

*See!*  
*I will not forget you.*  
*I have marked you on the palm*  
*of my hand.*



## *MARKS OF A HIGH CALLING*

**By**

**Ron Christian**

*“THIS ONE THING I DO,  
FORGETTING THOSE THINGS  
WHICH ARE BEHIND, AND  
REACHING FORTH UNTO  
THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE  
BEFORE, I PRESS TOWARD  
THE MARK FOR THE PRIZE  
OF THE HIGH CALLING OF  
GOD IN CHRIST JESUS”*

*-Philippians 3:13b-14*

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*PART I*  
*FINDING OUR HIGH*  
*CALLING*

*WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES  
CHRISTMAS MAKE?*

*Chapter 1*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

# CHAPTER 1

## OUTLINE

**SUBJECT: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES CHRISTMAS MAKE?**

**TEXT:** *“My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant.” (Luke 1:46, 47)*

**SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:39-55**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Christmas is the Christian celebration of the Incarnation (The act of God becoming a man in the person of Jesus).

Jesus’ entrance into Mary’s womb was really Jesus’ entrance into all of human life and existence.

### **PROPOSITION:**

All of human life and relationships are illuminated and exalted by and through the Incarnation.

- I. The Incarnation Illuminates and Exalts all of Human Life and Existence and Relationships.**
- II. The Incarnation Is Personally Meaningful Because the God-Man Who Entered the Womb of Mary Is Able to Enter the Life of Every Person.**
- III. The Incarnation Teaches Us the Proper Attitude Towards Ourselves and the Right Attitude Towards God.**

### **CONCLUSION:**

What difference does Christmas Make? It makes all the difference in the world! Christmas celebrates the fact of the Incarnation, that is, God entered the womb of a virgin to be born and to live among humankind.

This planet is a visited planet – visited by the Creator of the Universe! What a profound thought and an unreasonable thought – but a thought, which reflects a fact!

## CHAPTER 1

**SUBJECT: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES CHRISTMAS MAKE?**

**TEXT:** *“My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant.” (Luke 1:46, 47)*

**SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:39-55**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

**What difference does Christmas make? What is the answer? That depends upon the one to whom you ask the question:**

**The Craze Businessman: More money because of more sales.**

**The Soldier Boy: More companionship with loved one. A reunion with my loved ones after an entire year of separation. Perhaps more traveling is done at Christmas time than at any other time during the year.**

**The Common Person: More bills because of greater spending during Christmas time than any other time during the year.**

**The Lonely Person: More loneliness. (It's been reported that there are more suicides during Christmas season than at any other time during the year, and many suicides are attributed to deep loneliness.)**

**The Salvation Army Volunteer: Ringing of little bells for hours on end, watching more people who are unresponsive pass by casually than the few who will stop and drop in a few coins.**

**The Christian: More love for God and more practical love expressed to one's fellowman during the Christmas season than any other time during the year. After all, it is Jesus' Birthday, isn't it? (There are more donations given to missions during the month of December as it should be, but is this as it will be?)**

**Mary, (the poor Jewish Girl) - the Mother of Jesus: “She sang the beautiful psalm, the Magnificent, which she sang when she went to visit Elizabeth before the Saviour's birth. It certainly is noticeable that that psalm is mainly of her own privilege: ‘He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden; for from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. He that is mighty hath done great things to me.’ He was designed to be born of her. Thus, she will be forever blessed. Because of this close union between His life and hers, she was lifted up out of her insignificance. Because He has shared her lot, her lot has ceased to be mean and wretched. She is sacred because of the God who has come and lived in her life. The**

poor Jewish girl is not despicable, no one shall despise her, and she never will despise herself again, now that her life has been capable of containing the very life of God.”<sup>1</sup>

## **PROPOSITION:**

From the life of Mary and from a study of Jesus’ affect upon Mary’s life, we learn that Jesus elevated Mary’s life immeasurably. However, Jesus’ entrance into Mary’s womb was really Jesus’ entrance into all of human life and existence. All of human life (not just Mary’s) is illuminated and exalted by and through the Incarnation (God becoming a Man).

### **I. The Incarnation Illuminates and Exalts All of Human Life and Existence and Relationships.**

The fact that God could take upon himself human flesh shows God’s estimate of human experience and human flesh. God becoming man forever exalts humanity. This is in contrast to the pagan’s despicable attitude regarding human flesh.

Since God took upon Himself human flesh, we have no right to despise, debase, or abuse our human form. Some religions despise human flesh and declare it profane, useless, and evil. The human body and human life, into which our Lord was born, is sacred. In becoming a Man, Jesus has forever sanctified, purified, and ennobled human relationships.

Perhaps the most important verse of the New Testament is John 1:14: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; and we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.”* E. Stanley Jones notes, “This verse – ‘the Word became flesh’ – is the great divide. In all other religions it is Word become word – a philosophy, a moralist, a system, a technique, but for all time and all men everywhere, ‘the Word became flesh,’ the idea became fact.”<sup>2</sup>

Notes William Barclay, “Augustine afterwards said that in his pre-Christian days he had read and studied the great pagan philosophers and their writings...but he had never read that ‘the Word became flesh.’ The one thing that no Greek would ever have dreamed of was that God could take a body. To the Greek the body was an evil, a prison-house in which the soul was shackled, a tomb in which the spirit was confined...The great Roman Stoic Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, said ‘Despise the flesh – blood and bones are a net-work, a twisted skein of nerves and veins and arteries. The composition of the whole body is under corruption.’”<sup>3</sup>

Again, Jones notes “And yet, in the face of all that – the highest thought of the day – the gospel quietly says: *‘And the Word became flesh.’*”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Phillips Brooks; 20 Centuries of Great Preaching; vol. 6, p. 148

<sup>2</sup> Word Became Flesh; p. 5

<sup>3</sup> Barclays Commentary on John

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 8

***The greatest fact of history is the fact that God became a man, embodying himself in human flesh. This fact alone forever establishes the truth of the sacredness of human flesh and human existence. The human form, the result of God’s special creation according to Genesis, is the very form that God chose to live in for 33 years. The human form has deity stamped upon it, and should never be degraded or abused. Let us not destroy what God has created. Let us not abuse what God cherishes.***

**“Another crucial difference (between Christianity and other world religions) is that of the establishment of hospitals. These we take for granted as a natural part of our life, which Christians establish and support, but we look in vain for any genuine counterpart in most of the non-Christian religions. Some of the religions provide no rational support for the establishment of hospitals in that they minimize the importance of bodies. Christianity, by contrast, is concerned with bodies as an integral part of its faith. The Christian who has any true understanding of his position cares greatly about what happens to bodies. He knows that the Word became flesh.” (John 1:14)<sup>5</sup>**

## **II. The Incarnation Is Personally Meaningful Because the God-Man Who Entered The Womb Of Mary Is Able To Enter The Life Of Every Person.**

**Just as God shared His divine life with Mary, so God desires to share His divine life with every man.**

**“In everything her life must have been elevated by seeing how her Son could share it with her. Her humble house must have seemed glorious, her simple meal a banquet, her husband’s workshop sacred, the ordinary household thoughts not commonplace, because they were not hers alone, but His...Christ could be born into such flesh and such relationships, into such duties and such delights, as ours. At once radiance streams in upon them, and they are no longer dull.”<sup>6</sup>**

**When Jesus enters men’s lives, a ‘radiance streams in upon them.’ Life becomes radiant, filled with mystery, majesty, and glory.**

**“Once Carlyle was propounding his favorite view that the worship of sorrow was the highest idea of moral goodness, and that it was to be found in the New Testament. Whereat Harriet Martineau turned on him with the retort: ‘I think Jesus Christ lived one of the most joyous lives.’”<sup>7</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> Trueblood: The Encourager, p. 104

<sup>6</sup> Brooks: p. 148

<sup>7</sup> Barclay: In The Hands of God; p. 66

**“Sir Arthur Jones used to say: ‘Morality is an uncommonly happy way to live.’”<sup>8</sup>**

**Jesus touched the common things of life and made them uncommonly beautiful. Jesus elevated all of life by His presence. The mundane and routine became exciting and meaningful when Jesus was around.**

**Jesus’ followers knew Him to be one who loved to dine with sinners, loved to go to weddings, and loved to eat. Sinners called Him a friend, but His enemies called him a ‘winebibber’.**

**Jesus’ followers also will fall in love with life. The secular becomes the sacred. The common becomes the uncommon. The ordinary becomes the extraordinary. The grays become bright colors. When Jesus enters ones life, all things become transformed. George Wade Robinson, the hymn-writer describes it:**

**“Heaven above is softer blue,  
Earth around is sweeter green;  
Something lives in every hue,  
Christless eyes have never seen:  
Birds with gladder songs o’erflow,  
Flowers with deeper beauties shine,  
Since I know, as now I know,  
I am His, and He is mine.”**

**“One of the extraordinary things about the Christian experience is the sheer joyous vitality that it brings into life. When D.L. Moody was converted ( in the shoe store amidst the shoes) he went out and said: ‘I thought the old sun shone upon me, and as I walked out upon Boston Common and heard the birds singing in the trees, I thought they were all singing a song to me. Do you know I fell in love with the birds? I had never cared for them before. It seemed that I was in love with all creation.’ The universe was suddenly gloriously and joyously alive.**

**“In due time Wilfred Grenfell of Labrador, was converted by Moody. ‘He started me working for all I was worth,’ said Grenfell, ‘and made religion real fun – a new field brimming with opportunities.’**

**“Life became real fun when life became Christian.”<sup>9</sup>**

**Since Christ has entered your life, do you see life as ‘a new field brimming with opportunities?’**

**The life of E. Stanley Jones was a most creative life, and from the moment of his conversion, life for him was ‘a new field brimming with opportunities.’ He said, “There is more unalloyed joy in being a Christian to the square inch than there is to the square mile outside him. When I started on a six-month evangelistic tour of the**

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid: 66

<sup>9</sup> Barkley: In the Hands of God: pg. 107, 108

East, Mary Webster wrote and said ‘Have fun with Jesus.’ It sounded flippant at first, but the more I thought of it the flippancy turned to fact. That is exactly what I have as a Christian. I am having fun, and it is with Jesus. It is fun to be a Christian... You can keep your head, you can keep your face if you know how to laugh. Not merely at jokes, but to laugh at the rhythm of things, at the fact that God is going to have the last word, whoever has the first or intermediate word. God is going to have the last word always in everything. To laugh when there is nothing to laugh at except to laugh at the fact of your laughing – how absurd. How wonderful. I am a happy man because my happiness is not dependent on happenings, but upon the joy of belonging to him, whatever happens. That is an invincible joy. The funny thing about it all is that I am getting happier as I get grayer. I am happier at eighty-three than I was at twenty-three. I was happy at twenty-three because I had Jesus; I am happier at eighty-three because I have Jesus, but a Jesus who has the sum total of reality behind him. Therefore, I have a cosmic laughter because I have a cosmic Christ. He fills me and the universe.”<sup>10</sup>

There is a phrase in a sacred song we often sing that reflects only part of the truth. It goes like this:

‘Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of His glory and grace.’

When we turn to Jesus, it is true that we begin to live for two worlds - the world of time and the world of eternity. Moreover, the world of time in comparison to the world of eternity must grow strangely dim in the light of heaven’s glory and God’s grace.

However, is it not also true that when Christ enters into human life that ‘the things of earth grow strangely bright and beautiful?’

“There is in Christianity a two-fold danger; there is the danger of becoming too involved in the world, but there is also the equal danger of despising the world.

Baron von Hugel once said an extraordinarily true thing, “If there is one danger for religion, if there is any one plausible, all-but-irresistible trend, which throughout its long rich history has sapped its force and prepared the most destructive counter excesses, it is just that, that of allowing the fascinations of Greece to deaden, or to ignore the beauties and duties of Nature.

“Jesus loved the birds, lilies, crops, and watching the children playing. There is a clear sense in which He loved the world. The New Testament says, ‘*Your joy no man takes from you*’. (John 16:22) It was Jesus’ prayer that ‘*His joy should be in His*

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<sup>10</sup> A Song of Ascents; pg. 342, 349

*people and that their joy should be full.’ (John 15:11) ‘Rejoice’ says Paul, ‘and again I say to you, Rejoice.’” (Philippians 4:4)<sup>11</sup>*

**When John wrote, “Love not the world, neither the things in the world” he defined ‘world’ to mean the ‘present evil system of things which is in opposition to the will of God.’ He did not mean the world of nature and the world of human relationships. Jesus loved nature and He loved people.**

**He who is living for two worlds should enjoy the first world far more than the man who is living only for the first world. The man who is a Christian is the man, of all men, who should be the man of joy. Why? Because of the reality of the Incarnation. God has entered human life, elevating all of human existence.**

### **III. The Incarnation Teaches Us The Proper Attitude Towards Ourselves And The Right Attitude Towards God.**

**The question urgently asked is, ‘What kind of God rules the Universe?’ ‘Is God for us or against us humans?’**

**There are those who see God as a Harsh Judge, one who is ready to strike down humanity. Martin Luther, in his early life, was terror-stricken at the sight of Christ the Judge. The theme of the most popular handbooks in Luther’s day was death, “and the best sellers gave instructions, not on how to pay the income tax, but how to escape hell.”<sup>12</sup>**

**However, the word ‘Immanuel’ that we often hear at Christmas time reveals to us the attitude of God towards man. ‘Immanuel’ means “God for us, with us, and God in us.” God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. The Incarnate God is a God of Love.**

**“Each is worthy of his own and of his brethren’s respect; for there has been an incarnation. This humanity has held Divinity. God has been in this flesh. O my dear friends, if your lives are hampered and held down by any self-contempt, by any feeling that human life is low, that to be a man is to be something narrow, dry, and barren...cast it aside on Christmas Day.”<sup>13</sup>**

**The fact that God loved humanity so much that He became a Man, should forever destroy a man’s attitude of self-contempt. In addition, it should obliterate forever the false notion that God is an angry Judge, ready arbitrarily to strike down humankind.**

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<sup>11</sup> William Barclay: *Alive In The Hands of God*; pg. 66,67

<sup>12</sup> Bainton: *Here I Stand*; p. 21

<sup>13</sup> Brooks; *ibid*: p. 149

**The Incarnation should destroy attitudes of self-contempt, yes, but the Incarnation (God dwelling among men in relationship) should also destroy any attitudes of self-satisfaction and complacency. The Incarnation reveals that man is not a worm. However, the Incarnation also reveals that man is not a wonder.**

**Jesus' presence with Mary first stirred Mary's pride, relieving Mary from harmful attitudes of self-contempt and inferiority. However, the longer Jesus lived with Mary, the greater Mary felt the contrast between the sinless son and the sinful mother. The pride, stirred in Mary's heart because of divine identification with humanity, gave way to shame, stirred in Mary's heart because of divine sinlessness in contrast to human depravity.**

**So it was in the lives of the disciples, Jesus' call for the common lot of disciples to an uncommon destiny, stirred their pride, released them from self-contempt and shame, and self-despair. The first power of the Incarnation is its ability to stir men to pride.**

**How could Peter not be proud to be identified with the Master? The common fisherman became the proud 'fisher of men.'**

**However, the closer the contact with the Master, the greater the realization of the difference between the sinless Leader and the sinful follower. Pride gave way to shame. Peter, on one occasion, cried out when he saw Jesus, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.*"**

**If self-contempt is destroyed by the Incarnation, so is also the attitude of self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction. If the Incarnation reveals that God is not an angry arbitrary Judge, so the Incarnation also reveals that God is not a sentimental, indulgent 'Parent', pampering His erring children.**

**The Incarnation reveals the God whose actions are both merciful and just. The God of the Incarnation is the God who comforts the disturbed and who disturbs the comfortable.**

**The first power of the Incarnation is its ability to stir pride in the heart of the man who is wallowing in self-contempt. The love of the Incarnate God calls a self-belittling man out of his pit of despair. Jesus took a lowly poor Jewish girl (Mary) and stirred her heart to love and pride, through His identification with her.**

**The second power of the Incarnation is its ability to stir shame in the heart of the man who has become comfortable on his couch of self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction. To such a person the contrast between God's holiness and man's sin is revealed. The tattered garments of self-righteousness are seen as mere rags in contrast to the beautiful garment of Christ's righteousness.**

**“Only after Mary had thoroughly conceived the dignity of her daily tasks when Christ took part in them could she begin to perceive how differently He did them from the way in which she did them, and so learn how her actual life fell short of the dignity with which the revelation of His birth had vested it. The Incarnation must have stirred her pride before it stirred her shame.”<sup>14</sup>**

**So the power of the Incarnation is seen in its double power to both deliver one from self-contempt and from self-sufficiency. The Incarnation shows a man that he is neither a worm nor a wonder, but simply a great sinner who can be wonderfully transformed by a great Saviour.**

## **CONCLUSION:**

**What difference does Christmas make? All the difference in the world! Christmas celebrates the fact of the Incarnation, that is, God entering the womb of a virgin to be born and to live among humankind.**

**This planet is a visited planet – visited by the Creator of the Universe! A profound thought and an unreasonable thought – but a thought, which reflects a fact.**

**What does the Incarnation teach you and me?**

- (1) Human life and the human body, into which Jesus was born, are sacred. The glory of deity shone through the temple of human flesh, pronouncing a holy benediction forever upon our human form, and frame.**
- (2) The Incarnation is personally meaningful because the God-Man who entered the womb of Mary is able to enter the life of every person, imparting deep meaning and unspeakable joy to all of life. When Jesus touches life, all of life is transformed into a holy excitement and an exuberant joy.**
- (3) The Incarnation cleanses one’s attitudes towards himself and one’s attitudes toward God. Jesus is God in human flesh. Jesus gives God a face. What Jesus was, God has always been.**

**Jesus reveals a God of Holy Love. That is, God loves men unconditionally; therefore, men need no longer wallow in self-contempt. God’s love is a holy love, however. That is, God is not a sentimental, indulgent ‘Parent’, pampering His erring children. God hates sin while at the same time He loves the sinner whom He seeks to save. So, while God loves the sinner unconditionally, He also hates sin unconditionally. Therefore, man dare no longer rest on his couch of self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction. The Incarnation teaches us that God came to earth to comfort the distressed, and to distress the comfortable. Christ came to seek and to save the lost - those who know they are lost and those who think they are found.**

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<sup>14</sup> Brooks: Ibid; p. 149

**To repeat what was said earlier, “The Incarnation shows a man that he is neither a worm nor a wonder, but simply a great sinner who can be wonderfully transformed by a great Saviour.”**

**Has Jesus entered your life personally? Has he transformed every part of your life – your actions and reactions, your relationships, your attitudes, your routine of daily vocation? Have you allowed Jesus to lift you out of the pit of self-contempt? Or, if you are on the couch of self-sufficiency, are you willing to get off that couch un to your knees to acknowledge that you are a great sinner in need of a great Saviour? Let Christ illuminate and elevate all of human existence for you, TODAY!**

*THE PURSUING LOVE OF THE  
SAVIOUR*

*Chapter 2*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

## CHAPTER 2

### OUTLINE

**SUBJECT: THE PURSUING LOVE OF THE SAVIOUR**

**TEXT: *“This man receiveth sinners.”***

**SCRIPTURE: Luke 15:1-10**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

The Scribes and Pharisees accused Jesus of associating with publicans and sinners, and of showing special attention and love for them. Jesus did not deny such associations, but used his opponent’s criticism as his very text: “This man welcomes and receives sinners.”

