment, “...unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10).

We gather to Him. We are not drawn together by a consecrated building with stained glass windows and organ music. We do not gather to a man, no matter how gifted or eloquent. The Lord Jesus is the divine magnet.

The place on earth is not important; we may meet in a chapel, a home, a field or a cave. In true worship, we enter by faith into the heavenly sanctuary. God the Father is there. The Lord Jesus is there. The angels are there in festal array. The saints of the Old Testament period are there. And the saints of the Church age who have died are there. And in such august company we are privileged to pour out our hearts in worship to God through the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. So while our bodies are still on earth, in spirit we pass “far, far above the restless world that wars below.”

Does this contradict the Savior’s words, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20)? No, this is also true. He is present in a special way when His people meet together in His Name. He takes our prayers and praises and presents them to the Father. What a privilege to have the Lord Jesus in our midst.

Owe no man anything

“Owe no man anything, but to love one another.” (Rom. 13:8)

We need not take this verse as a prohibition against any and every kind of debt. In our society we cannot escape telephone bills, gas and light bills, and water bills. Also under certain circumstances, it may be better discipleship to buy a house on a mortgage, thus building up equity, than to pay out the same monthly amount in rent. And it is impossible to run a business today without contracting some debts.

But the verse certainly does forbid other practices. It forbids going into debt when there is slim chance to repay. It forbids borrowing to purchase a product that depreciates in value. It forbids getting into arrears. It forbids going into debt for nonessentials. It forbids plunging into debt over our heads, the temptation to overspend on impulse because we have credit cards. It forbids wasting the Lord's money by paying exorbitant interest charges on the unpaid balance.

The verse is designed to save us from dunning creditors, from marital problems caused by overspending, and from bankruptcy court, all of which are devastating to the Christian testimony.

In general, we should practice financial responsibility by living modestly and within our means, always remembering that the borrower is slave to the lender (see Prov. 22:7).

The one debt that is always in order for the Christian is the obligation to love one another. We are obligated to love the unconverted and to share the Gospel with them (Rom. 1:14). We are obligated to love the brethren and to lay down our lives for them (1 John 3:16). This kind of indebtedness will never get us in trouble with the law. Rather, as Paul says, it is the fulfilling of the law.

He that is not against us is for us

“He that is not against us is for us.” (Luke 9:49, 50)

At first this seems to flatly contradict our previous verse, but there is no contradiction. There the Savior was speaking to the unbelieving Pharisees and saying, “If you aren’t for Me, you’re against Me.” But here it is a different matter. The disciples had just restrained a man who was casting out demons in Jesus’ Name. They had no better reason than that he didn’t associate with them. Jesus said, “Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.”

When it comes to salvation, those who are not for Christ are against Him. But when it comes to service, those who are not against Him are for Him.

We are not called to oppose others who are serving the Lord. It is a big, wide world, and there is plenty of room for all of us to get on with our work without stepping on one another’s toes. We should take to heart the Saviors words, “Forbid him not.”

At the same time we should notice that Jesus did not tell John and the others to go and join this man. Some use methods that are unacceptable to others. Some have different emphases in the message they preach. Some have greater light than others. And some have liberty to do things about which others have a bad conscience. We cannot expect to pour every believer into the exact same mold as ourselves. But we can rejoice in every triumph of the Gospel, as Paul did. He said, “Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice” (Phil. 1:15-18).

Sam Shoemaker asked the preceptive question, “When shall we learn that in the great warfare of light against darkness in our time, we are going to need the support of allies who may not be to our personal taste, and learn that it is going to take all Christians working and pulling together to make headway against the storm of anti-Christ?”

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit...” (Gal. 5:16)

Exactly what is involved in walking in the Spirit? Actually it is not as complicated and impractical as some tend to think. Here is what a day’s walk in the Spirit would be like!

First, you start the day in prayer. You confess all known sin in your life; this makes you a clean vessel and therefore usable by God. You spend time in praise and worship; this gets your soul in tune. You turn over control of your life to Him; this makes you available for the Lord to live His life through you. In this act of rededication, you “cease from needless scheming and leave the ruling of your life to Him.”

Next, you spend time feeding on the Word of God. Here you get a general outline of God’s will for your life. And you may also receive some specific indication of His will for you in your present circumstances.

After your quiet time, you do the things that your hands find to do. Ordinarily they will be the prosaic, routine, mundane duties of life. This is where a lot of people have wrong ideas. They think that walking in the Spirit is foreign to the world of aprons and overalls. Actually it is mostly composed of faithfulness and diligence in one’s daily work.

Throughout the day you confess and forsake sin as soon as you are aware of it. You praise the Lord as His blessings come to mind. You obey every impulse to do good, and refuse every temptation to evil.

Then you take what comes to you during the day as being His will for you. Interruptions become opportunities to minister. Disappointments become His appointments. Phone calls, letters, visitors are seen as part of His plan.

Harold Wildish quoted the following summary in one of his books:

“As you leave the whole burden of your sin, and rest upon the finished work of Christ, so leave the whole burden of your life and service, and rest upon the present inworking of the Holy Spirit.”

“Give yourself up, morning by morning, to be led by the Holy Spirit and go forth praising and at rest, leaving Him to manage you and your day. Cultivate the habit all through the day, of joyfully depending upon and obeying Him, expecting Him to guide, to enlighten, to reprove, to teach, to use, and to do in and with you what He wills. Count upon His working as a fact, altogether apart from sight or feeling. Only let us believe in and obey the Holy Spirit as the Ruler of our lives, and cease from the burden of trying to manage ourselves; then shall the fruit of the Spirit appear in us, as He wills, to the glory of God.”

offend against the generation of thy children

“If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.” (Psa. 73:15)

The psalmist had been going through a rough patch. He saw the wicked prospering in the world, whereas his own life was a nightmare of trouble and suffering. He began to have doubts about the justice of God, the love of God, and the wisdom of God. It seemed as if the Lord rewarded wickedness and punished uprightness.

But Asaph made a noble resolve. He determined not to parade his doubts lest he should stumble any of God’s children.

Probably most of us have doubts and questions at times. Especially when we are almost at the end of endurance, when everything seems ready to cave in on top of us, it is easy to question the providence of God. What should we do?

We are certainly permitted to share our doubts with someone who is spiritually qualified to counsel us. Sometimes we are too distracted to see the light at the end of the tunnel, whereas it is quite clear to others and they can lead us to it.

As a general rule, we should “never doubt in the darkness what has been revealed to us in the light.” We should not interpret God’s Word by circumstances, no matter how bleak. Rather we should interpret our circumstances by the Scriptures and realize that nothing can ever thwart God’s purposes or nullify His promises.

But above all, we should not go around needlessly parading our doubts. There is the terrible danger of stumbling Christ’s little ones, concerning whom He said, “Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:6).

Our certitudes are numberless; our doubts, if any, are few. Let us share our certitudes. As Goethe said, “Give me the benefit of your convictions, if you have any, but keep your doubts to yourself, for I have enough of my own.”

Thou canst do all things

“I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted.” Job 42:2 NASB)

No purpose of God can be thwarted. Man may have his wickedness, but God has His way. Man may have a lot to say, but God will have the last word. Solomon reminds us that “there is no wisdom or counsel against the Lord” (Prov. 21:30). And Jeremiah adds his testimony that “every purpose of the Lord shall be performed” (Jer. 51:29).

Joseph’s brothers decided to get rid of him by selling him to a band of Midianites. But all they succeeded in doing was accomplishing the will of God. The Midianites provided free transportation for Joseph to Egypt where he rose to be Prime Minister and the savior of his people.

When the man who was born blind received his sight and trusted the Savior, the Jews excommunicated him from the synagogue. Was it a great victory for them? No, Jesus would have led him out anyway because the Good Shepherd “calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out” (John 10:3 NASB). So they merely saved Jesus the effort of doing it.

Men’s wickedness reached its Everest when they took the Lord Jesus and, nailing Him to a cross, put Him to death. But Peter reminded them that He was delivered up by “the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). God overruled man’s gargantuan crime by raising Christ up to be Lord and Savior.