#### **I. Jesus’ Identification of Lost**

- a. **The Lost Sheep Represents Those Who Are Lost By Drifting Away From The Family, and Fold of God.**
- b. **The Lost Coin Represents Those Who Become Lost Through The Carelessness of Others**

#### **II. Jesus’ Attitudes Towards Lost.**

- a. **Loves Individually**
- b. **Hopes Incessantly**
- c. **Seeks Diligently**
- d. **Rejoices Wholeheartedly**

#### **CONCLUSION:**

**Jesus loves the lost sinner with an incomparable love, for it is the love that centers upon each individual in need, the love that never grows hopeless, the love that takes the initiative to seek the lost, and the love that rejoices wholeheartedly when this lost one is found.**

## CHAPTER 2

**SUBJECT: THE PURSUING LOVE OF THE SAVIOUR**

**TEXT: “This man receiveth sinners.”**

**SCRIPTURE: Luke 15:1-10**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The Scribes and Pharisees accused Jesus of associating with publicans and sinners, and of showing special attention and love for them. Jesus did not deny such associations, but used his opponent’s criticism as his very text: “This man welcomes and receives sinners.” Then Jesus proceeded to illustrate this statement by citing certain parables, the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the lost son. Let us look at the first two parables, the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin.

#### **I. JESUS’ IDENTIFICATION OF LOST.**

Each of Jesus’ parables concerning the lost, describe the kind of people who are lost.

a. **The Lost Sheep Represents Those Who Are Lost By Drifting Away From The Family and Fold Of God.** The sheep did not intentionally break away from the fold, but gradually and carelessly became separated from the fold, all the time thinking that the shepherd and other sheep were near by. The sheep became fascinated with a new patch of green grass, which in turn led to another patch of grass. Little by little, the sheep was alone and lost. The sheep was lost because of careless preoccupation with things, which drew it away from the shepherd.

Therefore, it is in human life. A Christian becomes unconsciously preoccupied with things, which gradually draws him away from Christ and the Church. He does not deliberately, or rebelliously, draws away from the shepherd, but gradually and carelessly, he draws away from the shepherd.

It is usually through neglect of the means of grace that a Christian backslides and becomes lost from the fold. Said the writer of Hebrews, “*Therefore we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*” (Hebrews 2:1) The sheep did not pay close attention to the shepherd or to the other sheep, and consequently it drifted away from the fold and became lost. A Christian must pay close attention to the shepherd, and to the other sheep, otherwise he will drift away. “*How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?*” (Hebrews 2:3)

In what way is it possible for a Christian to neglect his salvation and thus drift from God? A Christian can neglect to pray. How easy it is to become preoccupied with legitimate pursuits in life and fail to take sufficient time to pray. Drifting is always preceded by neglecting prayer. The Scripture exhort the Christian to pray always: *“Pray at all times with every kind of spiritual prayer, keeping alert and persistent as you pray for all Christ’s men and women.”* (Ephesians 6:18, Phillips) As sheep are created to flock together, so Christians are made to worship and to fellowship together. The public worship is a means of grace, not to be taken for granted, but to be cherished and used by every Christian who has opportunity. Fellowship was one means of great spiritual growth in the early church, and is meant to be that today. The Christian who neglects this means of grace, not only hinders others whom he could be an encouragement to by his presence, but he also contributes to the decline in the church’s corporate influence in the world. In addition, he is sure to hinder his own spiritual growth.

A Christian can neglect his salvation and thus drift by failing to read the Bible regularly. *“Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation.”* (I Peter 2:2, RSV) *“How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth.”* (Psalms 119:103) *“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart; for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts.”* (Jeremiah 15:16) These messages describe the Bible as food – food to the soul. The drifting Christian is the one who begins to feed his mind and soul on the world’s husks, while he neglects the nourishment of God’s Word. A point in case is Television. Do you feed your mind more on television than you do on the Word of God?

The Christian can neglect his salvation and thus drift by failing to witness to his faith. One’s faith must be outwardly expressed, as this is God’s plan of spreading the good news. The Christian who grows ashamed to witness to his faith is the Christian who soon loses his identity with Christ. Wrote Paul to Timothy, *“Never be ashamed of bearing witness to our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner.”* (II Timothy 1:8, Phillips) As someone said, “Salvation may come quietly, but we cannot remain quiet about it.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, just as the sheep was lost by drifting carelessly away from the fold, so Christians can become lost by drifting carelessly. The Christian must avail himself of every means of grace.

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<sup>1</sup> Rosell: No. 120

**b. The Lost Coin Represents Those Who Become Lost Through The Carelessness of Others. The coin was lost by no fault of its own, but through the carelessness of another. Clovis Chappell states, “There are those who, while morally responsible, are yet far more sinned against than sinning.”<sup>2</sup>**

**Think of the many whose environment has been most unpleasant, and filled with alluring temptation and hurtful snares. God loves all men equally, but this is far from saying that all men have equal moral opportunities. Some seem almost to be in the clutches of evil when they come into the world.**

**Think of those who have to suffer physically because of the careless indulgence of a parent. Many babies have a weakness for smoking or drinking, or dope simply because their parents were users of these evil devices. It is no fault of the child if he has inborn weaknesses toward those evils. These weaknesses got into his bloodstream ever before he was born into the world. The constant presence of cigarettes, alcohol, or dope in his home makes him an easy victim of them. Before he has built up any moral resistance or moral standards, these evils are thrown into his face, and it seems most natural for him to succumb. Again, we cannot deny some type of moral responsibility in such a case, but the fact remains that some people are more sinned against than sinning. Such sinning is done, not so much out of rebellion, as out of ignorance and carelessness of another.**

**Think of a child who is sinned against in that he has never experienced love from either his parents or society. The child may rebel because of this neglect and he is partly responsible for his rebellion. But the child’s parents or society is far more responsible. Because he has been treated as a thing rather than a person, he will seek for security and acceptance and love outside of the home. He has been taught by society that to know sex is to know love. Therefore, the unloved child naturally turns to sexual experimentation, hoping through this to discover love. He has failed to realize that sex is only one manifestation of love and not love itself. This person has failed yes, but is he more sinning or more sinned against? He is more sinned against, since he has been treated more as a thing – unloved – rather than as a person – loved. His parents and society are more responsible than he is.**

**Think of the lawless child who comes from a permissive home where he never knew the meaning of authority, or restraint, or discipline, or respect. His lawless behavior cannot be justified, but it probably can be explained. Through the carelessness of his parents, he is lost – lost to the meaning of freedom through restraint, lost to the meaning of**

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<sup>2</sup> Sermons From The Parables; 173

maturity through respect, lost to the meaning of achievement through discipline, lost to the meaning of order through authority. Is he more sinning or more sinned against? An argument might be made that he is more sinned against. He is the product of carelessness by others. Our rebels must bear personal responsibility for their actions, but so must our permissive society. Because he lives in a maladjusted society, he is a maladjusted individual. The lost coin then represents those who are lost through the carelessness of another.

## II. JESUS' ATTITUDES TOWARD LOST

a. Love Individually. In the parable of the lost sheep, we see Jesus' concern for one lost individual. Just as the shepherd leaves the ninety and nine other sheep and goes in search for the one lost, straying sheep, so Jesus loves the one lost soul so much that he gives individual attention to the one.

In the parable of the lost coin, the one lost coin is so precious to the woman that she gives it her sole attention. "In Palestine the mark of a married woman was a head-dress made of ten silver coins linked together by a silver chain. For years, maybe a girl would scrape and save to amass her ten coins, for the headdress was almost the equivalent of her wedding ring. When she had it, it was so inalienably hers that it would not even be taken from her for debt. It may well be that it was one of these coins that the woman in the parable lost, and she searched for it as any woman would search if she had lost her marriage ring."<sup>3</sup>

In the impersonal world in which we live, it is hard for us to imagine that God could be individually concerned in each person. It is because we have placed God in a human category, rather than realizing that He has no human limitation. It is hard enough for us to realize that God so loved the world - categorically - but it is even more difficult for us to realize that God so loved the world - individually. God loves every man so much that if you would have been the only individual in the world, Christ would have died for you. The story of the lost sheep and lost coin teaches us that God loves every person individually.

b. Hope Incessantly. The shepherd never lost hope of finding his sheep. When all around seemed dark and the journey seemed rough, hope of finding the sheep drove him on and on. It is said that there are no hopeless situations in life, only people who have grown hopeless about them.

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<sup>3</sup> Barclays Luke: 209, 210

**The woman, who searched for her coin so incessantly and ceaselessly, was constantly in hope of finding her coin. As long as hope burns in the breast of man, he continues to search for the lost child. It is only when all hope has died out, that the search is stopped.**

**The Christian must be like God – never consider any man a hopeless case. Hope gives birth to labor and labor produces the results. Hope lightens the burden of the work itself. “Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey towards it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us.”<sup>4</sup> What godly mother does not think that some day her straying son will come home? Hope causes her to pray, to work, to expect.**

**c. Seeks Diligently. In the story of the lost sheep, we see vividly portrayed the pursuing love of God. God always takes the initiative in seeking and finding the lost. It was inconceivable to the Jews, who first heard this story that God could ever go out of His way to bring the lost and straying home. “The Jew might have agreed that if a man came crawling home to God in self-abasement and knelt before God praying for pity he might find it; but the Jew would never have conceived of a God who went out to search for sinners. It is our glory that we believe in the seeking love of God, because we see that love incarnate in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came to seek and to save that which was lost.”<sup>5</sup>**

**The same lesson was taught in “the Parable of the Coin”. To lose a coin in a Palestinian home was about like losing a needle in a haystack. “The Palestinian houses were very dark, for they were lit by one little circular window not much more than about eighteen inches across. The floor was beaten earth covered with dried reeds and rushes...The woman swept the floor in the hope that she might see the coin glint, or hear it tinkle as it fell among the rushes.”<sup>6</sup>**

**The Christian who desires to be like God must search diligently for the lost. The Christian is earnest in his quest for souls. It is his main mission in life, regardless of his particular vocation. “*He that winneth souls is wise.*” (Proverbs 11:30b)**

**d. Rejoice Wholeheartedly. The shepherd said to his friends as he came back to the expectant village with his rescued sheep, “*Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.*” (Luke 15:6B) “*When the woman found it (coin), she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.*” (Luke 15:9)**

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<sup>4</sup> Rosell;; No. 187

<sup>5</sup> Barclays Luke; 210

<sup>6</sup> Barclays Luke; 209

**Phillips Brooks said, “Live with enthusiastic, noble men and you will find the world opening its inspiring delights to you on every side.”<sup>7</sup> Joy is contagious. Sharing the joy of a lost sinner who is found, gives you a desire to experience the same joy firsthand.**

**The Christian then, like God, is one who exceedingly rejoices over a sinner who is found. “I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” (Luke 15:10) There should be nothing that fills the Christian with more joy than the conversion of a sinner to God. In a Palestinian village, the whole village would be on a watch for the returning shepherd with his lost sheep. “When, in the distance, they saw the shepherd striding home with the lost sheep across his shoulders, there would rise from the whole community, a shout of joy and of thanksgiving.”<sup>8</sup> So it should be with Christians. The whole Christian Church should feel like shouting when a lost sinner is found.**

## **CONCLUSION:**

**Jesus loves the lost sinner with an incomparable love, for it is the love that centers upon each individual in need, the love that never grows hopeless, the love that takes the initiative to seek the lost, and the love that rejoices wholeheartedly when the lost are found. God loves every lost man, including the one who has strayed away from the fold, and including the one who is lost because of careless treatment by another. It is this same type of love that every true Christian must imitate and experience in his life. Do you possess the pursuing love of the Saviour in your life?**

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<sup>7</sup> Sermons; v. 5; p. 329)

<sup>8</sup> Barclays Luke; 208

## CHAPTER 3

### OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:** THE FORGIVING LOVE OF THE FATHER

**TEXT:** *“But even though we are dead in our sins God, who is rich in mercy, because of love He had for us, gave us life together with Christ.” (Ephesians 2:4, 5)*

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 15:11-32

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

The story of the prodigal son is a vivid description of the life of restless indulgence, born of a false conception of freedom. It is an anatomy of human repentance that results in divine reconciliation. The story of the elder son is a description of self-righteous morality in the face of human sin, that results in a spirit of smug superiority and bitter contempt.

#### **PROPOSITION:**

God loves the sinner and desires him to return to god. God tenderly forgives and joyfully receives the repentant sinner into His great family. All who are truly Christian will also love the sinner and joyfully receive him as a Christian brother. The contrast between the attitude of the father towards the prodigal and the attitude of the elder son towards the prodigal, teaches us the difference between god’s warm acceptance of the sinner and the moralist’s cold rejection of the sinner.

#### **I. PRODIGAL SON**

- a. Restless Indulgence
- b. Pitiful Misery
- c. Humble Repentance
- d. Joyful Reconciliation

#### **II. THE ELDER SON**

- a. Self-Righteous Morality
- b. Smug Superiority
- c. Bitter Contempt
- d. Pathetic Alienation

## **CONCLUSION:**

**Is our way of treating sinners – prodigals – God’s way or the Pharisees’ way, the father’s way or the elder son’s way? Let us not forget that the true Christian, like God, will love the sinner and joyfully receive him into the family of God as a Christian brother. The contrast between the attitude of the father towards the prodigal and the attitude of the elder son towards the prodigal teaches us the difference between God’s warm acceptance and man’s cold rejection of the sinner.**

## CHAPTER 3

**SUBJECT: THE FORGIVING LOVE OF THE FATHER**

**SCRIPTURE: Luke 15:11-32**

**Text:** *“But even though we are dead in our sins God, who is rich in mercy, because of love He had for us, gave us life together with Christ.” (Ephesians 2:4, 5)*

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The story of the Prodigal Son is really the story of the father’s love as contrasted to the older son’s contempt and hate, in view of the prodigal son’s sin. The story of the prodigal is a vivid description of the life of restless indulgence, born out of a false conception of freedom. It is an anatomy of human repentance that results in divine reconciliation. The story of the elder son is a description of the life of self-righteous morality in the face of human sin that results in a spirit of smug superiority and bitter contempt. The tragedy of the story is found in the self-induced alienation of the moralistic elder son, while the repenting prodigal is joyfully reconciled.

### **PROPOSITION:**

God loves the sinner and desires him to return to God. God tenderly forgives and joyfully receives the repentant sinner into His great family. All who are truly Christian will also love the sinner and joyfully receive him as a Christian brother. The contrast between the attitude of the father towards the prodigal and the attitude of the elder son towards the prodigal, teaches us the difference between God’s warm acceptance of the sinner and the moralist’s cold rejection of the sinner.

#### **I. PRODIGAL SON**

In the story of the prodigal’s actions, we can see certain progressions, first from bad to worse and then, when he has reached the bottom, from the bottom finally to the very top.

a. **Restless Indulgence.** The younger son was restless and dissatisfied with routine work. Country life seemed boring to him; he wanted to be where the action was in the city. Knowing that he would eventually someday receive a certain portion of land from his father, he became impatient and asked his father for his portion now. “Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.” (Luke 15: 12b, RSV)

What was his reason for leaving home? Not intentionally to hurt his father, and certainly with no intention to someday work in a pigpen. By leaving home, he fully expected to find a new freedom and new opportunities, without the restrictions and restraints of his father’s

home. His motive was that of self-pleasing. Self was at the center of all of his desires.

The trouble with the younger son is that he did not understand the true meaning of freedom. Many there are who, like this restless son, think that they will really live when they get away from the duties and restrictions of their childhood home. “When I get on my own, away from father, then I am really going to live it up. I’ll then be free to do as I please.” Those are the words of countless prodigals down through the ages, not all of which comprehend the true meaning of freedom. Prodigals are slow “to learn that there is no freedom except in conformity to law.”<sup>1</sup> The truly free person is the controlled person, the one who submits to a Higher Law than himself, only to find the highest type of freedom. For example, the pianist who submits to certain laws of music is the one who is wonderfully free to use the piano to express any mood and move any man.

The prodigal failed to realize that he was free initially to choose, but that he had to live with the consequences of his choice. All men do. For example, one is free to choose to smoke, but he is not free to accept or reject the consequences of smoking. One is free to choose to respect others, but he is not free to accept or reject the consequences of his choice. Every choice has consequences, which one has to accept.

b. **Pitiful Misery.** What was the choice of the younger son? “*The younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living.*”<sup>2</sup> What were the binding consequences of his free choice? He became alienated from his family and from his God. Away from the fellowship of home is agony, especially when the friendships of the world prove unfaithful and unreliable. However, the lostness from his physical home is magnified by the lostness of his soul from the home of God’s companionship. He is alienated from family and alienated from God. Alienation is always the consequence of sin.

Material and spiritual poverty is also a consequence of sin. In the far country, he “*squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country and he began to be in want.*”<sup>3</sup> Not that there was widespread famine in the country itself, but he himself lost all and thus suffered personal famine in the country. Sin always is wasteful. It is wasteful of money and all material substances. Millions are the dollars daily wasted in riotous, selfish living. Spiritual poverty even outweighs physical poverty. Sin dulls one’s aspirations, stunts one’s development, and frustrates one’s

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<sup>1</sup> Chappell: Parables;187

<sup>2</sup> Luke 15:13b, RSV

<sup>3</sup> Luke 15:13-14

potential. Many there are, just like the prodigal, who are living far below their possibilities, all because of the paralysis of sin. The prodigal, in the far country, is reduced to a pitiful condition. Pitiful because his life was wasting away while his potentials were not realized.

Another consequence of sin is loss of all respect. He went to the very bottom of the ladder and became a skid row reject of society. “So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine.” Not that there is anything wrong in feeding swine, but for a Jew to resort to this kind of job was unthinkable. It was forbidden in the Law for a Jew to feed pigs. “Cursed is he who feeds swine.” He lost all self-respect and when one has lost respect for himself, he has lost everything.

Sin further resulted in the prodigal being plunged into a state of deep disillusionment. The prodigal had gone to the far country to find freedom and he had ended up in perpetual bondage. “*And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything.*”<sup>4</sup> Sin never keeps its glowing promises. “Every man who sets out in search of freedom apart from obedience only ends by dressing his soul in chains.”<sup>5</sup> Disillusionment is the result of sin.

c. **Humble Repentance.** The prodigal’s restless indulgence led to pitiful misery, but when he reached the bottom, things happened which eventually brought him to the very top, both physically and spiritually. What factors could possibly change this poor, lost wretch? Those factors were changed attitudes.

The prodigal first “*came to himself.*” He finally became awake to his true condition. A faithful friend of a wayward man will sometimes be heard to say to the wayward one, “Wake up, don’t you see that your behavior is going to land you in prison someday.” It was sad that the prodigal had to go to prison – the prison of a pigpen – before he woke up and regained his reason. The Spirit of God, working through circumstances, finally brought the prodigal to a rude awakening. He “*came to himself.*” He finally became awake to his true condition. He regained his moral sanity and began seriously to think, and a man must always become awakened before he can get out of the pigpen of sin.

The prodigal next acknowledged his spiritual and physical poverty. When he came to himself he said, “*How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger!*” He saw his pathetic condition, as he compared himself to the hired

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 15:16

<sup>5</sup> Chappell: Sermons From The Parables: 188

servants of his father. How poor he was. The sinner must always acknowledge his own spiritual poverty before he can be restored to spiritual health.

The prodigal was willing to accept the humble role of the hired servant. *“I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants!’”*<sup>6</sup> The hired servant was the lowest rank of slaves, a common day laborer. The ordinary slave was in some sense a member of the family, but the hired servant could be dismissed at a day’s notice. He was not one of the family at all.”<sup>7</sup> Repentance seeks no status with God at all, but only acceptance on the lowest level.

The prodigal transformed his decision into action. *“And he arose and came to his father.”*<sup>8</sup> He did not try to reform and seek better employment. His action was fruitful action. He saw that his essential need could be met only in his father, and could be met only as he honestly confessed his condition to his father. Repentance always means action – the action of faith. The prodigal had faith that somehow his father could help him. The sinner must not drown himself in tears of remorse, but rather he must arise and go in faith to the Father who can give help.

d. **Joyful Reconciliation.** The father saw the prodigal approaching from a distance and went to meet him. For a long time the father had waited expectantly and longed anxiously for his son to return. Unspeakable joy overwhelmed the father when he finally saw in the far distance the approaching appearance of his wayward son. *“While he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”*<sup>9</sup> What a perfect description of the love of God in action. When the sinner makes any approach towards God, God runs towards the sinner, to embrace, to kiss, and to welcome. God goes to meet the sinner while the sinner is still a great way off. The love of God is an initiating love. *“But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”*<sup>10</sup>

The father’s actions towards the son signified the father’s forgiveness of the son. This is not to say that forgiveness should automatically be assumed and that it was easy. True forgiveness is costly. The prodigal’s actions could not be excused or minimized. His actions had caused countless hours of grief to his father. This father was an

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 15:18-19, RSV

<sup>7</sup> Barclays Luke , p. 212

<sup>8</sup> V. 20

<sup>9</sup> V. 20

<sup>10</sup> Romans 5:8, RSV

**extraordinary father. His love was so great that it could forgive, but that forgiveness was costly. Many a father has not forgiven his returning prodigal son. “The story is told of a certain prodigal son who, on turning up in ‘the far country’ of another parish, was advised by the minister there to go home and ‘his father would kill the fatted calf for him’. The prodigal obeyed; and, months after, meeting the same minister again, was asked, hopefully: ‘Well, and did he kill the fatted calf for you?’ ‘No’, came the rueful reply, ‘but he nearly killed the prodigal son!’ Who will deny that it has often happened so in real life?”<sup>11</sup> Forgiveness is costly and must never be assumed or lightly regarded.**

**The father’s forgiveness was true and ennobling forgiveness. There is a way of forgiving when forgiveness is conferred as favor; and worse, when someone is forgiven, but always by hint and by word and by threat his sin is held over him. Once Lincoln was asked how he was going to treat the rebellious Southerners when they had finally been defeated and had returned to the Union of the United States. The questioner expected that Lincoln would take a dire vengeance, but he answered, ‘I will treat them as if they had never been away.’ It is the wonder of the love of God that God treats us like that.”<sup>12</sup>**

**The son was totally reconciled to the father. The father put the best robe on the son. The robe stands for honor. The father put a ring on his hand. “The ring stands for authority for if a man gave to another his signet ring it was the same as giving him the power of attorney.”<sup>13</sup> The father put shoes on his feet. “Wearing shoes stands for a son as opposed to a slave, for children of the family were shod and slaves were not.”<sup>14</sup> And the fatted calf was killed and a great homecoming celebration was given.**

**The prodigal, whose restless indulgence led to pitiful misery, came to himself, repented, and was joyfully reconciled to his father. The father’s action towards the prodigal shows us the heart and the love of God, which warmly accepts the repentant sinner. We must now contrast the father’s acceptance of the prodigal with the elder son’s cold and bitter rejection of the prodigal.**

## **II. THE ELDER SON**

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<sup>11</sup> Kennedy: The Parables; p. 6

<sup>12</sup> Barclays Luke p. 213

<sup>13</sup> Barclays Luke, p. 212

<sup>14</sup> Ibid; 212

Let us briefly note characteristics of the elder son, all of which are unlike the characteristics of the true Christian who, like God, must always lovingly accept the sorrowing prodigal.

a. **Self-Righteous Morality.** The elder son was good by outward standards. He was obedient and faithful to duty, both of which are to be commended and followed. Said he to his father, “*Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command.*”<sup>15</sup> He was right.

By outward standards, he was very moral, but his morality was a self-righteous morality. He was duteous, cold, calculating, unsympathetic, and rigid. He was so concerned with duty and performance that he had no fellowship with his father. With all his morality, he was lost while yet at home. He had no warm and close relationship with his father. He apparently was possessed with a sense of flawless but grim duty, instead of warm and loving service.

There are yet those who, like the elder son, are outwardly flawless in their behavior, but who have no vital and close relationship with God. Their morality has a serious flaw in it; it is born out of a spirit of self-righteousness.

b. **Smug Superiority.** Obviously, the elder son felt superior to his wayward little brother who had acted so foolishly and rebelliously. Anyone who compared the two sons would naturally praise the elder and criticize the younger. Doubtless, throughout the years the neighbors had helped feed the pride of the elder son, by periodically reminding him that he was his father’s pride and joy while the younger son was the source of the father’s shame. His meticulous observance of his father’s commands added to his sense of pride and superiority.

The elder son had failed to learn the most important lesson of all – the lesson of humility. He failed to see the corruption of his heart, which was very real, despite his apparent good conduct. It is oftentimes easier for the repentant prodigal to be humble, than for the self-righteous moralist to be humble. Says Bishop Kennedy, “It is difficult to walk in the city slums and not thank God for our own virtue. The man or woman who can look upon the drunk in the gutter and the harlot in the doorway with eyes full of compassion instead of disgust is a citizen of the kingdom indeed.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> V. 28

<sup>16</sup> Parables; p. 4

**“John Newton, after years of wandering and sin, came home to become a minister in the Church of England. He could never forget how God saved him from shipwreck, from moral disaster, and from despair. A neighboring curate who drank too much set the curtains of his house on fire while drunk, and was burned to death. Newton heard about the tragedy and wrote this prayer: ‘Lord, may I remember thy patience towards me when I drank down iniquity. Why was I not surprised in my sins and hurried to judgment?’”<sup>17</sup> Here was true humility. No man who has a smug superiority about him, in the face of human sin and ruin, can be a child of God.**

**c. Bitter Contempt. What was the reaction of the elder son when he heard of the welcoming feast for his younger brother? It was the reaction of bitter contempt, born out of ugly jealousy. “But he was angry and refused to go in.”<sup>18</sup> When the father entreated the elder son to come into the celebrating feast, the elder son said, “Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots; you killed for him the fatted calf!”<sup>19</sup>**

**Says G. Campbell Morgan, “Any interpretation of religion which holds derelict humanity in contempt is the worst form of irreligion.”<sup>20</sup> This is what the elder son did – he held his derelict brother in contempt. In the jealous words of the elder son, we can read hatred. Instead of calling him ‘my brother’, he calls him ‘this son of yours’. These are words of cold rejection by the elder son. No love for even his own brother – now returned home, repentant, transformed. No rejoicing over the fact that he had finally found himself and found the meaning of life and love, after drinking of the bitter dregs of licentious living. Only held contempt, jealousy, and cold rejection.**

**The elder son’s sins are brought out rudely into the light – the sins of the spirit and of the mind. His past moralistic living fades into the misty darkness as his ugly sins protrude themselves into the present light. His attitudes are those of one who would kick the fallen derelict further into the mud. Apparently, the elder son had a nasty mind too. “There is no mention of harlots until he mentions them. He, no doubt, suspected and accused his brother of the sins he himself would have liked to commit.”<sup>21</sup>**

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid; 6. 7

<sup>18</sup> Verse 28

<sup>19</sup> Verse 29, 30

<sup>20</sup> Parables and Metaphors of Our Lord; 216

<sup>21</sup> Barkley’s Luke; p. 214

**d. Pathetic Alienation. The father lovingly dealt with the bitter son. “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was befitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”<sup>22</sup>**

**The father’s heart pained because the son did not understand, but instead was cold, calculating, and jealous-ridden. He had the wrong attitude toward himself, toward his brother, and toward his father. He thought his faithfulness should have its visible and obvious rewards. “It is a terrible thing when jealousy takes the place of understanding and when we fail to see that oftentimes our reward is to be unrewarded.”<sup>23</sup> His attitude towards his brother was hatred instead of love. This attitude, needless to say, alienated him from his brother. He blamed his father of partiality and unfairness, instead of siding in with his father in welcoming the wayward home. This attitude alienated him from his father.**

**This alienation is pathetic, because the elder son had the opportunity to know fulfillment, fellowship, joy, and reconciliation instead. Instead, he was sour, unforgiving, and small – attitude, which resulted in alienation from all things, that are ennobling. His alienation is pathetic because it is a self-induced alienation.**

## **CONCLUSION:**

**Says Hunter; “In the parable, then, Jesus does two things. To begin with, he justifies his own mission in the teeth of his critics: ‘God is like the father of my story. This is his way with sinners, and therefore it is my way.’ But, secondly, he rebukes the Scribes and Pharisees: ‘You represent the Elder Brother in my story, because your way of treating sinners is his. But it is the wrong way, because it is not God’s way’”<sup>24</sup>**

**Is our way of treating sinners – prodigals – God’s way or the Pharisees’ way: the father’s way or the elder son’s way? Let us not forget that the true Christian, will like God, love the sinner and joyfully receive him into the family of God as a Christian brother. The contrast between the attitude of the father towards the prodigal and the attitude of the elder son towards the prodigal teaches us the difference between God’s warm acceptance and man’s cold rejection of the sinner.**

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<sup>22</sup> Verse 31,32

<sup>23</sup> Parables; Kennedy; p... 4

<sup>24</sup> Parables; p. 62

*THE FOLLY OF SECULARISM*

*Chapter 4*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

## CHAPTER 4

### OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:** THE FOLLY OF SECULARISM  
**TEXT:** *“Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God”*  
**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 16:24-26

#### INTRODUCTION:

Paul warned Christians not to conform to the anti-Christian standards of secular culture. Rather, Christians were to live transformed lives, with new standards and holy attitudes. Christians were to live in two worlds, the world of sense and the world of faith. So it is today. Christians must realize the folly of adopting secular standards, and the reasons why secularism, with all its glowing promises, will always fail.

#### PROPOSITION:

To better appreciate Christ’s command, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God”, let us note the shallow and delusive way of secularism, which is the predominate mood of our age.

#### I. ATTITUDES OF SECULARISM

- a. Definition of Secularism
- b. Preoccupation of Secularism
  - i. Secularism has invaded the area of Entertainment.
  - ii. Secularism has invaded the area of Business.
  - iii. Secularism has invaded the area of Education.

#### II. FAILURE OF SECULARISM

- a. Secularism is a failure because it is preoccupied with the body and ignores the spirit.
- b. Secularism is a failure because it is preoccupied with the temporal realm and denies the celestial realm.

#### CONCLUSION:

The man, who confines and limits himself to the finite realm of earthly pleasure, goods, and achievements, will be found eternally ‘wanting’ at the Final Judgment. Better to take Paul’s advice: *“Be not conformed to the world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your*

*mind.*<sup>1</sup> “*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God,*” said Jesus, and Jesus will have the final word at the Judgment.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 12:2

## CHAPTER 4

**SUBJECT: THE FOLLY OF SECULARISM**  
**TEXT: “Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God”**  
**SCRIPTURE: Matthew 16:24-26**

### INTRODUCTION:

Paul was not a monk who lived in a monastery with an attempt to escape the world. Rather, Paul lived and moved in the hustle and bustle of urban life among some of the greatest intellects of his day. He rubbed shoulders with the common populace of his day, and adapted his message to every need and every class of people. Paul did not seek to escape from the world. He whole-heartedly involved himself in the popular issues of his own age, and taught men how to live a godly life amidst a pagan society. Paul wrote to Christians: *“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves toward the goal of true maturity.”*<sup>2</sup> Paul warned Christians not to conform to the anti-Christian standards of secular culture. Rather, Christians were to live transformed lives, with new standards and holy attitudes. Christians were to live in two worlds, the world of sense and the world of faith. So it is today. Christians must realize the folly of adopting secular standards, and the reasons why secularism, with all its glowing promises, will always fail.

### PROPOSITION:

Let us try better to understand the attitude and mood of secularism, and let us note the ways in which secularism fails to impart satisfaction to man. To better appreciate Christ’s command, *“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God”*, let us note the shallow and delusive way of secularism, which is the predominate mood of our age.

#### I. ATTITUDES OF SECULARISM

a. Definition of Secularism. W. Curry Mavis clearly defines the meaning of secularism. “Secularism means, most simply a regard for the interests and affairs of this life to the neglect of matters pertaining to the future life. It represents the enthronement of personal interests and human sufficiency at the very center of life. Man takes a priority over God in the practical matters of life, and he maintains a nonchalant attitude toward Him...In secularism, ‘temporal values are seen as ends in themselves’, and men devote their lives to them.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 12:2, Phillips

<sup>3</sup> The Psychology of Christian Experience; pgs. 107, 108

**Secularism is preoccupation with this world with oftentimes a denial that there is an afterlife. Secularism results when one is swept into the whirlpool of materialism. A secularist believes that life consists in the abundance of things that a man possesses. Such a person is living for time only and has either disregarded or denied that there is an eternal existence. A secularist is one who adopts the attitude of ‘let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.’ Although a secularist may not outrightly deny the existence of God or manifest outward hostility to the Church, a secularist shows by his materialistic values and his indifferent attitudes that he is at heart a practical atheist. For him, physical reality is all that can be known, and for him the gateway to all knowledge is his five senses. A secularist feels that he is self-sufficient to cope with life and that his own wisdom is the standard for all decisions. To depend on God is naive and shows weakness in character.**

**Mavis describes the thoughts of those men who have exercised great influence in shaping our secular age. “The creative forces of Western civilization, indeed, of the whole world, for many decades have been secular. Emil Brunner ‘observes that the four men who have most profoundly influenced western thought in our time are Darwin, Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. The work of these men strengthened the secular forces of our age. Darwin complemented and augmented man’s sense of self-sufficiency by suggesting that man had worked his way up from the brutes against terrific odds. Man was thus able to handle lesser problems, having demonstrated that he was fit to survive. Nietzsche glorified human wisdom and power in talking of supermen who had no need for God. Marx fostered secularism in a most radical form by decrying religion as an ‘opiate of the people’. In sarcastic tones, he urged the multitudes to eat pie here on earth and not to wait for it in the sky. Freud strengthened the secular impulses by substituting psychoanalysis for religion. He said that religion was an illusion with no future. He would have men get ‘salvation,’ i.e., personal integration, on a psychoanalytic couch rather than on their knees before their Maker.”<sup>4</sup>**

**b. Preoccupation of Secularism. Says Mavis, “Secularism has invaded every area of modern life...Secularism is the dominant mood of the day.”<sup>5</sup>**

**I. Secularism has invaded the area of Entertainment. Because secularism has a distain for the very concept of sin, the adherent of secularism oftentimes indulges him in sensual pleasure. Having no moral restraints, the pleasure-obsessed secularist receives his entertainment from wine, women, and song. Crime, violence, and sex have become the order of the day. No longer does popular entertainment appeal to the natural and aesthetic qualities in man, but instead it has**

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid; p. 108

<sup>5</sup> Ibid: p. 108

lowered itself to appeal to the base and sensual drives of man. The invasion of the secular spirit into movies has changed love into lust and the sacred into the profane. The tragic testimony of Solomon could well be the testimony of millions of Americans, who, like Solomon, are pleasure obsessed. "I explored in my heart to stimulate my body with wine...and to lay hold of frivolity...I acquired singers, both men and women, and the delights of men – mistresses galore."

Through his disregard for morality and his practice of licentiousness, fornication, and adultery, the sensualist is wallowing in the cesspool of sin. Says one observer: "Concern for self and lack of concern for others seems to be the spirit of our day. People don't want to get involved in anything which inconveniences them or which has no personal physical benefits."<sup>6</sup> This same observer has shown the degrading, sensual qualities in much modern entertainment. An irresponsible and lustful spirit is oftentimes hid behind the pretense of love, as shown in the words of some 'pop music':

"I will never love you.  
The cost of love is too dear,  
But though I'll never love you  
I'll live with you one year."

Another popular song is a tragic commentary on the immorality of our secular age:

"Right or wrong, day by day  
All my love, all the way."

Here is another:

"And I like the way you let me come in  
When your mother ain't there."

The God of secularism makes many of its adherents bow low in the mire of lust.

ii. Secularism has invaded the area of Business. Men are breaking their health, and selling out their honor to make more money. Success in a secular culture is determined by a materialistic standard. One who is making \$50,000 a year is twice as successful as a \$25,000 a year man. The quantity of ones bank account is more important than the quality of ones life. It matters not what means are used to make the money, just so long as the secularist is secure and comfortable. Says Barclay, "The essence of the world's standard is that it sets self in the center; the essence of the Christian standard is that it sets Christ and others in the centre. The

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<sup>6</sup> Vic Erickson, Song tract: Jungle to Jukebox

essence of the worldly man is, as someone has said, ‘he knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.’ The world’s motive is the profit motive; the Christian’s dynamic is the desire to serve.”<sup>7</sup>

The secularist is involved in a bitter battle of competition and cares not if he tramples on another in his vicious pursuit for riches and honor. Money is a prestige symbol and many will bury their honor in the dust to get another dollar. Says Mavis, “Secularism has a strong appeal to practical-minded people, such as Americans, because secular values are utilitarian. We have been conditioned to appreciate gadgets more than ideas.”<sup>8</sup>

iii. Secularism has invaded the area of Education. Says Mavis, “It (secularism) is prominent in education which often undertakes to train its students to be successful without reference to God.”<sup>9</sup> In many of our leading disciplines of study today, there is an attitude of personal irresponsibility. Mavis has described this harmful approach in psychology, sociology, and even in theology.