Donald Gray Barnhouse told the story of a wealthy landowner who had beautiful trees on his estate. “But he had a bitter enemy who said, ‘I will cut down one of his trees; that will hurt him.’ In the dark of the night the enemy slipped over the fence and went to the most beautiful of the trees, and with saws and axes he began to work. In the first light of morning he saw in the distance two men coming over the hill on horseback, and recognized one of them as the owner of the estate. Hurriedly he pushed the wedges out and let the tree fall; but one of the branches caught him and pinned him to the ground, injuring him so badly that he died. Before he died, he screeched out, ‘Well, I have cut down your beautiful tree,’ and the estate owner looked at him with pity and said, “This is the architect I have brought with me. We had planned to build a house, and it was necessary to cut down one tree to make room for the house; and it is the one you have been working at all night.”

Be ye doers of the word

“Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” (James 1:22)

There is a subtle deception that attending meetings, conferences and seminars is doing the work of God. We listen to messages and talk about what we know we should be doing, and the delusion creeps over us that we are accomplishing His will. What we are actually doing is increasing our responsibility and deceiving ourselves. We deceive ourselves that we are spiritual when actually we might be quite carnal. We deceive ourselves that we are growing when the truth is that we are stagnant. We deceive ourselves that we are wise when we are pathetically foolish.

Jesus said that the wise man is the one who hears His words and does them. The foolish man also hears His words but does nothing about them.

It is not enough to listen to a sermon and walk away saying “What a marvelous message.” The true test is when we go away saying, “I will do something about what I heard.” Someone has said that a good sermon not only stretches the mind, warms the heart, and tans the hide but it also provokes the will to action.

In the middle of his message, a preacher once asked his audience the name of the first hymn they had sung. No one knew. He asked the text of Scripture that had been read. No one knew. He asked what announcements had been made. No one could remember. The people were playing church.

Before every meeting, we might well ask ourselves the following questions. Why did I come? Am I willing to have God speak to me personally? Will I obey Him if He does?

The Dead Sea justly earned its name by constant input without corresponding outflow. In our lives, information without application leads to stagnation. The Savior’s persistent question comes home to us, “Why call ye me Lord, Lord and do not the things that I say?”

I have been crucified with Christ

“I have been crucified with Christ.” (Gal. 2:20 NASB)

When the Lord Jesus died on the Cross, He died not only as my Substitute; He died also as my Representative. He died not only for me but as me. When He died, there is a real sense in which I died. All that I was as a child of Adam, all my old, evil, unregenerate self was nailed to the Cross. In God’s reckoning, my history as a man in the flesh came to an end.

That is not all! When the Savior was buried, I too was buried. I am identified with Christ in His burial. This pictures the removal of the old “I” from God’s sight forever.

And when the Lord Jesus arose from the dead, I arose too. But the picture changes here. It is not the one who was buried who arose, not the old self. No, it is the new man - Christ living in me. I arose with Christ to walk in newness of life.

God sees all this as having taken place positionally. Now He wants it to be true practically in my life. He wants me to reckon myself to have gone through this cycle of death, burial and resurrection. But how do I do this?

When temptation comes to me, I should reply to it exactly as a corpse reacts to any solicitation to evil. No response! I should say, in effect, “I have died to sin. You are no longer my master. I am dead as far as you are concerned.”

Day by day I should reckon my old, corrupt self to have been buried in the grave of Jesus. This means I will not be introspectively occupied with it. I will not look for anything worthwhile in it or be disappointed at its utter corruption.

Finally, I will live each moment as one who has risen with Christ to newness of life—new ambitions, new desires, new motives, new freedom and new power.

George Muller told how this truth of identification with Christ first came home to him:

There was a day when I died. Died to George Muller, his opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure, to the approval or blame even of my brothers or friends, and since then, I have studied only to show myself “approved unto God.”

He that is not with me is against me

“He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.” (Matt. 12:30)

The Lord Jesus spoke these words concerning the Pharisees. They had just committed the unpardonable sin, attributing His miracles to Beelzebub, the prince of the demons, when actually they were done in the power of the Holy Spirit. It was now evident that they would not accept Him as the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the world. Because they did not take a decided stand for Christ, they were necessarily against Him. Because they didn't serve on His side they worked against Him.

When it comes to the Person and work of Christ, there can be no neutrality. There is no way of straddling this fence. A man is either for Christ or he is against Him. Anyone who says he cannot decide has already decided.

When it comes to the truth concerning Christ, there can be no compromise. In biblical Christianity there are some areas where there can be a reasonable difference of opinion but this is not one of them. As A. W. Tozer has reminded us, “Some things are not negotiable.” We must adhere steadfastly to the absolute deity of the Lord Jesus, His virgin birth, His true humanity, His sinless nature, His substitutionary death for sinners, His bodily resurrection, His ascension to God's right hand and His coming again. When men start to hedge on these cardinal doctrines they are left with a demi-Savior, who is no Savior at all.

The poet laid it on the line when he wrote:

“What think ye of Christ?” is the test

To try both your state and your scheme;

You cannot be right in the rest

Unless you think rightly of Him:

As Jesus appears to your view,

As He is beloved or not,

So God is disposed to you,

And mercy or wrath is your lot.

the gospel of the glory of Christ

“...the gospel of the glory of Christ.” (2 Cor. 4:4)

We should never forget that the gospel is the good news of the glory of Christ. True, it concerns the One who was crucified and who was buried. But He is no longer on the Cross, no longer in the Tomb. He has risen, has ascended to heaven, and is the glorified Man at God’s right hand.

We do not present Him as the humble Carpenter of Nazareth, the suffering Servant or the Stranger of Galilee. Neither do we present Him as the effeminate do-gooder of modern religious art.

We preach the Lord of life and glory. He is the One whom God has highly exalted and given a Name which is above every name. At His Name every knee shall bow and every tongue confess Him Lord to the glory of God the Father. He is crowned with glory and honor, a Prince and a Savior.

Too often we dishonor Him by the message we preach. We exalt man with his talents and create the impression that God would be lucky to have such a man to serve Him. We make it sound as if man were doing a colossal favor to the Lord by trusting Him. That isn’t the Gospel which the Apostles preached. They said, in effect, “You are the guilty murderers of the Lord Jesus Christ. You took Him and with wicked hands nailed Him to the tree. But God raised Him from the dead and glorified Him at His own right hand in heaven. He is there today, in a glorified body of flesh and bones. His nail-scarred hand holds the sceptre of universal dominion. He is coming back again to judge the world in righteousness. And you’d better REPENT and turn to Him in FAITH. There is no other way of salvation. There is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

O, for a fresh vision of the Man in the glory! And for a tongue to tell forth the myriad glories that crown His brow! Surely then, as at Pentecost, sinners would tremble before Him and cry out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

spoke that out of darkness light

“...the God who spoke that out of darkness light should shine...has shone in our hearts for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Cor. 4:6, Darby’s translation)

“God has shone in...for the shining forth.” Here we learn that we are not meant to be the terminals of God’s blessings but only the channels. The expression “God has shone in” refers to our conversion. Whereas in the original creation He commanded light to shine, in the new creation He Himself has shone in our hearts.

But He did not do it in order that we might selfishly hoard the floodtide of His blessings. Rather He did it so that the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ might be made known through us to others.

In similar vein, Paul spoke of how God had “revealed his Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen” (Gal. 1:16). God reveals His Son in us that we might reveal Him to others. When the truth of this came home to me years ago, I wrote on the flyleaf of my Bible:

If of Jesus Christ their only view

May be what they see of Him in you,

MacDonald, what do they see?

No wonder that Ian MacPherson said, “Preaching is something august, sublime, awe-begetting—a supernatural act, the transmission of a Person through a person to a company of persons, the Person so conveyed being the everlasting Jesus.” He illustrated it by an incident that happened when King George V was speaking on the radio and his words were being relayed to America. A vital cable broke in the New York station, plunging the staff into panic. “Then Harold Vivien, a junior mechanic saw in a moment what to do. Seizing the ends of the broken wire, he held them, grimly and gallantly, as the current conveying the royal message was transmitted. Electrical charges of some two hundred and fifty volts shook his body, convulsing him from head to foot and causing him considerable pain. But he did not relax his grasp. Resolutely, desperately, he clung to the cable till the people heard the king.”

Channels only, blessed Master,

But with all Thy wondrous pow’r

Flowing thro’ us Thou canst use us

Ev’ry day and ev’ry hour.

another angel came

“And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.” Rev. 8:3.

We believe that the angel in this passage is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself. And His ministry here is full of comfort and encouragement for us.

What is He doing? He takes the prayers of all saints, adds His precious incense to them and presents them to God the Father.

We know only too well that our prayers and praises are very imperfect. We don't know how to pray as we should. Everything we do is stained with sin, with false motives, with selfishness.

“The holiest hours we spend in prayer upon our knees,
The times when most we deem our songs of praise will please,
Thou Searcher of all hearts, forgiveness pour on these.”

But before our worship and intercession ever get to God the Father, they pass through the Lord Jesus. He removes every trace of imperfection so that when they finally reach the Father they are flawless. And something else that is very wonderful happens. He offers the incense with the prayers of the saints. The incense speaks of the fragrant perfection of His person and work. It is this that gives efficacy to our prayers.

What an encouragement this should be to us. We are all too aware of how we bungle in prayer. We slaughter the rules of grammar, express ourselves inelegantly and say things that are doctrinal absurdities. But this need not discourage us from praying. We have a Great High Priest who edits and purifies all our communications with the Father.

Mary Bowley captured the truth in poetic form when she wrote:

Much incense is ascending
Before th' eternal throne;
God graciously is bending
To hear each feeble groan;
To all our prayers and praises
Christ adds His sweet perfume,
And love the censer raises
These odours to consume.

This month shall be unto you the beginning of months

“This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.” (Exodus 12:2)

New Year’s resolutions are good but fragile, that is, easily broken. New Year’s prayers are better; they ascend to the throne of God and set answering wheels in motion. As we come to the beginning of another year, we would do well to make the following prayer requests our own:

Lord Jesus, I rededicate myself afresh to You today. I want you to take my life this coming year and use it for Your glory. “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.”

I pray that You will keep me from sin, from anything that will bring dishonor to Your Name.

Keep me teachable by the Holy Spirit. I want to move forward for You. Don’t let me settle in a rut.

May my motto this year be, “He must increase; I must decrease.” The glory must all be Yours. Help me not to touch it.

Teach me to make every decision a matter of prayer. I dread the thought of leaning on my own understanding. “I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,” Jeremiah 10:23.

May I die to the world and even to the approval or blame of loved ones or friends. Give me a single, pure desire to do the things that please Your heart.

Keep me from gossip and criticism of others. Rather help me to speak what is edifying and profitable.

Lead me to needy souls. May I become a friend of sinners, as You are. Give me tears of compassion for the perishing. “Let me look on the crowd as my Savior did, till my eyes with tears grow dim. Let me view with pity the wandering sheep, and love them for love of Him.”

Lord Jesus, keep me from becoming cold, bitter or cynical in spite of anything that may happen to me in the Christian life.

Guide me in my stewardship of money. Help me to be a good steward of everything you have entrusted to me.

Help me to remember moment by moment that my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. May this tremendous truth influence all my behavior.

And, Lord Jesus, I pray that this may be the year of Your return. I long to see Your face and to fall at Your feet in worship. During the coming year, may the blessed hope stay fresh in my heart, disengaging me from anything that would hold me here and keeping me on the tiptoes of expectancy. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

In lowliness of mind

“In lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves.” (Philippians 2:3b)

To esteem others better than self is unnatural; fallen human nature rebels at such a blow to its ego. It is humanly impossible; we do not have the power in ourselves to live such an otherworldly life. But it is divinely feasible; the indwelling Holy Spirit empowers us to efface self in order that others might be honored.

Gideon illustrates our text. After his three hundred men had defeated the Midianites, he called for the men of Ephraim to add the final blow. They cut off the escape route and captured two Midianite princes. But they complained that they had not been called earlier. Gideon replied that the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim was better than the vintage of Abiezer (Judges 8:2), that is, the mopping-up operation conducted by the men of Ephraim was more illustrious than the whole campaign waged by Gideon. This spirit of selflessness appeased the Ephraimites.

Joab showed great unselfishness when he captured Rabbah and then called for David to come and administer the coup de grace (2 Samuel 12:26-28). Joab was quite content that David should get credit for the victory. It was one of the nobler moments in Joab's life.

The Apostle Paul esteemed the Philippians better than himself. He said that what they were doing was the significant sacrifice to God, whereas he was nothing more than a drink offering, poured out over the sacrifice and service of their faith (Philippians 2:17).

In more recent times, a beloved servant of Christ was waiting in an anteroom with other distinguished preachers, ready to file out onto the platform. When he finally appeared at the door and a thunderous ovation took place, he quickly stepped aside so that those who were following him would receive the applause.

The supreme example of self-abnegation is the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself that we might be exalted. He became poor that we might become rich. He died that we might live.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Judge not according to the appearance

“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” (John 7:24)

One of the most deep-seated frailties of fallen humanity is the persistent tendency to judge according to appearance. We judge a person according to his looks. We judge a used car by its body. We judge a book by its cover. No matter how often we are disappointed and disillusioned, we stubbornly refuse to learn that “all is not gold that glitters.”

In his book *Hide or Seek*, Dr. James Dobson says that physical beauty is the most highly valued personal attribute in our culture. We have made it what he calls “the gold coin of human worth.” Thus a beautiful child is more favored by adults than a plain one. Teachers tend to give better grades to attractive children. Pretty children get less discipline than others. Homely children are more subject to blame for misdemeanors.

Samuel would have chosen the tall, good-looking Eliab to be king (1 Sam. 16:7), but the Lord corrected him, “Look not on his countenance or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”

The greatest case of misjudgment in history occurred when the Lord Jesus visited our planet. Apparently He was not prepossessing as far as physical appearance was concerned. He had no form or comeliness, and when men saw Him, no beauty that they should desire Him (Isa. 53:2). They could see no beauty in the only truly beautiful Person who ever lived!

Yet He Himself never fell into this terrible trap of judging according to looks, for before His advent, it was prophesied of Him, “He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears” (Isa. 11:3). To Him it was not the face but the character that counted. Not the cover but the contents. Not the physical but the spiritual.

Not by might nor by power

“Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.” (Zech. 4:6)

This verse enshrines the important truth that the work of the Lord is not carried on by human ingenuity and strength but by the Holy Spirit.

We see it in the capture of Jericho. It was not the armed might of Israel that caused the walls to fall down. The Lord was the One who delivered the city into their hands when the priests blew the trumpets seven times.

If it had depended on a huge army, Gideon would never have defeated the Midianites, because his army had been thinned down to three hundred men. And their unconventional weaponry consisted of earthenware pitchers with torches inside. It could only have been the Lord who gave them the victory.

Elijah purposely eliminated any possibility that human might or power might ignite the altar by pouring twelve barrels of water over it. When the fire fell, there could be no question as to its divine source.

Left to human ingenuity, the disciples could fish all night but catch nothing. That provided the opportunity for the Lord to show them that they must look to Him for true effectiveness in service.

It's easy for us to think that money is the greatest need in Christian service. Actually it never was and never will be. Hudson Taylor was right when he said that what we need to fear is not too little money but too much unconsecrated money.

Or we resort to behind-the-scenes politicking, or to highpowered promotional programs, or to the psychological manipulation of people, or to clever oratory. We engage in vast construction programs and in organizational empire building, vainly thinking that these are the keys to success.

But it is not by might or by power or by any of these things that the work of God is forwarded. It is by the Spirit of the Lord.

Much so-called Christian work today would still continue if there were no Holy Spirit. But genuine Christian work is that which makes Him indispensable by waging the spiritual warfare, not with carnal weapons but with prayer, faith and the Word of God.

The people that are with thee are too many for me

“The people that are with thee are too many for me...” (Judges 7:2)

Everyone of us has a subtle desire for numbers and a tendency to judge success by statistics. There is a measure of reproach connected with small groups whereas large crowds command attention and respect. What should our attitude be in this area?

Large numbers should not be despised if they are the fruit of the Holy Spirit’s work. This was the case at Pentecost when about 3,000 souls were swept into the kingdom of God.

We should rejoice in large numbers when they mean glory for God and blessing for mankind. It is only proper for us to long to see multitudes lifting their hearts and voices in praise to God, and reaching out to the world with the message of redemption.