There are many who align themselves with modern psychology, which teaches that man’s behavior is completely the result of heredity and environment. Thus, man is alleviated from all personal responsibility. He is the product of uncontrollable circumstances. “Psychoanalysis suggests that the innate and instinctual urges – the wicked id – are so strong that man cannot hope to resist or control them. It has seemed too many that the drives within man will inevitably defeat him spiritually. These viewpoints have caused man to excuse and to pamper himself. He has surrendered easily before the threatening power of his impulse.”<sup>10</sup>

Sociological views have caused many to surrender their sense of personal responsibility in the face of adverse environmental factors. “The urban sociologist has sometimes said, at least by inference, that a dilapidated area of a city will necessarily dilapidate a man’s spirit...Many sociological theories suggest that a man is not really responsible for the set of his soul, that unfavorable social influence and pressures are responsible. Man is molded necessarily by his contacts.”<sup>11</sup>

The adoption by many of some theological views has resulted in the surrender of personal responsibility for behavior. “Some theologies have had a casual attitude toward sin. They have considered it a type of innate weakness, an inevitable part of the human situation about which man

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<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 115

<sup>8</sup> The Psychology of Christian Experience; p. 112

<sup>9</sup> Ibid: p. 108

<sup>10</sup> Ibid: p. 97

<sup>11</sup> Ibid: p. 98

could do little or nothing. This has caused man to consider his sins as unavoidable maladjustments which God understands and accepts.”<sup>12</sup>

A multiple category of sins results when a sense of personal responsibility is destroyed by the onslaughts of secularism. The skeptics, agnostics, and atheists who worship knowledge in the shrines of our educational institutions, have denied their highest human distinctive – spiritual creaturehood and personal responsibility.

## II. FAILURE OF SECULARISM.

The God of secularism has many worshippers, but this cultural god has failed to make life meaningful. Secularism has failed because its system is built upon a false premise.

a. Secularism is a failure because it is preoccupied with the body and ignores the spirit. Why has secularism left its adherents dull, drab, and unsatisfied? It is because secularism does not minister to the spirit of man, and man is a spiritual creature. Says Mavis, “Secularism, in inverting life values, neglects the interests of the immortal spirit of man, assuming that his spirit can be satisfied with earthly things. It fails to see, with Hannah More, that, ‘the soul on earth is an immortal guest, compelled to starve at an unreal feast; a pilgrim panting for the rest to come; an exile anxious for its native home.’”<sup>13</sup> Says Mavis further, “Modern man has a clear vision for secular goals, but dull vision for spiritual goals. It seems that some evil spirit, to use Kierkegaard’s figure of speech, has put a pair of glasses on the nose of this generation. One of the lenses is a powerful magnifying glass; the other is an equally strong reducing glass. Our generation looks at the secular things through the strong lens and at the spiritual things through the reducing one.”<sup>14</sup>

Man’s spirit, unattended and ignored, becomes shriveled and starved. Secularism may fatten the body, but it starves the soul. It may gratify the senses, but it will rotten the fiber of moral character. It may outwardly give fame and fortune but inwardly it imprisons the poverty-stricken spirit. The result of conforming to cultural standards is mediocrity and hypocrisy. To be squeezed into the world’s mold is to be formed into a stunted, dull, and manufactured person.

To live according to the Worlds’ standard is to live “at the mercy of the desires of our lower nature.”<sup>15</sup> As Barclay says, “To live according to the dictates of the flesh is simply to live in such a way that our lower nature, the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid: p. 98

<sup>13</sup> Ibid: 114

<sup>14</sup> Ibid: 103

<sup>15</sup> Barclay’s Ephesians 2:3

worst part of us, dominates our lives.”<sup>16</sup> To live under the dictatorship of rampant lusts is to live a life of unrest and dissatisfaction. The destiny of man’s downward course is perdition and eternal remorse. Tragic is the picture of God’s judgment on the passion-dominated life. *“For this cause God gave them up to vile affections.”*<sup>17</sup>

The greedy secularist, who has grown fat on the accumulation of material goods, remains dissatisfied because of the leanness of his soul. To his bitter disappointment, he learns that life does not consist in the abundance of things that a man possesses. His riches have only give ulcers to his stomach and taken peace from his mind. His false friends stand by to mock him, and his sad delusion turns to suicidal despair. The crackle of the dollar and the glitter of the coin have lost their appeal, for he finally learns that everything does not have its price and that there are qualities that have no monetary value. Sliding down the slope of life on the bed of perpetual pain caused from his indulgent living, the disillusioned secularist realizes that he has been the subject of a cruel tyrant. The sweet wine of frivolous living has left a bitter taste in his mouth. His one-time admirers and lovers now scorn the ‘wrinkled old man’. The swinging music of his youth remains as a strange echo in his mind to mock him as a fool. As Solomon of old, the materialistically - preoccupied secularist must learn that *“the lover of money shall not be satisfied with money, nor the lover of wealth with his gain; this, too, is futility. With the increase of goods there is an increase of those consuming them.”*<sup>18</sup>

The secularist who has bowed to the god of education has bowed to a false god who has also failed to fulfill his promises. Many secularists offer education as the ultimate answer to society’s problems. Secular education has failed to fulfill man’s deepest needs and has failed to perfect society. With increased education, there has also been increased crime. To educate the mind without cultivating the spirit, is to produce a subtle and sophisticated rebel who has dangerous and deadly potential.

To declare that reality is composed only of matter is to reduce oneself to a philosophical pygmy. Reality is broader and deeper than that which can be perceived through the five physical senses. The wide expanse of supra-materialistic reality is seen through the eyes of faith – the spiritual sense of man. This greater realm of reality, the secularist fails to see because he is preoccupied with the body and has ignored the spirit.

**b. Secularism is a failure because it is preoccupied with the temporal realm and denies the celestial realm.** The secularist is a fool because he has built his life upon earthly standards and has forgotten or denied eternity. Says Mavis,

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<sup>16</sup> Barclay’s Ephesians p. 118

<sup>17</sup> Romans 1:26a

<sup>18</sup> Ecclesiastes 5:10

**“In inverting the values of life secularism has lowered the spiritual ideals and brought about flatness to life. Secularism has no towering spiritual values, reaching toward heaven. It views life as one great plain of flatlands having neither depth nor height. Man moves along the earthly horizon for a period of seventy years, more or less, supplying his temporal needs, and then passes from the scene with no questions asked. During the time of his earthly existence, the secular man was too busy with the cares of life to explore the depth of his own spirit. Neither did he sense the pull of high ideals that comes from looking up to his Maker.”<sup>19</sup>**

**The great failure of the secularist is this: he has failed to realize the transitoriness of life and the permanency of eternity. Says the Scriptures about man’s earthly life, *“For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”*<sup>20</sup>**

**If life is so short and if sin will be punished eternally, does it not stand to reason that one is a fool to become enamored by the toys and joys of sensual pleasure? Wise is the man who heeds the Scriptures: *“Love not the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever.”*<sup>21</sup>**

**In the light of the transitoriness of life, not only is the passion-inflamed person a fool, but the money-inflamed person is also a fool. To become preoccupied in the accumulation of material possessions, is like a duck who has become so fat on grain that it is unable to soar into the skies as it was meant to soar. Man was meant to soar into the realm of spiritual living which leads to eternal life, but many, just as the fatten duck, are living indulgent, earth-centered lives. Some have never known the joys of soaring the heights of spiritual ecstasy, and such will never know the joys and peace of eternal life unless they repent of their indulgent, Christless lives. How foolish is the man who toils for the Almighty Dollar. Why? Because material riches are limited only to this material world. The rich man cannot take his riches with him when he dies. *“As he came naked from his mother’s womb so he shall return again as he came and nothing shall he take for his labor that he may carry away in his hand.”*<sup>22</sup>**

**The secular scholar who swells with pride because of the string of degrees behind his name, should instead humble himself in the dust before the Author of all knowledge and wisdom. The person, who is reeling because of**

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid: p. 114

<sup>20</sup> James 4:16

<sup>21</sup> I John 3:15-17

<sup>22</sup> Ecclesiastes: 12:12

the drunkenness for his intellectual pride, should take heed to Solomon's experienced advice: *"I applied my heart to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly. I discovered that this, too, is chasing after wind. For in more wisdom is more vexation and increasing one's knowledge increases one's distress."*<sup>23</sup> *"Furthermore, my son, be warned; there is no end to the making of many books, and much study is wearing to the body."*<sup>24</sup>

The transitoriness of life is shown in the great flux of knowledge. What is current knowledge today soon becomes old information, recorded in dusty journals and old histories, as irrelevant for the present age. The modern and complete soon become the antiquated and partial.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Looking honestly at the temporal qualities of life, which soon corrupt and fade away, some secularists have been compelled to cry out, "What is the meaning of life? Is life really worth living if death is the final denominator of all men?" The secularist must then be reminded that if a man should gain the whole world and yet lose his soul, he is the prince of fools. The man, who confines and limits himself to the finite realm of earthly pleasure, goods, and achievement, will be found eternally "wanting" at the Final Judgment. Better to take Paul's advice: *"Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."*<sup>25</sup> *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God,"* said Jesus, and Jesus will have the final word at the Judgment.

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<sup>23</sup> Ecclesiastes: 1:17, 18

<sup>24</sup> Ecclesiastes: 12:12

<sup>25</sup> Romans 12:2

*A GOOD MAN CONDEMNED –  
A BAD MAN HONORED*

*Chapter 5*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

## CHAPTER 5

### OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:** A GOOD MAN CONDEMNED - A BAD MAN HONORED  
**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 18:9-14  
**TEXT:** *“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”* (Psalms 34:18; also Note Luke 18:14)

#### INTRODUCTION:

The story of the Publican and the Pharisee is a story that illustrates for all time the characteristics and results of pride and humility.

#### PROPOSITION:

From the parable, we learn that *“God gives grace to the humble one, but he resists the proud one.”*

##### I. THE PHARISEE

- a. The Pharisee was self-righteous.
- b. The Pharisee was self-centered.
- c. The Pharisee was self-presumptive.
- d. The Pharisee was self-satisfied.

##### II. THE PUBLICAN

- a. The Publican acknowledged his spiritual poverty.
- b. The Publican cried out to God for mercy.
- c. The Publican was earnest in his prayer.
- d. The Publican went to his house justified.

#### CONCLUSION:

Pride bars the door to God. Humility opens the door to God. After the Pharisee’s boastful recitation of religious performances before God, he went away from the Temple **condemned**. The publican, on the other hand, confessed that he was guilty of vile sins, and in humility pled for mercy. He went away justified with God and filled with peace and joy – a changed man.

## CHAPTER 5

**SUBJECT:** A GOOD MAN CONDEMNED - A BAD MAN HONORED  
**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 18:9-14  
**TEXT:** *“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”* (Psalms 34:18; also note Luke 18:14)

### INTRODUCTION:

The story of the Publican and Pharisee is a story that illustrates for all time the characteristic and results of pride and humility. When it was first told, it had a shocking affect upon Jesus’ hearers. The bad man seemed to be praised and the respected man seemed to be criticized. Why? Simply because the bad man was, humble and the respected man was proud. The bad man prayed to God; the respected man prayed to himself.<sup>1</sup>

### PROPOSITION:

Let us look at the publican and the Pharisees and see the contrast between them, in their private life, public life, and religious life. From this parable, we learn that “God gives grace to the humble, but He resists the proud.” The Pharisee merely congratulated himself; the publican despised his own sins and confessed his need to God! The Pharisee said, “You’re okay. You can make it. Nothing is too great for you to conquer if you believe in yourself.”<sup>2</sup>

#### I. THE PHARISEE.

Of the Pharisee it is recorded, *“God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortionist, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”* (Luke 18:11, 12)

What kind of man was the Pharisee? He was a religious man, obviously. Religion is a good thing if religion does not become an end in itself. God must be the end of religion, but the Pharisee had made religion itself the end. Centering his attention upon religion instead of on God caused the Pharisee to become religiously proud.

The Pharisee was a moral man and morality is always a part of a vital relationship with God. However, morality without God leads to legalism, a mere system of ‘Do’s and Don’ts’, a life filled with icy laws instead of warm principles.

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<sup>1</sup> V. 11

<sup>2</sup> Ogilvie: Autobiography of God, p. 190

**The Pharisee was a liberal man but liberality without God results in doing the right things for the wrong reasons. The Pharisee somehow thought his liberality gained God's favor.**

**The Pharisee had 'I' problems. Preoccupation with 'Self' brought from Jesus a stinging rebuke and final rejection.**

**a. The Pharisee Was Self-Righteous. The Pharisee downgraded others in order to upgrade himself. Pointing to the publican, the Pharisee thanked God that he was so much better than he was. Instead of sorrowing over the publican's sins, the Pharisee was glad to be able to favorably compare his respectable life to the publican's wretched life.**

**Pharisaism at its worst was a series of self-righteous boastings. Rabbi Simeon ben Jochai once said, "If there are only two righteous men in the world, I and my son are these two; if there is only one, I am he!"<sup>3</sup>**

**The self-righteous person uses someone worse than the self-righteous person uses himself to make a favorable comparison. As Kennedy says, "The mistake of the Pharisee was to make the comparison on too low a level."<sup>4</sup> His standard of comparison should have been his own best potential and the spirit of Christ. "It all depends what we compare ourselves with. And when we set our lives beside the wonder of the life of Jesus, and beside the holiness of God, then all that is left to say is, 'God be merciful to me the sinner.'"<sup>5</sup>**

**The Pharisee was saying, 'I don't do that wicked thing, therefore I am pretty good.' He failed to realize the deceitfulness of the human heart and the potential for evil that is in that heart. Pride, concealed in garbs of piety, can viciously manifest itself at any time in presumptuous and vile sins. The Pharisee failed to realize the capacity for sin in his heart. Without the grace of God, a man is capable of almost anything. Said George Whitefield, as he saw a criminal going to the gallows, "There but for the grace of God go I."<sup>6</sup> Even if the Pharisee never committed vile acts of transgression, his failure to realize his essential sinful nature reveals the depth of his sin and pride. Jesus rebuked the Pharisee because he supposed that his self-achieved goodness made him a favorite of God. The spot light was on 'self' instead of on God.**

**There are still those who feel that they are better than others and thus favorites of God. We still have our Pharisees with us. "Some per chance are racial Pharisees who thank God for their superiority to all other peoples of the**

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<sup>3</sup> Barclay's Luke: p.233

<sup>4</sup> Kennedy: The Parables: p. 121

<sup>5</sup> Barclay's Luke: p. 234

<sup>6</sup> Barclay's Romans, p. 176

earth. Some are social Pharisees, thanking God that their forefathers came over on the 'Mayflower', possibly, while those of others came on almost any old vessel. There is also the intellectual Pharisee who speaks contemptuously of the moronic masses. There is the religious Pharisee who prides himself on his own goodness and the strictness of his orthodoxy. There is also the pagan Pharisee who thanks God that, while he makes no pretense of religion, he is yet far ahead of his bigoted brother that belongs to the Church. We resent the Pharisee, whether past or present, but let him that is without this same sin cast the first stone at him."<sup>7</sup>

b. **The Pharisee Was Self-Centered.** The Scripture says that he "*prayed with himself.*" He stood aloof from his fellowmen, probably careful not to have even any physical contact with others. Pulling his righteous garments to himself, he not only separated himself from others but he separated himself from God.

In the very tone of his words, one can discern a spirit of contempt for his fellowmen. He felt better than others did, and infinitely better than that despised publican over in the corner pounding his breast. What a vile fellow, that publican! Why, he has never even been in the Temple! What is he now doing in the Temple, defiling it with his very presence! The Pharisee hated vile sinners and he took pleasure in naming the many sins that others committed which he was not guilty of.

All of the Pharisee's love was centered upon himself, and therefore Jesus severely rebuked him. Man is not made to live a self-centered life, but rather he is made to live a self-giving life. The man who is self-centered has no one to admire him but himself. As Chappell comments, "The man whose whole love centers upon himself is quite likely to have a monopoly. Our love generally goes to those who have forgotten to love themselves."<sup>8</sup>

c. **The Pharisee Was Self-Presumptive.** The presumptions of the Pharisee revealed his erroneous conception of God. The Pharisee simply assumed that God was a legalist, that God judged a person righteous if he did certain things and did not do certain other things. The Pharisee thought that simply by performing certain rites and ceremonies that he could gain God's favor. He thought that if he went to Church so many times, heard so many sermons, read so many chapters from the Bible, or gave so much money to the church and others, that these religious performances alone would merit God's favor.

**There are still those who feel that they are favored of God because they do certain things and do not do certain things. "Many people – church people no less than multitudes outside the church who would not call themselves**

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<sup>7</sup> Sermons From the Parables by Chappell; p. 107

<sup>8</sup> Sermons From The Parables; p. 107

**atheists – still try to square their consciences by telling themselves that they have done their duty.”<sup>9</sup>**

**The adoption by many of some theological views has resulted in the surrender of personal responsibility for behavior. “Some theologies have had a casual attitude toward sin. They have considered it a type of innate weakness, an inevitable part of the human situation about which man could do little or nothing. This has caused man to consider his sins as unavoidable maladjustments which God understands and accepts.”<sup>10</sup> There are religious people who pride themselves in not cursing, in not committing immorality, in not stealing, in not smoking, in not watching ‘sexy’ pictures, in not drinking, etc. They actually feel that they stand in especially good light before God because they do not do these things. Many of these people, just like the Pharisee, are respectable people, read their Bibles, go to Church, give money to the Church and charity, and even say their prayers. All of these things are good until they alone are assumed meritorious. Such people with high religious performances can be like the Pharisee – filled with pride and empty of God and empty of love. “It’s possible to delude ourselves into thinking that we are right with God because of our own accomplishments and goodness.”**

**d. The Pharisee Was Self-Satisfied. The Pharisee felt that he had attained religious perfection. He seemed to forget that self-satisfaction arrests further development and growth. Instead of forgetting the past and pressing on into the future for further growth, he became satisfied with the past and forgot the future. As far as he was concerned, he had reached the heights of religious perfection and he felt that there were no more peaks to climb.**

**Jesus rebuked him severely because of total blindness to his spiritual imperfection and stunted moral condition. Far from having attained life’s goal – Christlikeness – he had not even begun the pursuit. Pride had paralyzed him from experiencing life’s most exciting venture – Growth. He seemed to fail to realize that “in any part of life, dissatisfaction with our present condition seems to be a prerequisite for growth.”<sup>11</sup>**

**When a person becomes self-satisfied or rests on his laurels of achievement, he is in a dangerous condition indeed. When we become satisfied with mere religious performance without genuine loving involvement with our fellowmen, then we are simply filling the shoes of the Pharisee whom Jesus so severely rebuked. “Am I satisfied with my achievements or with my religious activities? Do I feel superior to others? Have I gathered my self-righteous garments about**

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<sup>9</sup> Interpreting The Parables: Hunter; p. 103

<sup>10</sup> Ibid: p. 98

<sup>11</sup> The Parables; Kennedy p. 123

me and am I simply waiting for the Rapture? If so, I am merely a condemned Pharisee.