On the other hand, large numbers are bad if they lead to pride. God had to reduce Gideon’s army lest Israel should say, “Mine own hand hath saved me” (Judges 7:2). E. Stanley Jones once said he loathed our contemporary “scramble for numbers, leading, as it does, to collective egotism.”

Large numbers are bad if they lead to dependence on human power rather than on the Lord. This was probably the trouble with David’s census (2 Sam. 24:2-4). Joab sensed that the king’s motives were not pure and he protested—but in vain.

Large numbers are undesirable if, in order to achieve them, we lower standards, compromise Scriptural principles, water down the message, or fail to exercise godly discipline. There is always the temptation to do this if our minds are set on crowds rather than on the Lord.

Large numbers are less than ideal if they result in a loss of close fellowship. When individuals get lost in the crowd, when they can be absent and not be missed, when nobody shares their joys and sorrows, then the whole concept of body life is abandoned.

Large numbers are bad if they stifle the development of gift in the body. It is not without significance that Jesus chose 12 disciples. A huge crowd would have been unwieldy.

God’s general rule has been to work through a remnant testimony. He is not attracted by large crowds or repelled by small ones. We should not boast in large numbers, but neither should we be content with small numbers if they are the result of our own sloth and indifference.

dwelleth no good thing

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.” (Rom. 7:18)

If a young believer learns this lesson early in his Christian life, he will save himself from a world of trouble later on. The Bible teaches that there is NO GOOD THING in our old, evil un-regenerate nature. The flesh is absolutely no good. It is not improved one iota at the time of conversion. It is not improved by a lifetime of consistent Christian living. In fact, God is not trying to improve it. He has condemned it to death at the Cross and wants us to keep it in the place of death.

If I really believe this, it will deliver me from a futile search. I will not look for anything good where God has already said it can't be found.

It will deliver me from disappointment. I am never disappointed when I don't find any good in myself. I knew it wasn't there in the first place.

It will deliver me from introspection. I start with the premise that there is no victory in self. In fact, self-occupation spells defeat.

It will guard me from psychological and psychiatric counseling which turns the searchlight on self. Such therapy only compounds the problem instead of solving it.

It teaches me to be occupied with the Lord Jesus. Robert Murray McCheyne said, “For every look you take at self, take ten looks at Christ.” That is a good balance! Someone else said that even a sanctified self is a poor substitute for a glorified Christ. And the hymnwriter wrote, “How sweet away from self to flee, and shelter in our Savior.”

Much modern preaching and many new Christian books send people on an introspective binge, occupying them with their temperament, their self-image, their hang-ups and inhibitions. The whole movement is a tragedy of overbalance and it leaves a trail of human wreckage.

“I am too bad to be worth thinking about; what I want is to forget myself and to look to God, who is indeed worthy of all my thoughts.”

We walk by faith, not by sight

“We walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Cor. 5:7)

Did you ever stop to wonder why a baseball game is more exciting to most people than a prayer meeting? Yet comparative attendance records prove that it is so.

Or we might ask, “Why is the Presidency of the United States more appealing than overseership in an assembly?” Parents don’t say to their sons, “Eat your food and some day you may be an elder.” No, they say, “Clean your plate and some day you may grow up to be President.”

Why is a successful career in business more attractive than the life of a missionary? Christians often discourage their children from going to the mission field, content to see them rise to be “titled officials in secular enterprises.”

Why is a television documentary more absorbing than the study of God’s Word? Think of the hours spent before the TV set and the hurried moments before the open Bible!

Why are people willing to do for dollars what they wouldn’t do for love to Jesus? Many who are tireless in their work for a corporation are lethargic and unresponsive when the Savior calls.

Finally why does our nation loom larger and more important than the Church? National politics are colorful and engrossing. The Church often seems to lumber on without dynamic.

The reason for all these things is that we walk by sight and not by faith. Our vision is distorted. We don’t see things as they actually are. We value the temporal above the eternal. We value the soulish above the spiritual. We value man’s judgment above God’s.

When we walk by faith, all is changed. We have 20/20 spiritual vision. We see things as God sees them. We value prayer as the unspeakable privilege of having direct audience with the Sovereign of the universe. We see that an elder in an assembly means more to God than the ruler of a nation. We see, with Spurgeon, that if God calls a man to be a missionary, it would be a tragedy to see him driven down into a king.” We see television as a never-never land of unreality, whereas the Bible holds the key to a life of fulfillment. We are willing to spend and be spent for Jesus in a way we would never be willing for an unworthy impersonal corporation. And we reckon that our local church is more important to God and to His people than the greatest empire in the world.

Walking by faith makes all the difference!

Cursed be he that doeth the work of Jehovah negligently

“Cursed be he that doeth the work of Jehovah negligently.” (Jer. 48:10 ASV)

The work of the Lord is so important, pressing, sublime and awebegetting that a curse rests upon anyone who does it negligently. The God who wants and deserves the best cannot bear with sloth, delays, halfheartedness, or slipshod methods. When we think of the tremendous issues involved, we are not surprised.

During the latter part of 1968 a young Christian in Prague, Czechoslovakia witnessed to another young Czech named Jan Palach. There seemed to be a genuine interest on Jan's part, and so the Christian promised to deliver a New Testament to him. He was filled with good intentions but he let weeks pass before he even obtained the New Testament. Then he kept delaying its actual delivery.

On January 16, 1969, Jan Palach stood in St. Wencelas Square, poured gasoline over his body and set himself afire. He never lived to see the New Testament that had been promised to him.

Good intentions are not enough. It has been said that the streets of hell are paved with good intentions. But they don't get the work done. They must be translated into action. And here are a few ways to do it.

First, never refuse when the Lord directs you to do some act of service for Him. If He is Lord, then it is ours to obey without question.

Second, don't procrastinate. Delays are deadly. They rob others of needed help and blessing, and fill us with guilt and remorse.

Third, do it diligently. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Eccl. 9:10). If it's worth doing at all, it's worth doing well.

Finally, do it for God's glory. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God," (1 Cor. 10:31).

We should all have the spirit of Amy Carmichael, who wrote, "The vows of God are upon me. I may not stay to play with shadows or pluck earthly flowers till I my work have done and rendered up an account."

Show piety at home

“...Show piety at home...” (1 Tim. 5:4)

You’ve heard the expression, “A devil at home, a saint abroad.” It describes the horrible tendency to be gracious and outgoing to those in the outside world and yet be harsh and unkind at home.

This is a failing that is not confined to any particular class of people. Young people have to guard against it. It’s so easy to be a TV personality with one’s peers, yet be a terror to one’s parents. Husbands may maintain a charming front with their business associates, then when they come home, they turn off the charm and are their normal, irritable selves. Preachers may have a scintillating style in the pulpit and a rotten disposition in the family room.

It is one of the perverse streaks of our fallen state that we are sometimes meanest to those who are closest to us, who do the most for us, and who, in our saner moments, we love the best. Thus Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote:

One great truth in life I’ve found,
While journeying to the West;
The only folks we really wound
Are those we love the best.
We flatter those we scarcely know.
We please the fleeting guest,
And deal full many a thoughtless blow
To those we love the best.

Another poet echoed these sentiments as follows: “We have greetings for the stranger and smiles for the guest, but oft for our own the bitter tone, though we love our own the best.”

“It is very easy to have a church religion, or a prayer-meeting religion, or a Christian-work religion; but it is altogether a different thing to have an everyday religion. To ‘show piety at home’ is one of the most vital parts of Christianity, but it is also one far too rare; and it is not at all an uncommon thing to find Christians who ‘do their righteousness’ before outsiders ‘to be seen of men,’ but who fail lamentably in showing their piety at home. I knew a father of a family who was so powerful in prayer at the weekly prayer meeting, and so impressive in exhortation that the whole church was edified by his piety; but who, when he went home after the meetings, was so cross and ugly that his wife and family were afraid to say a word in his presence.” (H.W. Smith).

Samuel Johnson said, “Every animal revenges his pains upon those who happen to be near.” Man should avoid this natural tendency.

What we are at home is a truer index of our Christian character than what we are in public.

and let us run with endurance the race

“...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” (Heb. 12:1, NASB)

Many people have a view of the Christian life that is excessively idealistic. They think it should be one uninterrupted series of mountaintop experiences. They read Christian books and magazines and hear personal testimonies of dramatic events and conclude that this is all of life. In their dream-world, there are no problems, heartaches, trials and perplexities. There is no hard work, no daily routine, no monotony. All is Cloud 9. When they don't find their life fitting this pattern, they feel discouraged, disillusioned and deprived.

The true facts are these. Most of the Christian life is what G. Campbell Morgan calls “the way of plodding perseverance in the doing of apparently small things.” This is the way I have found it. There has been a full share of menial tasks, of long hours of disciplined study, of service without apparent results. At times the question has arisen, “Is anything really being accomplished?” Just then the Lord would drop some token of encouragement, some wonderful answer to prayer, some clear word of guidance. And I would be strengthened to go on for a while longer.

The Christian life is a long-distance race, not a 50 yard dash, and we need endurance to run it. It is important to start well but what really counts is the endurance that enables us to finish in a blaze of glory.

Enoch will always have an honored place in the annals of endurance. He walked with God—think of it—for 300 years (Gen. 5:22). But we need not think that those were years of undiluted glamor or uninterrupted thrill. In a world like ours, it was inevitable that he should have his share of trials, perplexities and even persecutions. But he did not grow weary in well doing. He endured to the end.

If you are ever tempted to quit, remember the words of Heb. 10:36 NEB, “You need endurance if you are to do God's will and win what He has promised.”

A noble life is not a blaze

Of sudden glory won,

But just an adding up of days

In which God's will is done.

the mouth of two or three witnesses

“...that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” (Matt. 18:16).

As far as the Bible is concerned, there must be the testimony of two or three witnesses in order to form a valid judgment. If we would only observe this principle, we would save ourselves oceans of trouble.

The natural tendency for us is to hear one person's side of a case and to immediately decide in his favor. He sounds convincing and our sympathies go out to him. Then later we learn that his was only one side of the story. When we hear the other side, we realize that the first man had distorted the facts or at least colored them in his own favor. Thus, “the first to plead his case seems just until another comes and examines him” (Prov. 18:17, NASB). When we make a decision before trying to ascertain the full facts, we act less righteously than the world's judicial system and place ourselves under the censure of Prov. 18:13 NASB, “He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.”

When Ziba reported to David that Mephibosheth hoped to gain the throne, David accepted the slander without investigation and gave all of Mephibosheth's property to Ziba (2 Sam. 16:1-4). Later Mephibosheth had a chance to tell the king the true facts. David then realized that he had made a decision without having sufficient evidence.

The Lord Jesus recognized this principle. He said that His testimony concerning Himself was not sufficient (John 5:31). So He presented the testimony of four witnesses: John the Baptist (vv. 32-35); His works (v. 36); God, the Father (vv. 37, 38); the Scriptures (vv. 39, 40).

By failing to obtain the competent testimony of two or three witnesses, we can cause broken hearts, ruined reputations, divided churches and severed friendships. If we follow God's Word, we will avoid tons of injustice and human hurt.

what hast thou that thou didst not receive?

“...what hast thou that thou didst not receive?...” (1 Cor. 4:7)

This is a good question because it reduces us all to size. We do not have anything that we did not receive. We received our physical and mental equipment through birth. What we look like and how brainy we are is something too far beyond our control to justify pride. It is an accident of birth.

All that we know is a result of our education. Others have poured information into our minds. Often when we think we have had an original thought, we find it in a book we first read twenty years ago. Emerson said, “All my best thoughts were stolen by the ancients.”

What about our talents? Some talents definitely run in the family. They are developed by training and by practice. But the point is that they did not originate with us. They were given to us.

Pilate was inflated by the authority he wielded, but the Lord Jesus reminded him, “You would have no authority over Me unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11, NASB).

In short, every breath man draws is a gift from God. That is why Paul goes on to ask in 1 Corinthians 4:7 (Phillips), “If anything has been given to you, why boast of it as if it were something you had achieved yourself?”

And that is why, for instance, Harriet Beecher Stowe refused to take any credit for writing Uncle Tom’s Cabin: “I, the author of Uncle Tom’s Cabin? No, indeed, I could not control the story; it wrote itself. The Lord wrote it, and I was but the humblest instrument in His hand. It all came to me in visions, one after another, and I put them down in words. To Him alone be the praise!”

The constant realization that we have nothing that we did not receive delivers us from boasting and self-congratulation, and leads us to give God the glory for anything good that we are or have done.

So, “let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord” (Jer. 9:23, 24).

I can do all things through Christ

“I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me.” (Phil. 4:13)

It is easy to misunderstand a verse like this. We read it and immediately think of hundreds of things that we cannot do. In the physical realm, for instance, we think of some ridiculous stunt requiring superhuman power. Or we think of some great mental achievement that lies far beyond us. So the words become a torture to us instead of a comfort.

What the verse actually means, of course, is that the Lord will give us power to do anything He wants us to do. Within the circle of His will there are no impossibilities.

Peter knew this secret. He knew that, left to himself, he couldn't walk on water. But He also knew that if the Lord told him to do it, then he could do it. As soon as Jesus said, “Come,” Peter got out of the boat and strode across the water to Him.

Ordinarily a mountain will not slide into the sea at my command. But if that mountain stands between me and the accomplishment of God's will, then I can say “Be removed,” and it will.

What it boils down to is that “His commands are His enablements.” Therefore He will provide strength to bear any trial. He will enable me to resist every temptation and conquer every habit. He will strengthen me to have a clean thought life, to have pure motives, and to always do the thing that pleases His heart.

If I am not getting the strength to accomplish something, if I am threatened with physical, mental or emotional collapse, then I may well question if I have missed His will and am seeking my own desires. It is possible to do work for God that may not be the work of God. Such work does not carry the promise of His power.

So it is important to know that we are moving forward in the current of His plans. Then we can have the joyous confidence that His grace will sustain and empower us.

All things are yours

“All things are yours.” (1 Cor. 3:21-23)

The unsaintly saints in Corinth had been squabbling over human leaders in the church. To some Paul was the ideal. Others made Apollos their favorite. And still others felt that Cephas was superlative. Paul is telling them that it is ridiculous to limit their choice to one when all these men belong to them. Instead of saying, “Apollos is mine,” they ought to say, “Paul, Apollos and Cephas are all mine.”

It is a word for us today. We err when we become exclusive followers of Luther, Wesley, Booth, Darby, Billy Graham or any other great gift to the Church. All these men are ours and we can rejoice in the measure of light that each of them gives to us. We shouldn't become followers of any one man.

But it is not only servants of the Lord who are ours. The world is ours. We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. One day we are going to come back and reign over the world with the Lord Jesus. In the meantime, unconverted men are running things as if the world belonged to them. But it doesn't. They are simply caretakers, managing it for us until the day when we take possession.

Life is ours. This does not mean simply that we have life; all men have that. It means that we have the more abundant life, eternal life, the very life of Christ. Our life is not vanity and vexation of spirit. It is meaningful, purposeful and rewarding.

And death is ours. We are no longer subject to slavery all our lives through fear of death. Now death is the messenger of God that brings our souls to heaven. Therefore to die is gain. In addition to all this, we belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. When I think of this I am reminded of Guy King's whimsical remark, “What fortunate beggars we are!”

ye have been called unto liberty

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.” (Gal. 5:13)

The liberty of the child of God is one of his priceless possessions. Made free by the Son, he is free indeed. But he is called to responsible freedom, not to license.

Children want to be free from the restraints of home. Young people want to be free from the discipline of study. Adults want to be free from their marriage vows. Still others rebel against being boxed in by regular employment. But these are not the freedoms to which we are called.

The stars are not free to leave their orbits and wander throughout space. A train is not free to leave the tracks and meander over the countryside. A plane is not free to leave its assigned course; its safety depends on the pilot's obeying the regulations.

Jowett comments, “There is no realm where the lawless are the free. In whatever way we wish to go we must accept bondage if we would discover liberty. A musician must reverence the laws of harmony if he would exult in his lovely world. A builder must put himself in bondage to the law of gravity, or it is not a house that emerges, but a rubbish-heap. What sort of liberty does a man enjoy who consistently defies the laws of health? In all these realms to trespass is to be maimed, to pay homage is to be free.”

It is true that the believer is free from the law (Rom. 7:3) but that does not mean that he is lawless. He is now enlawed to Christ, bound by the cords of love, and committed to obey the numerous commandments that are found in the New Testament.