**I must never be satisfied with any attainment of righteousness. The grace of God in a man's life is never static; it is dynamic and constantly producing growth. "The true saint is never self-consciously good, for he is aware of the temptations which surround him and he is never sure just how completely he has conquered them. He is always less aware of his goodness than of his danger, and that is why he is a saint...Life is at its best only when our spirit is that of the painter who, when asked which picture was his best, replied, 'The next one'."**<sup>12</sup> The true Christian knows that he is always a debtor to love, to God, and to others. His positive goodness never allows him to be satisfied with present accomplishments.

## **II. THE PUBLICAN.**

**In contrast to the Pharisee, the publican was an obviously bad man. "The publican was regarded as a grafter and a crook. He had sold out his people for a profit and he made his money by oppressing the poor."**<sup>13</sup> How shocking to Jesus' listeners for Jesus to make the villain the victor, and the respectable the rejected. It seemed that Jesus had gotten his characters mixed up. It was not Jesus, however, that was mixed up; it was the crowd. And so it is with us. We tend to bow and scrape to the respectable, moral, or influential citizens in our city, and we tend to look down upon the city drunk or prostitute or cheat. "If a modern preacher should tell a story with a gangster as the hero and a priest as the rascal, the congregation might wonder at his sanity...So we may appreciate something of the dramatic effect of the parable on the people who first heard it."<sup>14</sup>

**Why was the publican justified by God and the Pharisee condemned by God? Simply because the Pharisee was proud and the publican was, humble. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psalms 51:17b) How was this humility and contrition manifested?**

**a. The Publican Acknowledged His Spiritual Poverty. Of the publican it is said, "But the tax collector stood in a distant corner, scarcely daring to look up to Heaven, and with a gesture of despair said, 'God, have mercy on a sinner like me'"**<sup>15</sup> He confessed his sin. He had a serious view of sin. He acknowledged that sin was an offense towards God as well as an offense toward his fellowmen. He felt unworthy to even pray to God, but at the same time, he knew that only God could help him.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid: 120, 123

<sup>13</sup> The Parables by Kennedy: p. 116

<sup>14</sup> Ibid: p. 117

<sup>15</sup> Phillips Luke: 28:13

The publican did not try to blame someone else for his moral predicament. He did not use evil associates or his heredity, or his background, or his environment, or circumstances as scapegoats for his sin. He took the full blame upon himself. He realized that he was a poor lost sinner in need of forgiveness.

b. **The Publican Cried Out To God For Mercy.** Smiting upon his breast, he cried out, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” He was not merely remorseful but he was repentant. Repentance issues forth in the action of faith, while remorse plunges one into deep and deadly despair. *“For Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.”* (II Corinthians 7:10, RSV)

The proper translation of the publican’s cry is “God be merciful to me - the sinner.”<sup>16</sup> He felt that he was the sinner par excellence, the very chiefest of sinners. The publican could not claim a moral life or a religious life or even a generous life, like the Pharisee could claim. His pleas for mercy came out of a spirit of self-abandonment. He made no claim of goodness, only a claim on God’s mercy. He came to God just as he was, “poor, wretched, blind.”

“Just as I am, without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!”

c. **The Publican Was Earnest In His Prayer.** While the Pharisee prayed a flowery prayer of self-praise, the publican prayed a prayer of self-despising. The Pharisee prayed for God to hear him – to reciting to God how good he was. The publican prayed a deep unutterable prayer to God – a prayer of confession and faith.

The Pharisee “did not really go to pray to God. He prayed with himself. True prayer is always offered to God and to God alone. A certain American cynically described a preacher’s prayer as ‘the most eloquent prayer ever offered to a Boston audience’. The Pharisee was really giving himself a testimonial before God.”<sup>17</sup> The publican had nothing to testify to, other than his sinful condition. He earnestly pled to God for mercy, for he realized the depth of his depravity. “Only when sinners become dissatisfied not with this or that fault in their lives but with their whole character, are they ready to cry with the Publican, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner!’”<sup>18</sup>

The publican had a right conception of God. “That he was holy, one in whose presence a sinner needs propitiation, for that is his word, be

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<sup>16</sup> Barclay’s Luke, p. 233

<sup>17</sup> Barclay’s Luke, p. 232

<sup>18</sup> Interpreting The Parables by Hunter, p. 104

propitious, to me. His sense of God in his prayer was that God is compassionate, one to whom a sinner could come.”<sup>19</sup>

d. **The Publican Went To His House Justified.** What was the result of this man’s confession of sin? *“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”* (Luke 18:14)

The publican went away a forgiven man, filled with joy and clothed in the garments of God’s righteousness. This reconciliation with God produced a release from guilt and condemnation and gave a peace deep within his heart.

Confessing one’s sins to God and accepting Christ by faith, always results in justification. *“Since then it is by faith that we are justified, let us grasp the fact that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have confidently entered into this new relationship of grace, and here we take our stand, in happy certainty of the glorious things he has for us in the future.”* (Romans 5:1, 2, Phillips)

When Luther discovered this great truth of justification by faith, he wrote, “I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the ‘justice of God’ had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love.”<sup>20</sup>

## **CONCLUSION:**

Pride bars the door to God. Humility opens the door to God. The Pharisee was preoccupied with -‘self-righteousness’, ‘self-centeredness’, ‘self-presumption’, ‘self-satisfaction’. After his boastful recitation of religious performances before God, he went away from the Temple condemned.

The publican confessed that he was guilty of vile sins, and in humility pled for mercy. He went away justified with God and filled with peace and joy – a changed man. Have you humbly confessed your sins to God? If not, will you do so today? *“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)

Remember too, that *“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”* (Psalm 34:18) The story of the publican well illustrates this.

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<sup>19</sup> G.C. Morgan

<sup>20</sup> Here I Stand; 49, 50

**There are only two facts of life of which we must always be certain: (1) I am a great Sinner! (2) Jesus is a great Saviour! “All who recognize their need, and can’t make it on their own can experience the comfort of God and be given strength to be what He meant them to be.”<sup>21</sup>**

**If you, as a great sinner, accept the great Saviour, you can become a great Saint (humble and Christ-like!)**

**The parable teaches us that “we never outgrow our need for God’s love, forgiveness, guidance and indwelling power...Are you conscious of things said or unsaid, done or left undone, that jab at your conscience? Who can live any day without a disturbing sense of missed opportunities as well as of overt sins that have hurt us and others?”<sup>22</sup>**

**Notes Clovis Chappell: “Let us join him (the publican) in his humble prayer, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner!’ Do not hesitate. Do not think for a moment that you do not need to pray it. It is a universal prayer. It befits the worst of us and the best of us. If you cannot pray it, you have no part in Christ’s Gospel. He is out after the lost. Moreover, that takes us all in. ‘If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’”<sup>23</sup>**

**‘God be merciful to me a sinner’ is not only the attitude which introduce one to God’s salvation, but it is equally the attitude which must remain if we are to remain right with God! For there can be no salvation without humility. Salvation is both God’s act in a moment and God’s loving relationship with man throughout time and eternity. Thus, to have and to maintain salvation, we must have the humility, which was amazingly demonstrated in the prayer of the publican: “God be merciful to me a sinner.”**

**As one minister noticed a woman hesitating to take the cup at the Lord’s Supper, he said gently, “Take it, woman. It was meant for sinners. It was meant for you.”<sup>24</sup>**

**Jesus receives sinful persons. He is a friend of ‘publicans and sinners.’ Christ will not cast out the one who comes to Him in Repentance!**

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<sup>21</sup> Ogilvie; 195

<sup>22</sup> Ogilvie; 197

<sup>23</sup> Clovis Chappell; p. 113

<sup>24</sup> Barclay’s ‘Lord’s Supper’; p. 111)

*GO AND TELL!*

*Chapter 6*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

## CHAPTER 6

### OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:** GO AND TELL!  
**SCRIPTURE:** II Corinthians 5:10-19  
**TEXT:** *“God has given us the story of this reconciliation to tell.”* (II Corinthians 5:19; Barclay)

#### INTRODUCTION:

The victory over sin depends upon the communication of the message behind the enemy lines of sin. The victory over sin depends upon the communication of the message of salvation. Christ still sounds forth the challenge and command, ‘Go and Tell’. Go where? Go to the uttermost parts of the earth. Tell what? Tell every sinner everywhere that God, through Christ, seeks to reconcile the world to Himself.

#### PROPOSITION:

Reconciliation is possibly the best word that summarizes Christ’s purpose in the world of sin. Christ seeks to reconcile all men unto Him.

- I. MEANS OF RECONCILIATION
  - a. Man’s Estrangement
  - b. Christ’s Provision
  
- II. MEANING OF RECONCILIATION
  - a. Believer’s New Values
  - b. Believer’s New Creation
  
- III. MINISTRY’S OF RECONCILIATION
  - a. Christian’s Motivation
  - b. Christian’s Fear
  - c. Christian’s Message

#### CONCLUSION:

Paul’s message was both simple and great. His message was that Christ died for our sins, that he arose again, and that each man will be judged according to the way he responds to the work and person of Christ. Paul well knew that all men are sinners and in need of Christ’s reconciling love and grace.

## CHAPTER 6

**SUBJECT: GO AND TELL!**

**TEXT: “God has given us the story of this reconciliation to tell.” (II Corinthians 5:19; Barclay)**

**SCRIPTURE: II Corinthians 5:10-19**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

A soldier on the front lines of a battlefield during World War II was commissioned to go behind the frontlines of the enemy as a messenger to carry an important message to fellow troops. The message had to be relayed; some man had to carry the message. Mr. Davis, a soldier who was quick on his feet, was chosen to bear the message. Filled with fear, Davis quickly, but very cautiously, carried the message behind the enemy line. It took him one half hour to relay the message by foot, and two hours to slowly and cautiously return to camp. He risked his life in the service for his country and his fellow-soldiers on the battlefield. God has a message and he needs a man to carry that message, despite the dangers involved in such a service. The Christian life is a life fraught with danger and battle. God is calling for brave messengers to carry the message behind the enemy lines of sin. The victory over sin depends upon the communication of the message of salvation. Christ still sounds forth the challenge and command, ‘Go and Tell’. Go where? Go to the uttermost parts of the earth. Tell what? Tell every sinner everywhere that God, through Christ, seeks to reconcile the world to Him.

### **PROPOSITION:**

Reconciliation is possibly the best word that summarizes Christ’s purpose in this world of sin. Christ seeks to reconcile all men unto Him. What is the means of reconciliation? Why is reconciliation possible? What does reconciliation really mean? What is the result of reconciliation? What motivates a Christian to be a minister of reconciliation? What is the message, which every Christian has to proclaim to the world?

Let us discuss (1) the Means of Reconciliation, (2) the Meaning of Reconciliation, (3) the Ministry of Reconciliation.

#### **I. MEANS OF RECONCILIATION.**

- a. **Man's Estrangement.** Man is an estranged creature, haunted by loneliness and paralyzed by fear. Man is alienated from God, from his fellowman, and from himself. Man was made for greatness but is wallowing in despair. Man was made for communion, but is plagued by feelings of separation and rejection. Man was made to only enjoy peace, but hears constantly the clamor of disharmony. Man was made for love, but is too often a creature of hate. Man was made to be integrated, but is a bundle of frayed nerves. Man was made for God, but is a rebel in rebellion against God's perfect will.

Paul's offer to man's predicament is found in Christ. He first states and vividly portrays man's condition and then offers a solution. Says Paul, "The inevitable conclusion is that all died".<sup>1</sup> Paul says that all men are dead in sins and trespasses. Man was created to be an intimate friend of God, eternally to enjoy perfect fellowship with God. Man forfeited his right and privilege of intimate friendship with God, when he disobediently asserted his creaturehood and thus overstepped his God-imposed limitations. The cause of man's fall and the universal sin of mankind is pride. Pride is a condition and attitude of life which gives birth to a multitude of sins.

When man rebelled against God's commandments, man died. Man's sensitivity to fellowship became annulled by sin. Man's innocence became blemished by guilt, and his capacity for nobility became shriveled by self-centeredness.

Man's nature is corrupted by sin. Every area of man's activity feels the pollution of sin. Man's will is rendered so weak that he is unable to subdue the passions of his flesh. Man's knowledge is so inadequate that he is unable to discover and pursue the pathway which leads to righteousness. Man's nature is warped, twisted, and corrupted.

The Scriptures paint a dark, but realistic, picture of man's corrupted nature. Wrote Jeremiah "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?*"(Jeremiah 17:9) Isaiah wrote, "*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are filthy rags.*" (Isaiah 64:6) Perhaps the most vivid description of man's universal sin and gross wickedness is found in Romans. One verse that speaks to all of humanity is this: "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" (Romans 3:23)

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay's II Corinthians 5:15

a. **Christ's Provision.** Pride was the cause of man's downfall, and causes man to live a selfish, self-centered life. Paul gives the remedy to the self-centered life. He says, "*He (Christ) died for all in order that those who live should no longer live for their own sakes, but for the sake of Him who died and was raised again*"<sup>2</sup>

Christ died to his own interests and comforts when he surrendered himself to the Cross. We are called to follow Christ's example, and thus to die to our own selfish interests. Christ arose from the dead to experience a new resurrected life. By accepting Christ into our lives and following his example, we die to our old way of life and become resurrected to a new way of life. The self-centered life becomes a Christ-centered life. The passion-inflamed life becomes a love-inflamed life.

Because Christ died and arose from the dead, man is enabled to die to pride and self-centeredness and become resurrected to newness of life – a life which is Christ-centered and others-centered. The essence of Paul's Gospel was this: "*that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried; and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.*" (I Corinthians 15:3, 4)

Paul declares, "*Christ gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.*" (Galatians 1:4) "*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" (Romans 5:8) "*For Christ also died for our sins once and for all. He, the Just, suffered for the unjust, to bring us to God.*" (I Peter 3:18)

## II. **MEANING OF RECONCILIATION**

What does it mean to be reconciled to God? What is the result when a life is reconciled or brought back to God in an intimate relationship of friendship? Paul gives us the wonderful answer.

a. **Believer's New Values.** Paul says a person's values are changed when he comes to Christ. The world places great value on the acquiring of material things, and places relatively little value upon the dignity and importance of individual personality. Paul bears this out when he writes, "The result (of reconciliation) is that from now on we value no man on the world's standards. There was a time when we applied our human standards to Christ, but now that is no longer the way in which we know Him."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Barclay's II Corinthians 5:15

<sup>3</sup> Barclay's II Corinthians 5:16

**Paul knew what he was talking about when he said that values are changed when one gives his life to Christ. Paul knew by experience, for Saul the Persecutor was changed to Paul the Lover of men. Saul, who was instrumental in whipping and imprisoning Christians, became the object of men's beating and imprisonment because of his love for Christ and people.**

**Barclay recounts an incident which was cited by Max Warren, of how the attitudes and values of natives in New Guinea were changed through conversion. "Max Warren tells of a custom of the natives in New Guinea. At certain times they have ritual songs and dances. They work themselves up into frenzy and the ritual culminates in what are called 'the murder songs', in which they shout before God the names of the people they wish to kill. When the natives became Christians they retained these customs and that ritual, but in the murder songs, it was no longer the names of the people they hated, but the names of the sins they hated, that they shouted before God and called on Him to destroy. An old pagan custom had been captured for Christ."<sup>4</sup>**

**No longer did these natives hate their fellowmen, but instead only hated the sins which they practiced. They did not wish their enemies to be destroyed, but only wished the sins to be destroyed – the very sins which were wrecking their enemies.**

**b. Believer's New Creation. Paul briefly summarizes everything that happens to a sinner who has been reconciled to Christ, "The result is that if a man is in Christ he has been created all over again. The old things have passed away, and lo they have become new."<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> Barclay's Corinthians p. 269

<sup>5</sup> Barclay's II Corinthians 5:17

**What is the purpose of Christianity? In the last analysis it is to make bad men good. This is what Christ does. He takes a shattered life and makes an integrated life; he takes a shallow life and builds a strong character; he takes a guilt-ridden life and restores it to a life of radiance and confidence. Christ takes the despised woman of Samaria and makes her an honored messenger of love. Christ takes a demon-possessed outcast, and makes him a respectable citizen. Christ takes a high-browed Pharisee and makes him a humble and faithful follower. Christ takes a doubting Thomas and makes him a flaming evangelist. Christ takes a thieving Onesimus and makes him a faithful servant. Christ takes an adulterous outcast and makes her a pure and respectable lady. Christ takes the dying thief and makes him a son of paradise. He takes the guilt-ridden publican and makes him a free and justified believer. Christ restores a wandering prodigal to the status of full sonship. Christ breaks the shackles of sins and sets the prisoner free. Christ seeks and finds the lost sheep. He applies his healing salve to the sores of sin, and restores the downtrodden to wholeness and health. Christ came to seek and to save the lost. *“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”* (John 3:17)**

### **III MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION**

**Paul not only speaks of Christ’s death and resurrection as the means of reconciliation, and the new creation with new values as the meaning of reconciliation, but Paul further says that the Christian has a special task to fulfill – that of being a minister of reconciliation. This job of bringing sinners to the**

**reconciling Christ is committed to every Christian, not merely the formal preacher. Writes Paul, “And all things are from God who reconciled us to Himself by means of Christ who gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”<sup>6</sup>**

**Paul first outlines the motivating force which causes the Christian to carry out his ministry of reconciliation, and then Paul notes the specific message which every Christian is to declare to sinners.**

#### **a. Christian’s Motivation**

**1. Christian’s Fear. Paul says, “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one of us may receive the consequences of the thing we did while we were in the body, consequences which will correspond to what each one of us has done, be it good or bad. So then, it is because we know the fear of the Lord that we keep on trying to persuade men.*” (II Corinthians 5:10, 11)**

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<sup>6</sup> Barclay’s II Corinthians 5:19

**Paul is not possessed of a crippling fear which renders life miserable and ineffective, but Paul does possess a wholesome reverence, awe, and fear which is a cleansing agent in Paul's life. Paul rightfully fears God, because God is Almighty and holds the keys to life and death. Paul rightfully fears God because God pronounces the last word of judgment which will either send man to eternal life or eternal death. Fear God because of who He is and what He can do. Peter's exhortation is this: *"If you pray to a Father who judges men by their actions without the slightest favoritism, then you should spend the time of our stay here on earth with reverent fear."* (I Peter 1:1)**