The believer is free from sin as master (Rom. 6:7, 18, 22) but only to become a servant to God and to righteousness.

The believer is free from all men (1 Cor. 9:19) in order to become a servant to all, that he might win the more.

But he is not free to use his liberty as a pretext for evil (1 Pet. 2:16 RSV). He is not free to indulge the flesh (Gal. 5:13). He is not free to stumble or offend another person (1 Cor. 8:9). He is not free to bring dishonor on the Name of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 2:23, 24). He is not free to love the world (1 John 2:15-17). He is not free to grieve the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19).

Man does not find fulfillment or rest in doing his own thing. He finds it only in taking Christ's yoke and learning of Him. “His service is perfect freedom.”

The word of the Lord came

“The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time.” (Jonah 3:1)

Here is a message that glows with hope and promise. Just because a man has failed does not mean that God has put him on the shelf.

David’s failures are recorded with stark realism. As we read them, we sit in the dust with him and burn with shame. But David knew how to break before the Lord, how to repent with bloodearnestness. And God was not through with him. God forgave him and restored him to a life of fruitfulness.

Jonah failed to answer God’s missionary call and wound up in the belly of a great fish. In that animate submarine, he learned to obey. When God called him the second time, he went to Nineveh, preached imminent judgment, and saw the whole city plunged into deepest repentance.

John Mark made a brilliant start with Paul and Barnabas, but then he copped out and went home. God did not abandon him, however. Mark returned to the battle, regained the confidence of Paul, and was commissioned to write the Gospel of the Unfailing Servant.

Peter failed the Lord in spite of his protestations of undying loyalty. Men would write him off by saying that the bird with the broken wing could never fly as high again. But God did not write him off and Peter flew higher than ever. He opened the doors of the kingdom to 3000 at Pentecost. He labored tirelessly and suffered repeatedly at the hands of persecutors. He wrote the two epistles which bear his name, then crowned a glorious life of service with a martyr’s death.

So when it comes to service, God is the God of the second chance. He is not through with a man just because that man has failed. Whenever He finds a broken and a contrite heart, he bows to lift up the head of his fallen soldier.

This must not be taken to condone sin or failure, however. The bitterness and remorse of having failed the Lord should serve as sufficient deterrent.

Neither does it mean that God gives the unrepentant sinner a second chance after this life. There is a terrible finality about death. For the man who dies in his sins, the awful sentence is, “Wherever the tree falls, there it lies.” (Eccl. 11:3 NASB).

as to the Lord, and not to men

“With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.” (Eph. 6:7)

Paul’s instructions to slaves (Eph. 6:5-8) are freighted with meaning for all who profess to be servants of Jesus Christ.

They show, first of all, that any honorable work, no matter how menial it is, can be done to the glory of God. The slaves to whom Paul wrote may have mopped floors, cooked meals, washed dishes, tended animals or cultivated crops. Yet the Apostle said that these chores could be done “as unto Christ” (v. 5); that in performing them, the slaves were “the bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God” (v. 6); that they were “doing service, as to the Lord” (v. 7); and that they would be rewarded by the Lord for “doing a good job” (v. 8).

It is easy in our thinking to make a dichotomy between the secular and the sacred. We think of our week-day work as being secular whereas our preaching, witnessing and Bible teaching are sacred. But this passage teaches that for the Christian there need be no such distinction. Realizing this, the wife of a well-known preacher put a motto over her kitchen sink, “Divine services conducted here three times daily.”

A servant with this clause

Makes drudgery divine;

Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws

Makes that and th’ action fine.

George Herbert

There is another choice lesson here, namely, that no matter how low a person may be on the social ladder, he is not shut out from the choicest blessings and rewards of Christianity. He may never exchange his work clothes for a business suit, but if his work is of such good quality as to bring glory to Christ, he will receive a full reward. “Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free” (v. 8).

Believing this, we should pray, in the lines of George Herbert:

Teach me, my God and King,

In all things Thee to see,

And what I do in anything

To do it as for Thee.

My kingdom is not of this world

“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight...”
(John 18:36)

The fact that Christ’s Kingdom is not of this world is enough to keep me out of the world’s politics. If I participate in politics, then I am casting a vote of confidence in the system’s ability to solve the world’s problems. But frankly I have no such confidence because I know that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

Politics has proved singularly ineffective in solving the problems of society. Political remedies are nothing but a Band-Aid on a festering sore; they do not get at the source of the infection. We know that sin is the basic trouble in our sick society. Anything that fails to deal with sin cannot be taken seriously as a cure.

It becomes a matter of priorities, then. Should I spend time in political involvement or should I devote that same time to the spread of the Gospel? Jesus answered the question when He said, “Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60). Our top priority must be to make Christ known because He is the answer to this world’s problems.

“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4). This being so, we come to the daring realization that we can shape national and international history through prayer, fasting and the Word of God more than we could ever do through the ballot.

A public figure once said that politics is by its very nature corrupt. He added this word of warning: “The church should not forget its true function by trying to participate in an area of human affairs where it must be a poor competitor...It will lose its purity of purpose by participating.”

God’s program for this age is to call out of the nations a people for His name (see Acts 15:14). Rather than making people comfortable in a corrupt world, He is committed to saving people out of it. I should be committed to working with God in this glorious emancipation.

When the people asked Jesus how to work the works of God, He answered that the work of God is to believe on Him whom God had sent (see John 6:28,29). This then is our mission—to lead men to belief, not to the ballot-box.

If we confess our sins

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Without the assurance of this verse, it would be practically impossible to go on in the Christian life. As we grow in grace, we have a deepening awareness of our utter sinfulness. We must have some provision for instant cleansing for sins, otherwise we are doomed to perpetual guilt and defeat.

John tells us that, for believers, provision is made through confession. The unbeliever receives judicial forgiveness from the penalty of sins through faith in the Lord Jesus. The believer receives parental forgiveness from the defilement of sins through confession.

Sin breaks fellowship in the life of the child of God, and that fellowship remains broken till the sin is confessed and forsaken. When we confess, God is faithful to His Word; He has promised to forgive. He is just in forgiving because the work of Christ at the Cross has provided a righteous basis on which He may do so.

What this verse means, then, is that when we confess our sins, we can know that the record is clear, that we have been completely cleansed, that the happy family spirit has been restored. As soon as we are conscious of sin in our lives, we can go into the presence of God, call that sin by its name, repudiate it, and know with certainty that it has been put away.

But how do we know for certain? Do we feel forgiven? It is not at all a question of feelings. We know that we have been forgiven because God says so in His Word. Feelings are undependable at best. God’s Word is sure.

But suppose someone says, “I know that God has forgiven me but I can’t forgive myself”? This might sound very pious but actually it is dishonoring to God. If God has forgiven me, then He wants m

And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more

“And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” (Heb. 10:17)

God’s ability to forget sins that have been covered by the blood of Christ is one of the most soul-satisfying truths in Scripture.

It is a great wonder when we read, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (Psa. 103:12). It is a marvel that we can say with Hezekiah, “Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back” (Isa. 38:17). It boggles the mind when we hear the Lord saying, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins” (Isa. 44:22). But it is even more wonderful when we read, “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:34).

When we confess our sins, He not only forgives, He forgets instantly. We are not stretching the truth when we say that He immediately buries our sins in the sea of His forgetfulness. This is illustrated by the experience of a believer who was having a ding-dong struggle with a besetting sin. In a moment of weakness, he gave in to the temptation. Rushing into the presence of the Lord, he blurted out, “Lord, I’ve done it again.” Then he thought he heard the Lord saying, “What have you done again?” The point, of course, is that in that split second following confession, God had already forgotten.

This is a delightful paradox—that the omniscient God can forget. On the one hand He knows everything. He counts the stars and names each one. He numbers our tossings and keeps count of our tears. He marks the sparrow’s fall. He numbers the hairs of our head. And yet He forgets those sins that have been confessed and forsaken. David Seamands said, “I don’t know how divine omniscience can forget but I know it does.”

There is one final point! It has been well said that when God forgives and forgets, He puts up a sign reading “No fishing.” It is forbidden for me to fish up my own past sins or the sins of others that God has forgotten. In this respect we must have a poor memory and a good forgettery.