**One time while Kipling was on a world tour, he saw General Booth board his ship amidst a horde of tambourine-beating Salvationists. This scene revolted Kipling and when Kipling later got to know General Booth, Kipling told Booth of his disapproval of the incident. Booth replied to Kipling, "Young man, if I thought that I could win one more soul for Christ by standing on my hands and beating a tambourine with my feet I would learn to do it."<sup>7</sup> The true Christian, who is motivated by love, cares not if his actions appear strange or crazy. A Christian is out to win souls. A Christian is motivated by a wholesome fear of God and an intense love for people.**

**b. Christian's Message. What is the message of the Christian? Paul says the message which the Christian has to proclaim is "that God, through Christ, was reconciling the world to Himself, not debating their sins against them."<sup>8</sup> Paul then adds, *"God has given us the story of this reconciliation to tell."* (II Corinthians 5:19)**

**The message which the Christian is to proclaim is the message of forgiveness. In Martin Luther's early life, he conceived of God as a God of wrath and terror who was ready to strike down man because of his sin. Luther's fear was a paralyzing fear and terror when he prayed to such a God. Wrote Luther, "Who am I, that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine Majesty? The angels surround him. At his nod the earth trembles. And shall I, a miserable little pygmy, say 'I want this, I ask for that'? For I am dust and ashes and full of sin and I am speaking to the living, eternal and the true God."<sup>9</sup>**

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<sup>7</sup> Barclay's Corinthians, p. 232

<sup>8</sup> Barclay's II Corinthians 5:19

<sup>9</sup> Bainton's Here I Stand, p. 30

**In Luther's later life, he found God's forgiveness and his conception of God drastically changed. Luther no longer viewed God as a God of wrath but as a God of love. Luther then could write: "If you have a true faith that Christ is your Saviour, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love."<sup>10</sup>**

**Luther expressed his testimony of God's forgiveness and love in poetry:**

**"In devil's dungeon chained I lay  
The pangs of death swept o'er me.  
My sin devoured me night and day  
In which my mother bore me.  
My anguish ever grew more rife,  
I took no pleasure in my life  
And sin had made me crazy.**

**Then was the Father troubled sore  
To see me ever languish.  
The Everlasting Pity swore  
To save me from my anguish.  
He turned to me his father heart  
And chose himself a bitter part,  
His Dearest did it cost him.**

**Thus spoke the Son, "Hold Thou to me,  
From now on thou wilt make it.  
I gave my very life for thee  
And for thee I will stake it.  
For I am thine and thou art mine,  
And where I am our lives entwined,  
The Old fiend cannot shake it."<sup>11</sup>**

**Luther discovered that Christ came not to condemn mankind but to save mankind from sin and death. This is the message which we have to tell to the nations – the message of forgiveness, love, and reconciliation.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**Paul's message was both simple and great. His message was that Christ died for our sins, that he arose again, and that each man will be judged according to the way he responds to the work and person of Christ. Paul well knew that all men are sinners and in need of Christ's reconciling love and grace.**

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 50

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pg. 50, 51

**Paul also knew by both experience and observation that a person is greatly changed when he responds to Christ's love. Attitudes, desires, actions, and relationships are changed when a sinner repents and becomes a friend of God.**

**Paul was convinced of the validity of Christianity by the radiant lives and certain message of the Christians whom he persecuted. Saul the Persecutor became Paul the Lover of Men. God commissioned Paul to preach the same message which was effective in changing his own life. Paul says that God has given to every Christian "the story of his reconciliation to tell". The commission of Christ is, "*Go ye and make disciples.*"**

*“OUR GOD IS ABLE” – TO  
FORGIVE ALL SINS!*

*Chapter 7*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

## CHAPTER 7

### OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:** “OUR GOD IS ABLE” – TO FORGIVE ALL SINS!  
**SCRIPTURE:** Psalms 32:1-6  
**TEXT:** “I said ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’ – and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” (Psalm 32:5b)

#### INTRODUCTION:

The sweetest word in the English language is Forgiveness! Some would give anything if they knew their sins were forgiven!

#### PROPOSITION:

There is only one who is able to forgive your sins. His name is Jesus. “*The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.*” (Mark 2:10)

- I. EVERY PERSON NEEDS FORGIVENESS
- II. COST OF FORGIVENESS
- III. MEANS OF FORGIVENESS
- IV. RESULTS OF FORGIVENESS

#### CONCLUSION:

Do you feel guilt? Confess it to God! He will forgive all your sins, the sins you remember and the sins you don’t remember!

## CHAPTER 7

**SUBJECT:** “OUR GOD IS ABLE” – TO FORGIVE ALL SINS  
**SCRIPTURE:** Psalms 32:1-6  
**TEXT:** “*I said ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’ – and you forgave the guilt of my sin.*” (Psalm 32:5b)

### INTRODUCTION:

The sweetest word in the English language is Forgiveness! Some would give anything if they knew their sins were forgiven! There are too many today who are trying desperately, but futilely, to forgive their own sins. Martin Luther had an acute sense of his own sinfulness, and he tried desperately to atone for his own sins, through his own religious efforts and human works.

### PROPOSITION:

There is only one who is able to forgive your sins. His name is Jesus. “*The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.*” (Mark 2:10)

#### I. EVERY PERSON NEEDS FORGIVENESS

The Bible says, “*There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*” (Romans 3:10-12)

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

“*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.*” (Isaiah 53:6)

“*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*” (Isaiah 64:6)

“*The entire human race is lost, dead in transgressions and sins, following the ways of the world, gratifying the cravings of the sinful nature, objects of God’s wrath.*” (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Sinners by nature and sinners by choice, the human race is helpless and hopeless without God, and in desperate need of mercy and forgiveness.

**There are many guilty people who claim innocence in regards to sin. Some rationalize sin, and say “I am as good as many church folks!” True, but irrelevant! What does this statement prove? God is our standard, not other people! Hypocrites will keep many people out of heaven!**

**Some project the blame of their sins onto someone else – that is, they scapegoat their sins. “It is easy enough to find all kinds of defenses behind which to seek to hide. We may blame our sins on our heredity, on our environment, on our temperament, on our physical condition.”<sup>1</sup> “We ascribe the responsibility to a group, we offer up scapegoat sacrifices; we perform or partake in dumb-show rituals of penitence and atonement.”<sup>2</sup>**

**“At three I had feelings of  
Ambivalence towards my brothers  
And so it follows naturally  
I poisoned all my lovers.  
But now I’m happy; I have learned  
The lesson this has taught;  
That everything I do that’s wrong  
Is someone else’s fault.”**

**Have you heard people try to escape personal moral responsibility by saying, “The devil made me do it!”? It is bad enough to rationalize sin. It is perhaps worse to blame others for our actions of moral irresponsibility. Worse yet, is to be callously indifferent to sin and sin’s consequences. Notes Barclay, “At first a man regards some wrong thing with horror; the second stage comes when he is tempted into doing it, but even as he does it, he is still unhappy and ill at ease and very conscious that it is wrong; the third stage is when he has done the thing so often that he does it without a qualm.”<sup>3</sup>**

**There are those who “claim that sin has no effect upon them, who say that they can sin and take no harm; who insist that they can take their pleasures, and, if need be, make their mistakes and emerge none the worse for them”.<sup>4</sup> In other words, there are those who feel that they can sow ‘wild oats’ and yet never have to ‘reap wild oats’. They do not see the ‘cause and effect’ of sin. Paul wrote, “*Don’t be misled; remember that you can’t ignore God and get away with it; a man will always reap just the kind of crop he sows! If he sows to please his own desires, he will be planting seeds of evil and he will surely reap a harvest of spiritual decay and death; but if he plants the good things of the Spirit, he will reap the everlasting life which the Holy Spirit gives him.*” (Galatians 6:7, 8; Living Bible)**

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<sup>1</sup> Daily Study Bible; Barclay; p. 39; 1 John

<sup>2</sup> Menninger; Whatever Became of Sin: p. 17

<sup>3</sup> Barclay; Daily Study Bible; Ephesians; p. 114

<sup>4</sup> Barclay Daily Study Bible; 1 John, p. 39

Some rationalize sin. Some project the blame onto others. There are some who are callously indifferent to sin and to sin's consequences. And there are still others who out rightly deny the very existence of sin. They deny the reality of guilt and declare that what one feels is not real guilt, but only guilt feelings or guilt impulses. Some psychiatrists have gone so far as to say that guilt feelings or anxiety feelings are caused because a person secretly wants to commit certain acts but dares not because of parental or societal restrictions. Thus, according to their theory, society's restrictions are mainly to blame for people's 'guilty feeling'. Some belittle the idea of an objective Moral Law such as the Ten Commandments.

Comments Barclay, "The man who is conscious of his own blindness, and who longs to see better and to know more, is the man whose eyes can be opened and who can be led more and more deeply into the truth. The man who thinks he knows it all, the man who does not realize that he cannot see, is the man who is truly blind, and who is beyond hope and help. Only the man who realizes his own weakness can become strong. Only the man who realizes his own blindness can learn to see. Only the man who realizes his own sin can be forgiven."<sup>5</sup>

## II. COST OF FORGIVENESS

What man needs most, namely, forgiveness, God is most willing to give. But, God's gift of forgiveness is costly indeed. It cost God the blood of His well-beloved Son!

*"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" God is a just God and cannot look lightly upon sin. Sin not only breaks God's laws, but sin breaks God's heart. The penalty of sin is death. "The soul that sinneth shall die!" The guilty deserve to die. There is no way that man can atone for his own sins. Man cannot outbalance his bad works with his good works. In the sight of God, all of our own good works are like "filthy rags". (Isaiah 64:6)*

**"Can the labors of my hands fulfill Thy Law's demands?" No, for to be justified in God's eyes, one would have to keep God's Laws perfectly! None is good enough or strong enough to merit God's favor!**

**Galatians 1:4 says that Jesus "...gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." Ephesians 5:2 says that "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."**

**Titus 2:14 says that Christ "gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."**

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<sup>5</sup> Barclay Study Bible; John: vol. 2; p. 58

**Paul noted in Romans 5:6, “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.” “In Jesus Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” (Ephesians 1:7)**

**Notes Billy Graham about the high cost of forgiveness: “In Christ’s atonement for sin, He stood in the guilty sinner’s place. If God had forgiven sin by a divine decree without atonement, which involved the personal shame, agony, suffering, and death of Christ, then man could assume that God overlooked, winked at, or was indifferent to sin. Thus man would go on sinning, and earth would have become a living hell. But in the suffering of Jesus we have the participation of God in the act of atonement. Sin pierced the very heart of God. God felt every piercing nail and spear thrust. God felt the burning sun. God felt the mocking derision and the body blows. Here in the cross is the suffering love of God bearing the guilt of man’s sin, which alone is able to melt the sinner’s heart and bring him to repentance for salvation.” ‘For he hath made him to be sin for us.’ (II Corinthians 5:21)**

**“Thousands of people suffer from guilt complexes. Almost everyone senses that somehow they are wrong, like the little boy who said: ‘I guess I was just born wrong.’ God said from the cross: *I love you.*” He was also saying: ‘I can forgive you.’ The most glorious and thrilling word in any language is “forgiveness.” God in Christ had a basis for forgiveness. Because Christ died, God can justify the sinner and still be just.**

**“Christ’s atonement is sufficient because God said it is. I know that I am a sinner. I know that I have broken God’s laws. I know that I have offended God countless times. My heart, mind, and conscience have been troubled. However, when by faith I look at the cross, there is peace and joy because I know that God was satisfied with the sacrifice of His Son. My sin was committed against God. If God is content with what Christ has done on my behalf and is willing to pardon me, then I have nothing more to worry about. I am redeemed, I am reconciled, I am forgiven, I am assured of heaven – not because of any goodness or good works of my own. It is only because of the love and mercy of God in Christ on the cross that I have any claim on heaven at all. It was God who permitted Christ to die as my substitute. It was God who accepted His sacrifice when He died.”<sup>6</sup>**

### **III. MEANS OF FORGIVENESS**

**In light of what God has done for you, namely, giving His Son Jesus to die for you, what must you do appropriately to respond to God’s loving initiative?**

**In order to enjoy God’s offer of forgiveness, you must first repent of your sins. What is repentance? “Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, and realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor—is what Christians call repentance.”<sup>7</sup>**

<sup>6</sup> Billy Graham; World Aflame; pg. 118-120

<sup>7</sup> C.S. Lewis; Mere Christianity, p. 59

**There can be no repentance without first recognizing the fact of sin and the seriousness of sin. There can be no treatment of a disease without diagnosis of the disease. There can be no healing without acknowledgement of the hurt. There is no conversion without conviction of sin. No treating of sin as a plaything, but as a serious problem.**

**Repentance is not only recognizing the fact of sin and the seriousness of sin, but repentance is also recognizing one's inability to save himself from the consequences of sin, in terms of both spiritual death and eternal death. The Bible talks about being "*dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.*" (Ephesians 2:1-2)**

**Sin causes one to be dead to life's purpose and plan. Sin blinds one to the meaning of life. The consequences of sin are not only spiritual death, but also eternal death, which is separation from God forever. To have a true spirit of repentance is to acknowledge ones personal helplessness; before one is ready to receive God's help, he must declare moral bankruptcy!**

**Next, repentance involves confession of sin to God. Confession means "agree with". One must agree with God's evaluation of sin and God's provision for sin. Repentance means rejecting man-made solutions for salvation, and acceptance of God's sole solution for salvation.**

**Repentance further involves a change of mind, from an attitude of embracing sin to an attitude of forsaking sin. Repentance also involves a change in actions, from a life of practicing sin to a life of practicing righteousness. Repentance does not mean, however, perfection in performance, but rather a new direction in life.**

**Repentance does not mean self-improvement. Reformation is human endeavor; transformation is divine renewal. A person may attempt to reform a pig by cleaning him up and dressing him in clean clothes. However, until the nature of the pig is changed, the pig will go back into the mud puddle. Man's nature must be changed by God. Self-improvement is not sufficient. Man must be divinely transformed.**

**Repentance is not merely regret or remorse. Simply to feel sorrow about events in the past is not to change things in the present or the future. Regret and remorse are both involved in repentance, but repentance is more than regret and remorse. The mourner's bench is good, but one must do more than mourn at a mourner's bench. Combined with mourning must be a genuine change of the will and of the mind.**

**Repentance is "a moral u-turn." "It is a change of mind toward sin, from one of embracing to one of separation".<sup>8</sup> Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a***

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<sup>8</sup> Stanley Walters

*repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death*". (II Corinthians 7:9-10, RSV) Notes John Murray, "The change of heart and mind and will principally respect four things; it is a change of mind respecting God, respecting ourselves, respecting sin, and respecting righteousness".<sup>9</sup>

The prodigal son is an example of true repentance. He changed his mind about sin. He saw the results of sin and came to despise his sinful way of life. He turned his back on his former way of life - he made a moral u-turn and went to his father. His repentance began with regret and remorse but it ended up in action. Repentance is basically an action of the will - "I will go to my Father".

Repentance involves open confession of sin. Says Weatherhead, "Suppressed sin, like suppressed steam, is dangerous. Confession is the safety-valve". Said one psychiatrist who dealt with the disrupted people of Hollywood at high fees, "All these patients of mine need is a mourner's bench."

To become a Christian, one must be awakened to his true spiritual condition without Christ. Further, one must repent of his sins and exercise true saving faith. Repentance and faith are two sides of one coin or two halves of one whole. Repentance should always be inseparably coupled with faith. Repentance is forsaking sin, and faith is turning to the Savior. The moment one forsakes sin, he must turn to the Savior, for sin can only lose its grip on one's life when one surrenders himself to the stronger hold of the Savior! One is saved by faith. Faith is a transfer of trust from one's self to one's Savior. Saving faith is always accompanied by genuine repentance. Repentance is a change of attitude toward sin. Faith is a change of attitude toward the Savior, from one of rejection to one of acceptance and surrender.

Says Wesley, concerning the relationship between repentance and the fruits of repentance: "God does undoubtedly command us both to repent and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance; which if we willingly neglect, we cannot reasonably expect to be justified at all; therefore both repentance and fruits meet for repentance, are in some sense, necessary to justification, but they are not necessary in the same sense with faith, nor in the same degree. Not in the same degree; for those fruits are only necessary conditionally; if there be time and opportunity for them. Otherwise a man may be justified without them, as was the thief upon the cross".<sup>10</sup>

If repentance is turning from sin, then faith is turning to God. Saving faith is putting yourself in the care of One who can do something. It is a transfer of trust for salvation from self to Christ.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Redemption Accomplished and Applied, p. 114

<sup>10</sup> Wesley's Sermons; Vol. 1, p. 387

<sup>11</sup> Stanley Walters

**Saving faith is more than a mere intellectual assent to the existence of God. James wrote, “You say that you believe that there is one God. Excellent! The demons also believe the same thing – and shudder in terror.”<sup>12</sup> The devil knows that Jesus is the Son of God, and even trembles because of this belief, but the devil is still the devil!**

**Faith is the total commitment of one’s total self to Christ. Faith is “not merely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head but also a disposition of the heart”.<sup>13</sup> Faith is throwing yourself upon God, like a drowning man throws himself upon the strength of the lifeguard. Only when one ceases to struggle and abandons himself to the Divine Lifeguard, is he saved.**

#### **IV. RESULTS OF FORGIVENESS**

**To forgive mankind’s sins, God gave up His Son to die a substitutionary death for mankind. To receive God’s offer of forgiveness, a sinner must repent deeply and surrender completely to Christ.**

**The benefits of receiving God’s forgiveness are great! There is an immediate release from the burden of guilt. “What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record!” (Psalms 32:1-2; Living Bible)**

**One of the most famous passages in The Pilgrim’s Progress is the passage where John Bunyan tells how Christian lost his burden: “Now I saw in my dream that the highway up which Christian was to go was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation. Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the burden on his back. He ran thus till he came to a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulcher. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the sepulcher, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.”**

**Notes <sup>14</sup>Billy Graham, in his book World Aflame, “A beautiful young society leader came to visit my wife and me. She had been converted to Christ in one of our crusades, and she was absolutely radiant in her transformation. Already, she had learned scores of Scripture verses by heart and was so full of Christ that we sat for two hours listening to her give her moving testimony. Over and over she said: ‘I cannot understand how God could forgive me. I have been such a wicked sinner. I just cannot understand the love of God.’”**

**“One of the most fascinating and powerful witnesses to streak across God’s landscape in recent years is the story of Lee Atwater, the deceased former chairman**

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<sup>12</sup> Barclay’s James 2:19

<sup>13</sup> Wesley’s Sermons, Vol. 1, p. 14

<sup>14</sup> Billy Graham, World Aflame, pp. 122-123

of the Republican National Committee. He spent the last year of his young life fighting for his physical life while gaining a new life 'in Christ,' bidding others to follow his example of genuine repentance that flows from salvation. Lee majored in Jesus' admonition to 'love your enemies.' How amazing for one who was noted in the media and by his opponents as the 'pit bull of American politics.' Some of the media still have not been able to understand the radical change, but the best evidence is there: old enemies were converted into friends. Even the Democratic National Committee lowered its flag to half-staff on the morning of March 29, 1991, when Lee, as the Salvation Army would say, was 'promoted to Glory.'

Soon after a brain tumor had felled him while attending a fund-raiser for the Republican Party, Lee exclaimed: 'I looked into that dark abyss and it scared the hell out of me! I have found Jesus Christ. It's that simple. He's made a difference, and I'm glad I've found Him while there's still time.'"

This news story was written by a Christian reporter named Lee Bandy and was headlined in newspapers all around the world on November 2, 1990. The Chicago Tribune headline on page one read like this: "GOP Bad-boy: I have found Jesus Christ!"<sup>15</sup>

## **CONCLUSION:**

Always Remember – "Our God Is Able To Forgive All Sins!" There is no sin stain so deep but what Jesus' blood goes deeper! He is able to forgive the "chiefest of sinners"! He is able to remove your sins "as far as the East is from the West." "The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." The New Covenant of Grace, prophesied by Jeremiah 31:33, was fulfilled in Jesus Christ: "*This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds. Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.*" (Hebrews 10:16-17)

Do you feel guilt? Confess it to God! He will forgive all your sins, the sins you remember and the sins you don't remember!

**"Tis the grandest theme, let the tidings roll,  
To the guilty heart, to the sinful soul;  
Look to God in faith, He will make thee whole.  
'Our God is able to deliver thee.'  
Tho' by sin opprest, Go to Him for rest;  
'Our God is able to deliver thee'"**

**"Come, and He will give you rest;  
Trust Him, for His word is plain;  
He will take the sinfulest'  
Christ receiveth sinful men.**

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<sup>15</sup> Article from "Table Talk"; Oct. 1991; pp. 12, 13

**“Christ receiveth sinful men,  
Even me with all my sin;  
Purged from every spot and stain,  
Heaven with Him I enter in.**

**Chorus:**

**“Sing it o’er and o’er again;  
Christ receiveth sinful men;  
Make the message clear and plain:  
Christ receiveth sinful men.”**

*“OUR GOD IS ABLE” – TO  
DELIVER FROM  
TERRORIZING FEARS*

*Chapter 8*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

## CHAPTER 8

### OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:** “OUR GOD IS ABLE” - TO DELIVER FROM  
TERRORIZING FEARS  
**SCRIPTURE:** Psalms 34:1-10  
**TEXT:** *“I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me  
from all my fears.” (Psalm 34:4)*

#### INTRODUCTION:

Notes E. Stanley Jones: “The man who fights life’s battles without fear, fights one enemy – the real thing confronting him. But the man who fights with fears within him fights three enemies – the real thing to fight, plus the imaginary things built up by fear, plus the fear itself. And the greatest of these is fear.”<sup>1</sup>

#### PROPOSITION:

Deliverance from Terrorizing fears comes from wholesomely fearing the Lord.

- I. CONQUERING THE FEAR OF PEOPLE
- II. CONQUERING THE FEAR OF THE FUTURE
- III. CONQUERING THE FEAR OF FAILURE
- IV. CONQUERING THE FEAR OF DEATH

#### CONCLUSION:

There is only one effective way to conquer fear. It is faith in God (Psalms 34:4-5)! Are you diligently seeking the Lord? Are you looking to Him for strength and deliverance from your fears?

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<sup>1</sup> E. Stanley Jones, Abundant Living, p. 75

## CHAPTER 8

**SUBJECT:** “OUR GOD IS ABLE” – TO DELIVER FROM  
TERRORIZING FEARS

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalms 34:1-10

**TEXT:** *“I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears.”* (Psalm 34:4)

### INTRODUCTION:

Notes E. Stanley Jones: “The man who fights life’s battles without fear, fights one enemy – the real thing confronting him. But the man who fights with fears within him fights three enemies – the real thing to fight. Plus the imaginary things built up by fear, plus the fear itself.”<sup>2</sup>

### PROPOSITION:

Deliverance from Terrorizing fears comes from wholesomely fearing the Lord. That is to say, those who profoundly respect the Lord and who reverence the Lord’s power and person, and who look to the Lord alone as the source of strength – those persons find deliverance from all their terrorizing, crippling fears. This is the theme of Psalms 34:1-10.

Life is filled with fears. But our God is able to deliver us from every one of life’s debilitating fears.

### I. CONQUERING THE FEAR OF PEOPLE

Wrote Paul to timorous Timothy, Paul’s young partner in the faith: *“I want to remind you to stir into flame the strength and boldness that is in you that entered into you when I laid my hands upon your head and blessed you. For the Holy Spirit, God’s gift, does not want you to be afraid of people, but to be wise and strong, and to love them and enjoy being with them. If you will stir up the inner power, you will never be afraid to tell others about your Lord.”* (Timothy 1:6-8a. Living Bible)

Growth in God’s grace results in growth in love for the people God has made. Wrote Peter, *“You must learn to know God better and discover what He (God) wants you to do. Next, learn to put aside your own desires so that you will become patient and godly, gladly letting God have His way with you. This will make possible the next step, which is for you to enjoy other people and to like them, and finally you will grow to love them deeply.”* (II Peter 1:5-7. Living Bible)

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<sup>2</sup> E. Stanley Jones, Abundant Living, p. 75

**It is not God's will that we go through life, being constantly intimidated by people, fearful of rejection by others, introverted, withdrawn, timid, self-conscious, cowardly.**

**Some of God's greatest servants today were one time shy and withdrawn, fearful of people. When Norman Vincent Peale was a boy he was painfully shy. He said that people would come to his boyhood home and he would run and hide behind the garage.**

**He writes, "Once an uncle of mine was visiting us and he found me behind the garage. He grabbed me by the nape of the neck and said, 'Get in there among those people or else!' I was scared to death to do so, but I was more scared of him; so I went."<sup>3</sup>**

**God enabled Norman Vincent Peale to overcome his shyness, so much so that he learned to enjoy people and to speak to tens of thousands of people for many decades. He learned to love people very deeply!**

**Fear of people paralyzes many Christians, hindering them from effective witnessing. Our God is able to take a fearful Simon Peter – a man who denied his Lord three times – and turn him into a bold witness. Peter fearlessly stood before the very ones who crucified the Lord, and Peter declared to them their need for repentance! (Acts 2)**

**Our God is still able to give you and me power to witness fearlessly! *"But you will be filled with power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* (Acts 1:8, Today's English Version)**

**Our God is able to give us courage to preach the Word, regardless of the reception of the listeners. In the face of the angry mobs, John Wesley often preached fearlessly, and sometimes angry people in the crowds became greatly convicted and were even converted during the meetings! Of John Knox it was said, *"He feared (respected) the Lord so much, that he feared the face of no man!"***

**In the face of life's enemies, let us remain steadfast and courageous! Remember what God said to Judah during the reign of Jehoshaphat, *"Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's."* (2 Chronicles 20:15)**

**Whether we, as believers, are facing people that seek to terrorize us with their slander and evil plots, or whether we are facing the onslaughts of the devil himself, we must hold steady and not be afraid.**

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<sup>3</sup> Get Fear Out of Your Mind, p. 8

**“And tho this world, with devils filled,  
Should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed  
His truth to triumph thru us.  
The prince of darkness grim,  
We tremble not for him –  
His rage we can endure,  
For lo, his doom is sure:  
One little word shall fell him.”**

**If we need not be terrorized by the Evil One (Devil) himself, should we be terrorized by the evil human agents of the Devil?**

**Declared the Psalmist: “I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me. I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side. Arise, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God! For you have struck all my enemies on the jaw; you have broken the teeth of the wicked. From the Lord comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people.” (Psalms 3:5-6)**

**Wrote the Psalmist, “The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.” (Psalms 27:1-3)**

**Because the Lord is my light and my salvation and the stronghold of my life – whom shall I fear and of whom shall I be afraid? (v. 1) The object of one’s faith determines the value of one’s faith, and if the Lord is the object of one’s faith, then one has nothing to fear. The Lord’s light which reveals reality is stronger than moral darkness which conceals sin and evil. The Lord’s salvation which converts the sinner and which saves him for heaven, places the converted one on a plane which is infinitely higher than the sinner who thrives on his wicked deeds. Though the evil plots of evil men may be ever so strong, the righteous plans of godly men are much stronger! The righteousness which salvation brings is more enduring than the evil schemes which sinners plan! Right will triumph ultimately and evil will be destroyed eventually! The stronghold of the saved person is the Lord Himself, and no evil man or group of evil men can tear down that mighty stronghold! “If God be for us, who can be against us?”**

**“The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,  
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;  
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,  
I’ll never, no, never, no, never forsake!”  
(How Firm a Foundation)**

**Because the Lord is our light and our salvation and our stronghold, we have no need to fear the enemies of our soul. Because the unshakable source of our faith is the Lord, the invincible power of our faith is manifested in fearlessness!**

## **II. CONQUERING THE FEAR OF THE FUTURE**

**The unknown creates fears in many, and yet the fact of not knowing the future can add zest and anticipation to life. Who would want to know every detail of the future? It is an act of God's mercy to veil the future. If we knew the details of the future, we might become both complacent regarding effort and terrified regarding problems.**

**When Jesus said, *"Take no thought for tomorrow,"* He did not forbid legitimate planning for the future. What He did forbid was hurtful worry in regards to the morrow.**

**What should be the relationship between the present and the future? First, the Christian must exercise faith in a God who is all-wise (He knows what is best), all-loving (He wants to give what is best), and all-powerful (He is able to give what is best).**

***"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and He will make your paths straight."* (Proverbs 3:5-6)**

**Wrote the Psalmist, *"He (God) guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way."* (Psalms 25:9) *"For this God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even to the end."* (Psalms 48:14) *"You (God) guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will take me into glory."* (Psalms 73:24)**

**To Isaiah, God gave this promise: *"Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'"* (Isaiah 30:21)**

**Christ hath promised that He will never leave us or forsake us, but that He would walk with us every step of the way throughout life!**

**Knowing that we serve an all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving God should give us great comfort as we face an unknown future. And the God of wisdom, power, and love, is the God who gives wisdom and power and love to His followers. This brings us to the second point to remember as we face an unknown future.**

**Secondly, the Christian must claim the promise that Paul gave to young timorous Timothy: *"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."* (II Timothy 1:7) God gives the Christian power to cope with any circumstance of life. God gives the Christian love – love that is centered on others and love that is centered on God. The more that one becomes preoccupied with others, the less one becomes preoccupied with self. The less one becomes**

preoccupied with self, the less one is fearful of the future. God also gives the Christian wisdom in dealing with circumstances that will arise – be those circumstances favorable or unfavorable. God will open your mouth and put the words in your mouth to meet the challenging situations of life.

Thirdly, act with confidence, living life to the fullest today, planning reasonably for tomorrow, but not worrying about tomorrow. The God who took care of you in the past is the same God who is able to take care of you in the future. Take one day at a time. Don't borrow trouble from tomorrow. Divide and conquer. *“Don't worry at all then about tomorrow. Tomorrow can take care of itself! One day's trouble is enough for one day.”*(Matthew 6:34; Phillips)

Notes E. Stanley Jones, “Meet today, today; for if you put the trouble of next week into today by anticipation through worry, then you spoil today. You are meeting two sets of troubles at once – one set that is actually here, and the set that you bring in by worrying about tomorrow's troubles...Worry is the advance interest you pay on troubles that never come. Some of them do come, and you can meet and conquer them separately. But tomorrow's troubles plus today's break you.”<sup>4</sup>

Fourth, close each day thanking God for the day and open each new day with a prayer for guidance. “In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God.” Let that be your motto for life. Praise and confidence drives away fears!

Fifth, remember that love casts out all fear (I John 4:18). “Love delivers from self-attention, gives you other-attention; and therefore love, not faith, is the method of getting rid of fear. For love produces faith as a by-produce of that love. You are not afraid of people you love.”<sup>5</sup>

“Father, help me to live one day at a time, reflecting on the past to learn and planning for the future to prosper, but never becoming guilt-ridden because of the past or terror-stricken because of the future. Let me feel your comforting hand on my shoulder and see your guiding finger charting my future course in life. Calm my fears and help me to rest secure in your love.”

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** He who holds the unknown future in His mighty hands is He who holds my hand today.

### **III. CONQUERING THE FEAR OF FAILURE**

Terrifying fear in the face of a problem or a responsibility can contribute to failure. “More people than might be supposed are deeply troubled by the fear of failure. It is a dangerous fear to have working against you, for it can cause the personality to freeze and therefore induce the very failure you fear.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Abundant Living; p.77

<sup>5</sup> E.S. Jones, Christian Maturity, p. 230

<sup>6</sup> Vincent Peale; Overcoming Anxiety and Fear, p. 25

**Faith contributes to success. Jesus said, “*All things are possible to him that believeth.*” The man of faith must eliminate the word “impossible” from his vocabulary. Let what William James said be implanted in your mind: “Our belief at the beginning of a doubtful undertaking is the one thing that assures the successful outcome of any venture.”**

**Failure is almost certain in one form or another to come to all persons, but, depending upon how we react to failure, failure can be a means of exercising faith or of becoming more fearful. Many there have been who, after experiencing failure, were simply spurred on to increased effort which led eventually to a greater success than what they would have had if they never had experienced defeat. I recall one friend’s attempts to have his writings published. He had so many failures that he had made a scrapbook of ‘reject slips’ from publishing companies. He persisted, year after year, and finally was successful in having nearly ten of his books published! It is said that ‘Babe Ruth’ struck out more times than he hit home runs!**

**In perhaps the shortest speech in history, Winston Churchill stood up to speak to a group of young people, and he said “Never, Never, Never Give Up!” and he sat down! Persistence and hard work, combined with such prayer and God’s enabling power, result in great accomplishments! Most people never accomplish what they could because they grow discouraged and give up too soon.**

**“A century ago a young fellow, aged 22, lost his job as a store clerk. The next year he became a partner in a small store, which failed. The next year he fell in love and courted the girl for four years, after which she said no. Later another sweetheart died. At age 37, on his third try, he was elected to the state legislature, but two years later he lost the reelection. At age 40 he was rejected for a political appointment! In this period he also had a nervous breakdown. At age 41, his four-year-old son died. At age 45, he was defeated for the Senate. At age 47, he was defeated for vice-president. At age 49, he was again defeated for the Senate. But at the age of 51, he was elected president of the United States. His name was Abraham Lincoln, and many consider him the greatest leader the United States has ever had.”**

**How should we react to our fears of failure? Work and keep working, in spite of the fear of failure. Consistent involvement will not only reduce the fear of failure, but such involvement will bring the possibilities of success closer to reality! Says Norman Vincent Peale: “Honestly admit your fear and then act as though you were unafraid – and with the help of God go on and do your job with total neglect of fear. You will make the grade with the Lord’s kindly help.”**

**Failure and success must not be the main consideration in confronting a task, but rather faithfulness in carrying out God’s commands. There have been great missionaries who have labored for many years with very little apparent or visible success. Says John Wesley: “On every occasion of uneasiness we should retire to prayer that we may give place to the grace and light of God, and then form our**

resolutions without being in pain about what success they may have.”<sup>7</sup> *“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”* (I Corinthians 15:58; NIV)

Notes E. Stanley Jones: “A great many of people go through life in bondage to success. They are in mortal dread of failure. Why should they be? Jesus cared little about success or failure. The story of Jesus is a story of apparent failure – rejected by His nation and crucified by the Romans, He ended on a cross. A faith that has a cross at its center cannot be a faith that worships success. I do not have to succeed; I have only to be true to the highest I know – success and failure are in the hands of God. On my way to India, I once said in England: ‘The romance of missions has gone for me. I know what I’m up against. If you should say to me that I go back to India to see nothing but frustration and failure and that I would see no more fruit whatever, I would reply: “That is an incident. I have the call of God to India, and to be true to that call is my one business; success and failure are not my business – to be true is.”’ I made that statement one day in a meeting, and a minister came up and said: ‘All my life I’ve been in bondage to success; I’ve looked at everything from the success standpoint. You have released within me the greatest tension of my life. I have only to be true, thank God.’”