But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul

“But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.” (1 Sam. 16:14)

There are verses in the Bible that seem to assign evil actions to God. For example, when Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel, “God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem” (Judg. 9:23). In the days of Ahab, Micaiah said to the wicked king, “The Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets” (1 King 22:23). Job attributed his losses to the Lord when he said, “What? shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job 2:10). Then again the Lord Himself says in Isaiah 45:7, “I make peace, and create evil.”

Yet we know that because God is holy, He can neither originate evil nor condone it. No sin, sickness, suffering or death come from the Lord. He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). It is unthinkable that He should be the cause of anything that is contrary to His own moral perfection.

It is clear from other scriptures that Satan is the author of disease, suffering, tragedy and destruction. Job’s losses and intense pain were caused by the Devil. Jesus said that the woman who was bent double had been bound by Satan for eighteen long years (Lu. 13:16). Paul spoke of his thorn in the flesh as “the messenger of Satan” (2 Cor. 12:7). Satan is the culprit behind all the troubles of mankind.

But how then do we reconcile this with the verses that picture God as creating evil? The explanation is simply this: in the Bible God is often said to do what He permits to be done. It is the difference between His directive will and His permissive will. He often allows His people to go through experiences that He never would have chosen for them in the first place. He allowed Israel to wander forty years in the wilderness whereas His directive will, if it had been accepted, would have brought them into the Promised Land by a shorter route.

Even in permitting the evil of demons and of man, God always has the last word. He overrules it for His own glory and for the blessing of those who are exercised by it.

He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob

“He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel.” (Num. 23:21)

The hireling prophet, Balaam, spoke a remarkable truth when he said that the all-seeing God could not see sin in His people, Israel. What was true of Israel then is wonderfully true of the believer today. As God looks upon him, He cannot find a single sin for which to punish him with eternal death. The believer is “in Christ”. That means that he stands before God in all the perfection and worthiness of Christ. God accepts him in all the acceptability of His own beloved Son. It is a position of favor that cannot be improved on and that will never end. Search as He may, God cannot find any charge against the one who is in Christ.

This is illustrated by an incident involving an Englishman and his Rolls Royce. He was touring France on his vacation when the rear axle broke. The local garage could not replace the axle, so they phoned to England. The company sent not only a rear axle, but two mechanics to see that it was properly installed. The Englishman continued on his trip, then returned to England, expecting to receive the bill. When months passed and no bill arrived, he wrote to the company, described the entire incident and asked for the bill. Shortly afterwards, he received a letter from the company saying, “We have searched our records carefully and can find no record of a Rolls Royce ever having had a broken rear axle.”

God can search His records carefully and can find no record of any sin on a believer’s account that would condemn him to hell. The believer is accepted in the Beloved One. He is complete in Christ. He is clothed in all the righteousness of God. He has an absolutely perfect standing before God. He can say with triumph and confidence:

Reach my blest Savior first;

Take Him from God’s esteem;

Prove Jesus bears one spot of sin,

Then tell me I’m unclean.

Seekest thou great things for thyself

“Seekest thou great things for thyself; seek them not.”(Jer. 45:5)

There is a subtle temptation, even in Christian service, to become great, to see one's name in the magazines or hear it over the radio. But it is a great snare. It robs Christ of glory. It robs ourselves of peace and joy. And it makes us prime targets for the Devil's bullets.

It robs Christ of Glory. As C. H. Mackintosh said, “There is always the utmost danger when a man or his work becomes remarkable. He may be sure Satan is gaining his objective when attention is drawn to aught or anyone but the Lord Jesus Himself. A work may be commenced in the greatest possible simplicity, but through lack of holy watchfulness and spirituality on the part of the workman, he himself or the results of his work may attract general attention, and he may fall into the snare of the devil. Satan's grand and ceaseless object is to dishonor the Lord Jesus. And if he can do this by what seems to be Christian service, he has achieved all the greater victory for the time.” Denney also said it well, “No man can at one and the same time prove that he is great and that Christ is wonderful.”

We rob ourselves in the process. Someone said, “I never knew real peace and joy in service until I ceased trying to be great.”

And the desire to be great makes us sitting ducks for Satanic attack. The fall of a well-known personality brings greater reproach on the cause of Christ.

John the Baptist assiduously renounced any claims to greatness. His motto was, “He must increase; I must decrease.”

We too should sit down in the lowest place until the Lord calls us to go up higher. A good prayer for each of us is, “Keep me little and unknown, loved and prized by Christ alone.”

Nazareth was a little place—

And so was Galilee.

Don't worry over anything whatever

“Don't worry over anything whatever.” (Phil. 4:6, Phillips)

There is so much that a person could worry about—the possibility of cancer, heart trouble or a multitude of other diseases; foods that are supposedly harmful, accidental death, a communist takeover, nuclear war, runaway inflation, an uncertain future, the grim outlook for children growing up in a world like this. The possibilities are numberless.

And yet we are told in God's Word, “Don't worry over anything whatever.” God wants us to have lives that are free of care. And for good reasons!

Worry is unnecessary. The Lord is looking out for us. He holds us in the palms of His hands. Nothing can happen to us apart from His permissive will. We are not the victims of blind chance, accidents or fate. Our lives are planned, ordered, directed.

Worry is futile. It never solves a problem or avoids a crisis. As someone has said, “Anxiety never robs tomorrow of its sorrow; it only saps today of its strength.”

Worry is harmful. Doctors are agreed that many of their patients' ailments are caused by worry, tension, nerves. Ulcers rate high on the list of worry-related maladies.

Worry is sin. “It doubts the wisdom of God; it implies He doesn't know what He is doing. It doubts the love of God; it says He doesn't care. It doubts the power of God; it says He is not able to overcome the circumstances that cause me to worry.”

Too often we are proud of our worrying. When a husband reproached his wife for her incessant worrying, she replied, “If I didn't worry, there'd be precious little of it done around here.” We will never get deliverance from it until we confess it as sin and utterly renounce it. Then we can say with confidence:

I have nothing to do with tomorrow,
My Savior will make that His care;
Should he fill it with trouble and sorrow,
He will help me to suffer and bear.
I have nothing to do with tomorrow;
Its burdens, then, why should I share?
Its grace and its strength I can't borrow;
Then why should I borrow its care?

God is love

“God is love.” (I John 4:8).

The coming of Christ brought a new word for love into the Greek language—agape. There was already a word for friendship (philia) and one for passionate love (eros), but there was none to express the kind of love which God showed in giving His only begotten Son and which He calls on His people to show to one another.

This is another-worldly love, a love with new dimensions. The love of God had no beginning and it can have no end. It is a love that has no limit, that can never be measured. It is absolutely pure, free from all taint of lust. It is sacrificial, never counting the cost. Love manifests itself in giving, for we read, “God so loved the world that He gave...” and “Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us...” Love ceaselessly seeks the welfare of others. It goes out to the unlovely as well as to the lovely. It goes out to its enemies as well as to its friends. It is not drawn out by any worthiness or virtue in its objects but only by the goodness of the donor. It is utterly unselfish, never looking for anything in return and never exploiting others for personal advantages. It does not keep a count of wrongs, but throws a kindly veil over a multitude of slights and insults. Love repays every discourtesy with a kindness, and prays for its would-be murderers. Love always thinks of others, esteeming them better than self.

But love can be firm. God chastens those whom He loves. Love cannot countenance sin because sin is harmful and destructive, and love desires to protect its objects from harm and destruction.

The greatest manifestation of God’s love was the giving of His beloved Son to die for us on the Cross of Calvary.

Who Thy love, O God, can measure,
Love that crushed for us its Treasure,
Him in whom was all Thy pleasure,
Christ, Thy Son of love?

(Allaben)

Beloved, if God so loved us

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” (1 John 4:11).

We must not think of love as an uncontrollable, unpredictable emotion. We are commanded to love, and this would be quite impossible if love were some elusive, sporadic sensation, coming as unaccountably as a common cold. Love does involve the emotions but it is more a matter of the will than of the emotions.

We must also guard against the notion that love is confined to a world of dream castles with little relation to the nitty-gritty of everyday life. For every hour of moonlight and roses, there are weeks of mops and dirty dishes.

In other words, love is intensely practical. For instance, when a plate of bananas is passed at the table and one has black spots, love takes that one. Love cleans the washbasin and bathtub after using them. Love replaces paper towels when the supply is gone so that the next person will not be inconvenienced. Love puts out the lights when they are not in use. It picks up the crumpled Kleenex instead of walking over it. It replaces the gas and oil after using a borrowed car. Love empties the garbage without being asked. It doesn't keep people waiting. It serves others before self. It takes a squalling baby out so as not to disturb the meeting. Love speaks loudly so that the deaf can hear. And love works in order to have the means to share with others.

Love has a hem to its garment

That reaches right down to the dust—

It can reach the stains of the streets and lanes,

And because it can, it must.

It dare not rest on the mountain;

It must go down to the vale;

For it cannot find its fulness of mind

Till it kindles the lives that fail.

Redeeming the time

“Redeeming the time.” (Eph. 5:16)

In a day when men of the world are becoming increasingly allergic to work, Christians must make the most of every passing moment. It is a sin to waste time.

Voices from every age testify to the importance of diligent labor. The Savior Himself said, “I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4).

Thomas a Kempis wrote, “Never be idle or vacant; be always reading or writing or praying or meditating or employed in some useful labor for the common good.”

When asked the secret of his success as an interpreter of the Word, G. Campbell Morgan said, “Work—hard work—and again, work!”

We should never forget that when the Lord Jesus came into the world, He served as a carpenter. The greater part of His life was spent in the shop in Nazareth.

Paul was a tentmaker. He considered it an important part of his ministry.

It is a mistake to think that work is a result of the entrance of sin. Before sin entered, Adam was placed in the garden to dress it and to keep it (Gen. 2:15). The curse involved the toil and sweat that accompany work (Gen. 3:19). Even in heaven there will be work, for “his servants shall serve him” (Rev. 22:3).

Work is a blessing. Through it we find fulfillment of our need for creativity. The mind and body function best when we work diligently. When we are usefully occupied, we enjoy greater protection from sin, because “Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do” (I. Watts). Thomas Watson said, “Idleness tempts the devil to tempt.” Honest, diligent, faithful work is a vital part of our Christian testimony. And the results of our labor may outlive us. As someone has said, “Everyone owes it to himself to provide himself with some useful occupation while his body is lying in the grave.” And William James said, “The great use of a life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.”

He that believeth shall not make haste

“He that believeth shall not make haste.” (Isa. 28:16)

In an age of supersonic travel and highspeed communications, in a culture where hurry is the watchword, it brings us up short to learn that haste is seldom used of God in a good sense in the Bible. Seldom, I say, because there is the instance where the father runs to meet the returning prodigal, suggesting that God hastens to forgive. But generally speaking, God is not in a hurry.

When David said, “The king’s business required haste” (1 Sam. 21:8), he was guilty of subterfuge, and we should not use his words to justify our frenetic rushing back and forth. The plain truth is, as our text states, if we are really trusting the Lord, we don’t have to be in a hurry. The urgency of our task can be better served by a quiet walk in the Spirit than by a frenzy of carnal activity.

Here is a young man who is in a hurry to get married. He reasons that if he doesn’t act quickly, someone else might get the girl. The truth is that if God wants that girl for him, no one else can get her. If she is not God’s choice, then he will have to learn the hard way, “Marry in haste; repent at leisure.”

Another is in a hurry to go into so-called full-time work. He argues that the world is perishing and that he cannot wait. Jesus did not argue that way during the years in Nazareth. He waited till God called Him forth to public ministry.

Too often we are in a hurry in our personal evangelism. We are so anxious to rack up professions that we pick the fruit before it is ripe. We fail to allow the Holy Spirit to thoroughly convict the person of sin. The result of such a method is a trail of false professions and of human wreckage. We should “let patience have her perfect work” (James 1:4).

The true effectiveness of our lives lies not in rushing madly about on self-appointed missions, but in Spirit-directed activity that is ascertained by patiently waiting on the Lord.

Even so, Father

“Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” (Matt. 11:26)

In almost everyone’s life there are things which he never would have chosen, which he would like to be rid of, but which can never be changed. There is the matter of physical impairments or abnormalities. Or it may be a chronic, low-grade illness that will not leave us alone. Again it may be a nervous or emotional disorder that lingers as a most unwelcome guest.

So many live defeated lives, dreaming of what might have been if only. If only they were taller. If only they were better looking. If only they had been born in a different family, race or even sex. If only they were built to excel in athletics. If only they could know perfect health.

The lesson that these people should learn is that there is peace in accepting what cannot be changed. What we are, we are by the grace of God. He has planned our lives with infinite love and infinite wisdom. If we could see as well as He, we would have arranged things exactly as He has done. Therefore we should be able to say, “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.”

But there is a step further. We don’t have to accept these things in a spirit of meek resignation. Knowing that they were permitted by a God of love, we can make them the cause of praise and rejoice. Paul prayed three times that his thorn in the flesh might be removed. When the Lord promised grace to bear the thorn, the Apostle exclaimed, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9).

It is one of the signs of spiritual maturity when we can rejoice in the seemingly adverse circumstances in life and use them as means of glorifying God. Fanny Crosby learned the lesson early in life. When she was only eight, the blind poetess wrote:

Oh, what a happy child I am

Although I cannot see!

I am resolved that in this world

Contented I will be.

How many blessings I enjoy

That other people don’t!

So weep or sigh because I’m blind

I cannot, nor I won’t!

Freely ye have received, freely give

“Freely ye have received, freely give.” (Matt. 10:8)

Fritz Kreisler, one of the world’s greatest violinists said, “I was born with music in my system. I knew musical scores instinctively before I knew my ABC’s. It was a gift of Providence. I did not acquire it. So I do not even deserve thanks for the music...Music is too sacred to be sold. And the outrageous prices the musical celebrities charge today are truly a crime against society.”

These are words that everyone in Christian work might take to heart. The Christian ministry is a ministry of giving, not of getting. The question is not, “What is there in it for me?” but rather “How can I best share the message with the greatest number?” In the service of Christ, it is far better that things should cost rather than that they should pay.

It is true that “The labourer is worthy of his hire” (Luke 10:7) and that “They which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14). But this does not justify a man’s setting a price on his gift. It does not justify charging exorbitant royalties for the use of hymns. It does not justify unconscionable fees for speaking or singing engagements.

Simon the Sorcerer wanted to buy the power of conferring the Holy Spirit on others (Acts 8:19). No doubt he saw this as a way of making money for himself. By his action, he gave his name to our language (simony) to describe the buying or selling of religious privileges. It is no overstatement to say that the religious world today is shot through with simony.

If the dollar could somehow be removed from so-called Christian work, a great deal of it would stop immediately. But there would still be faithful servants of the Lord who would press on till their last ounce of strength was expended.

We have received freely; we ought to give freely. The more we give, the wider the blessing, and the greater the reward—good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over.

Judge not, that ye be not judg

“Judge not, that ye be not judged.” (Matt. 7:1).

People who know little else about the Bible often know this verse and use it in a most bizarre way. Even when a person is criticized for unspeakable wickedness, they piously gurgle, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” In other words, they use the verse to forbid any condemnation of evil.

The plain fact of the matter is that, while there are areas where we must not judge, there are other areas where judgment is commanded.

Here are some instances where judging is out. We must not judge people’s motives; not being omniscient, we cannot know why they do what they do. We mustn’t sit in judgment on the service of another believer; to his own Master he stands or falls. We mustn’t condemn those who have conscientious scruples about things that are morally neutral; it would be wrong for them to violate their conscience. We mustn’t judge by outward appearances or show respect of persons; it’s what is in the heart that counts. And certainly we should avoid a harsh, critical censorious spirit; a habitual fault-finder is a poor advertisement for the Christian faith.

But there are other areas where we are commanded to judge. We must judge all teaching to see whether it agrees with the Scriptures. In order to avoid unequal yokes, we must judge whether others are true believers. Christians should judge disputes between believers rather than allow them to go to civil courts. The local church must judge in cases of extreme forms of sin and disfellowship the guilty offender. Those in the church must judge which men have the qualifications of elders and of deacons.

God does not expect us to throw away our critical faculty or abandon all moral and spiritual standards. All He asks is that we refrain from judging where it is forbidden and that we judge righteously where it is commanded.

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