“There is a lion in the way,” says fear. But when you walk straight up to the lion ‘of fear, he turns out to be a mouse of fact. Suppose you should fail. Is that so terrible? Not to have tried is a worse failure.”<sup>8</sup>

Joshua was doubtless afraid when the leadership over the Israelites was placed in his hands, following Moses’ death, but God spoke to Joshua and alleviated his fears, *“Be strong and brave, for you will be a successful leader of my people, and they shall conquer all the land I promised to their ancestors. You need only to be strong and courageous and to obey to the letter every law Moses gave you, for if you are careful to obey everyone of them you will be successful in everything you do. Constantly remind the people about these laws, and you yourself must think about them every day and every night so that you will be sure to obey all of them. For only then will you succeed; Yes, be bold and strong! Banish fear and doubt! For remember, the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”* (Joshua 1:6-9, Living Bible)

**True success means following God closely and obeying God’s laws explicitly and loving others practically!**

**“Father, deliver me from the fear of failure. When my terrestrial look is dark and forbidding, let me be assured that your celestial look is always bright and inviting. Your causes cannot fail, so when my cause is identified with your cause I too cannot fail!”**

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<sup>7</sup> Wesley’s Plain Account of Christian Perfection; p. 130

<sup>8</sup> Abundant Living; p. 82

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Love never fails, regardless of the tangible results of my love!**

#### **IV. CONQUERING THE FEAR OF DEATH**

**For many years now I have had the joy of ministering to dying saints – saints like Ollie Vondy who left this ‘stage of action’ to take her flight to the heavenly realm, October 1991. These saints died well, that is, they died with no fear and no dread. They anticipated the glory of heaven, and they had no doubt that God would take them safely home to be with Christ forever.**

**When I talked with Ollie Vondy about eternity, only days before her death, her face lit up with anticipation and with a smile of joy and gratitude. She knew she was soon going to her heavenly home!**

**Wrote John Bunyan, “Let dissolution (death) come when it will, it can do the Christian no harm, for it be but a passage out of a prison into a palace.”**

**There is a natural desire to “hang on to this earthly life” as long as possible. Even though Christians may at times be “homesick” for heaven, it is natural to “fight for human survival.” God has built into each of us a “will to live.” None of us should have a “death wish”, except perhaps during unusual situations such as when a believer is experiencing severe pain as a result of a terminal disease. Praying to die, that is asking God to allow you to go on to your heavenly home, is not sinful, during a terminal illness.**

**Notes Billy Graham, “There is no shame in being afraid; we’re all afraid from time to time. But there’s an interesting paradox here, in that if we fear God with all our hearts, there will be nothing else to fear.”<sup>9</sup>**

**When you fear the Lord, i.e., when you profoundly respect and worship the Lord, there is no reason for you to be fearful in the face of death.**

**The believer has no reason to fear death, for the believer’s sins have all been forgiven. The believer does not face an angry God at the Great Judgment after death. Rather, he faces a loving God, one whose arms are outstretched in welcome to the weary pilgrim who has faithfully followed Christ. The sweetest words of the universe will be spoken by God to the faithful saint, when his spirit leaves his body: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful in little things, now I will make you ruler over great things. Enter the glories of heaven and experience the joys of thy Lord!”**

**To the repentant thief on the cross, Jesus said, “*Today you will be with me in Paradise!*” Notes Dr. Ryle about this repentant thief, “No child of Adam ever**

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<sup>9</sup> Facing death, p. 59

**Listen to some of the words of joy by dying saints: “The chariot has come, and I am ready to step in.” (Margaret Price) “Eternity rolls up before me like a sea of glory.” (Jordon Antie) “How bright the room! How full of angels!” (Martha McCrackin) “I wish I had the power of writing; I would describe how pleasant it is to die”. (Dr. Cullen) “The sun is setting; mine is rising. I go from this bed to a crown. Farewell.” (S.B. Bangs) “Can this be death? Why, it is better than living! Tell them I die happy in Jesus.” (John Lyth)**

**Placing your faith in the Deathless One – Jesus Christ – you shall never die! Of course, your body will die and return to dust, but you as a believer will never die! Said Jesus, “If a man keeps my saying he shall never see death.” (John 8:5) “Whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die.” (John 11:26) Notes J.B. Phillips, “It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the meaning that Christ intended to convey was that death was a completely negligible experience to the man who had already begun to live life of the eternal quality.”<sup>11</sup>**

**Said the great 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelist D.L. Moody, “Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it. At that moment, I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all – out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal; a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, a body fashioned like unto His glorious body...That which is born of flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever.”<sup>12</sup>**

## **CONCLUSION:**

**Life is fraught with many kinds of fears. There is fear of people, fear of the unknown future, fear of failure, fear of death.**

**There is only one effective way to conquer fear. It is faith in God! Declared the Psalmist, “I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to Him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.” (Psalms 34:4-5)**

**Are you diligently seeking the Lord? Are you looking to Him for strength and deliverance from your fears?**

**In summary, here are the steps to take to overcome your fears:**

- (1) Fasten your mind on Christ, not on the object of your fears.**
- (2) Quiet your mind in Christ’s presence. “Let Go, and Let God!”**
- (3) Repeat to yourself, “God is here with me just now to help me to conquer my fears.”**

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<sup>11</sup> The Newborn Christian, p. 212

<sup>12</sup> Billy Graham; Angels , pg. 162, 163

- (4) Surrender each fear to Christ. Let Christ take control of the specific situations that are causing your fears.**
- (5) Begin helping other people. Fill your life with “love projects.” Get your mind off yourself and your own circumstances. Lose yourself in the lives of others, and concentrate on meeting the needs of others. One of the surest ways to heal yourself is to minister to the hurts of others.**
- (6) Face life with cheerfulness and laughter. Take God and others seriously, but don’t take yourself so seriously. Learn to see the “funny side” of life. Learn to laugh at yourself. Let the “joy of the Lord” be your strength!**

**“What have I to dread, what have I to fear,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms?  
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.  
Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms.”**

*“OUR GOD IS ABLE” – TO  
IMPART PERSONAL  
SIGNIFICANCE*

*Chapter 9*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

## CHAPTER 9

### OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:** “OUR GOD IS ABLE” – TO IMPART PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE  
**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 10:29-31; 16:26  
**TEXT:** *“And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”*  
(Matthew 10:30-31)

#### INTRODUCTION:

If one bases his sense of self-worth upon the evaluation of human categories, he is left with an aching void. A deep sense of self-worth cannot be found in any of earth’s possessions or relationships – however good they may be. Only God can affirm you at the deepest level of your being.

#### PROPOSITION:

Because of what God has done for us, and because of the way God treats us, we can have a wholesome sense of personal dignity and significance. We must see the basis of human dignity and worth, from God’s perspective.

- I. GOD’S SPECIAL CREATION OF MANKIND
- II. CHRIST’S DEATH FOR SINNERS
- III. GOD’S OWNERSHIP OF HUMANS
- IV. GOD’S GIFT OF SPECIAL ABILITIES
- V. GOD’S SPECIAL CALL TO EACH PERSON
- VI. GOD’S TOOLS FOR REDEMPTIVE PURPOSES
- VII. GOD’S TEMPLE FOR HIS INDWELLING SPIRIT
- VIII. HEIRS WITH CHRIST IN HIS SUFFERING AND IN HIS GLORY
- IX. PROMISE OF FUTURE RESURRECTION WITH NEW BODIES
- X. PROMISE OF FUTURE SHARED POWER WITH CHRIST IN ETERNITY

#### CONCLUSION:

In light of what God has done and in light of what God has promised to believers, there are several significant responses that believers should give to God’s many grace initiatives.

## CHAPTER 9

**SUBJECT:** “OUR GOD IS ABLE” – TO IMPART PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 10:29-31; 16:26

**TEXT:** *“And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”*  
(Matthew 10:30-31)

### **INTRODUCTION:**

**Is your self-worth based on human evaluation or on God’s divine evaluation?**

**Self-worth based on human evaluation has many drawbacks. If one bases his sense of self-worth upon the praise he gets from his peers, he is looking to an unreliable and variable source for support. The praise of peers is changeable and is often based, not on the facts, but upon the whims of changeable people. The praise of peers so often is conditional – ‘if you do this, then I will accept you.’ There is no ‘for better or for worse’ commitment to the person himself, but commitment based only upon performance. Jesus himself refused to value himself and his mission on the basis of human evaluation and praise.**

**The person who bases his self-worth on material things will be destroyed, for ‘*the world passes away*’. (I John 2:17) The Bible tells us not “*to set hopes on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy.*” (I Timothy 6:17)**

**Don’t set your hope and build your sense of self-esteem on friends, for friends may leave you or forsake you.**

**Don’t build your sense of self-worth on your physical beauty, for such beauty is only ‘skin deep’ and it fades like the autumn leaves. There are adults still hanging on to the symbols of youth – fads and fashions in clothing – as an attempt to maintain a crumbling sense of self-worth.**

**Don’t set your hopes and build your sense of self-worth on popularity, for the world’s popularity is elusive and passing. Writes Sangster, “Fame is the will-o’-the-wisp which beckons others on...Sir Walter Scott achieved it – great, and worthy, and deserved fame – but there was that in him which not all the praise of men could satisfy. When he was dying, he said, ‘Bring me the book’. ‘The book?’ they said. ‘What book?’ ‘There is only ONE book’, he answered a little wearily. ‘Bring me the Bible.’”<sup>1</sup>**

**If one bases his sense of self-worth upon the evaluation of human categories like we have described, he is left with an aching void. A deep sense of self-worth cannot be found in any of earth’s possessions or relationships – however good they may be. Only God can affirm you at the deepest level of your being. There are those who are constantly seeking to be**

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<sup>1</sup> Sangster’s Daily Reading; p. 90

affirmed by others, but who find that even those who are nearest and dearest cannot fill the inner void in their lives. God alone can give one a lasting sense of value.

**“Your net worth is not equal to the sum total of your appearance, your abilities, or your affluence. It’s an awful lie that tempts you to feel bad about yourself because you don’t compare well with others when it comes to beauty, brains, bucks, or brawn. It’s a lie of unbelievable proportions that causes us to think that real value is found in a handsome face, a well-dressed body, a quick mind, or a fat bank account. Yet the children of the world are nurtured or neglected, pampered or put off, largely on the basis of the bone structure and fat deposits of their bodies, the alertness of their minds, or the social status of their parents. Children are raised to feel good or bad about themselves, depending on how they fit into the selfish, ever-changing mold of the world around them.”<sup>2</sup>**

## **PROPOSITION:**

Because of what God has done for us, and because of the way God treats us, we can have a wholesome sense of personal dignity and significance. We must see the basis of human dignity and worth, from God’s perspective.

### **I. GOD’S SPECIAL CREATION OF MAN**

*“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’” (Genesis 1:26)*

Man is the “crown of God’s creation”, qualitatively different than all the other creatures which God made. Man is an eternal being who lives in a temple of clay. Man has a body, but he is a spirit. A never-dying soul! A creature which is overbuilt for time! “Far more valuable than a river or an ocean or a mountain, and far more valuable than a billion thousand dollar bills. In fact, because of the designer label we bear, and because of what we have been made for, it would be impossible for even the least of us to begin to estimate our eternal worth.”<sup>3</sup> Man is not an accident of nature or the product of a long process of evolution. Rather, man is the creation of a loving God whose care of man is infinite and wonderful. *“You (God) made all the delicate, inner parts of my body, and knit them together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is marvelous – and how well I know it. You were there while I was being formed in utter seclusion! You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in your Book!” (Psalms 139:13-16, Living Bible)*

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<sup>2</sup> How Can I Feel Good About Myself?, p. 13

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 18

**Each person is special – made in God’s own image – formed by God Himself! And each person is unique! “Everything God has made has its own personal identity. There are billions of leaves but no two have ever been alike. No two raindrops ever have been identical. And no other person has ever been made or ever will be made exactly like you. The print of your finger is different; you think differently, and you look different from any other person that ever lived. One day a sixth-grade teacher asked her class, ‘what is here in the world today that was not here fifteen years ago?’ She expected the class to tell her of some of the new inventions and discoveries. One little boy held up his hand. ‘All right, Johnny,’ she said, ‘What is here that was not here fifteen years ago?’ He said, ‘Me.’”<sup>4</sup>**

**In light of the fact that each of us is made in God’s own image, uniquely created and wonderfully made, what should our human response be?**

**“For the beauty of the earth,  
For the glory of the skies,  
For the love which from our birth  
Over and around us lies;  
Lord of all to Thee we raise  
This our hymn of grateful praise.”**

**Because of our special creation, we ought to be especially grateful!**

## **II. CHRIST’S DEATH FOR SINNERS**

***“But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.” (Romans 5:8, Living Bible)***

**“When Muretus, the poor scholar, was overtaken by sudden sickness centuries ago in the Low Countries, he was picked up out of the gutter and carried into a hospital. It never crossed the mind of the two young surgeons standing by the table on which he had been laid that this mud-stained, ill-clad boor could understand a word of their conversation, for they were talking in Latin. The theme of their discussion was a certain dangerous operation, which was just being mooted in Europe, and with a sudden inspiration, one of the surgeons nodded toward Muretus and said to his colleague: ‘Shall we try the experiment on this worthless creature?’ But Muretus had understood every word. Who better? Nor did he say, ‘I am a scholar and a gentleman. You can’t do that to me!’ In polished Latin, he said to those startled youths: ‘Will you call that man worthless for whom Christ died?’ That is the ground of our worth: the solid, sufficient, and only basis of it. And it is the same for everyone. We were dear enough to have shed the sacred blood.”<sup>5</sup>**

**Because Christ died for us, thus forever establishing the fact of our human worth, what should be our proper human response? We ought to humble ourselves before**

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Allen; Roads to Radiant Living; p. 84

<sup>5</sup> Sangster; The Secret of Radiant Life; p. 77

**God; we ought to surrender our pride and have a broken and a contrite heart; we ought to hate our sins and turn our backs on our sinful lifestyle; we ought to shed bitter tears of regret that our sins helped crucify the most beautiful person in the Universe! We are not worthy of the least of His favor, but we each have great worth to God because God was willing to die for each of us.**

### **III. GOD'S OWNERSHIP OF HUMANS**

**Wrote Paul, “*Your own body does not belong to you. For God has bought you with a great price.*” (I Corinthians 6:19b-20a) If Christ has redeemed the human race with His own blood, and therefore, the human race belongs to Christ by right of His redemption, then what should be the proper response of each person to God?**

**Each person should not only repent of sins, but should surrender all rights of personal ownership to God. We must no longer live for ourselves but for Christ, whose blood was shed on Calvary's Cross to redeem us. “We must die to our own selfish pride, our self-motivated plans, and our self-centered relationships. Just as a seed must die to produce a plant, so we must die to ourselves before we can live fulfilled and fruitful lives. Anything that competes with God for control of our lives deserves to be hated and ‘put-to-death’! We were made to serve Him. We were created to feel good – feel great – about the privilege of being His servant.”<sup>6</sup>**

### **IV. GOD'S GIFT OF SPECIAL ABILITIES**

**“*Now God gives us many kinds of special abilities, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all.*” (I Corinthians 12:4, Living Bible)**

**One of the building blocks in the foundation of dignity and significance is the fact that God has given every person special talents and abilities. The most obscure, least talented, ill educated person has a place in the Kingdom of God. In God's eyes, there is no merely “common person”. There is a custom-made ‘yoke’ which God has specially designed for each person. Each is given the potential of doing something every well! This is a basis for dignity, not for pride or for arrogance.**

**Each gifted one must desire to use his gift, not to glorify himself, but to edify and to build up the Body of Christ (the Church). There is no place for pride, only for humility and cooperation and complementation.**

**To the highly gifted and proud Corinthian Christians, Paul had to write: “*What are you so puffed up about? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if all you have is from God, why act as though you are so great, and as though you have accomplished something on your own?*” (I Corinthians 4:7, Living Bible)**

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid; p. 11

## V. GOD'S SPECIAL CALL TO EACH PERSON

God has a special purpose for which each person that is born!

**“To serve the present age,  
My calling to fulfill:  
O may it all my powers engage  
To do my Master’s will!”**

Wrote Isaiah, *“...Then I heard the Lord asking, ‘Whom shall I send as a messenger to my people? Who will go?’ And I said, ‘Lord, I’ll go! Send me.’”* (Isaiah 6:8, Living Bible)

Wrote Jeremiah, *“The Lord said to me, ‘I knew you before you were formed within your mother’s womb; before you were born I sanctified you and appointed you as my spokesman to the world.’ ‘O Lord God,’ I said, ‘I can’t do that! I’m far too young! I’m only a youth!’ ‘Don’t say that’, he replied, ‘for you will go wherever I send you and speak whatever I tell you to. And don’t be afraid of the people, for I the Lord, will be with you and see you through.’ Then he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, I have put my words in your mouth! Today your work begins, to warn the nations and the kingdoms of the world. In accord with my words spoken through your mouth I will tear down some and destroy them and plant others and nurture them and make them strong and great.”* (Jeremiah 1:4-10, Living Bible)

Because God has a special call for every person, each one should feel very special to God. What is the proper response to God’s call? Explicit and quick obedience!

## VI. GOD'S TOOLS FOR REDEMPTIVE PURPOSES

Wrote Paul, *“Do not let any part of your bodies become tools of wickedness, to be used for sinning; but give yourselves completely to God – every part of you – for you are back from death and you want to be tools in the hands of God, to be used for His good purposes.”* (Romans 6:13, Living Bible)

God looks at man in a similar way that a doctor looks at his medical instruments. Imagine the frustration of a doctor at the scene of an accident or in an operating room, without medical instruments. It is not the instruments that do the surgery, yet the doctor is helpless without the instruments. It is not man that does the divine miracles, yet God in some way is hindered, if not helpless, without human instruments. God has voluntarily limited himself to work through human instruments.

Notes Barclay, *“We hear a great many sermons about the might and the majesty and the power of God; we would be well sometimes to think of the helplessness of God, that without us and without what we can do God is quite and totally helpless. He has got to get a man. We are the Body of Christ, literally hands to do His work,*

**feet to run upon His errands, a voice to speak for Him. This is the Church's task; to be the body, the hands, and the feet, through whom Christ acts.”<sup>7</sup>**

**To know that God wants to use everyone of us as tools and instruments in His hands, ought to give each of us a sense of significance and dignity! What is the proper response to God's will to use us as tools? It is the surrender of our will to cooperate with God as a co-laborer with Him!**

## **VII. GOD'S TEMPLE FOR HIS INDWELLING SPIRIT**

**Wrote Paul to the Corinthians: “Haven't you yet learned that your body is the home of the Holy Spirit God gave you, and that He lives within you?” (I Corinthians 6:19a, Living Bible)**

**As believers, it is not only our responsibility to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:16), but it is the greatest privilege that one can image. Christ in us through the Holy Spirit dignifies life as nothing else dignifies life!**

**What is the responsible response of believers, whose lives are made significant because of the indwelling presence of this Heavenly Guest – the Holy Spirit? Wrote Paul to the Ephesians: “Be filled with the Holy Spirit and controlled by him...Don't cause the Holy Spirit sorrow by the way you live.” (Ephesians 5:18; 4:30)**

**As believers, we are to treat our bodies with respect, for our body is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Also, we are to reverence and to respect the Holy Spirit who indwells our bodies. Being sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit is the result of maintaining a sense of life's dignity because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our inner being.**

## **VIII. HEIRS WITH CHRIST IN HIS SUFFERING AND IN HIS GLORY**

**Wrote Paul to the Romans, “And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering. We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as His children, including the new bodies He has promised us – bodies that will never be sick again and will never die.” (Romans 8:23, Living Bible)**

**Why, for the believer, is life so significant and so dignified? Because the believer is an heir of the eternal glory of Christ! Whatever belongs to Christ also belongs to the follower of Christ! If Christ is God – which he is – then it is a great privilege to be identified with Christ even in His sufferings! To be a part of the “company of the committed” is a rare and wonderful privilege! Is not life on this earth elevated to the highest heights when it is vitally attached to the King of the Universe?**

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<sup>7</sup> Life of Christ for Everyone pg. 94, 95

What then is the proper response of believers who are named as heirs of Christ? Courage in suffering with Christ on earth and Joy in anticipating future glory which will be shared with Christ in Heaven!

## **IX. PROMISE OF FUTURE RESURRECTION WITH NEW BODIES**

Notes C.S. Lewis, “Nature is mortal; we shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive. We are summoned to pass in through nature, beyond her, into that splendor which she fitfully reflects. And in there, in beyond nature, we shall eat of the tree of life...The whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy. As Saint Augustine said, the rapture of the saved spirit will ‘flow over’ into the glorified body”<sup>8</sup>

The fact that God has promised that believers will someday enjoy the delights of heaven and the glory of a new body, patterned after Christ’s resurrected body, should bring a sense of great significance to the present earthly existence. In light of this anticipated future glory, what is the proper response of the believer? After describing the future resurrected body which every believer can anticipate receiving, Paul wrote, *“We are saved by trusting. And trusting means looking forward to getting something we don’t yet have, for a man who already has something doesn’t need to hope and trust that we will get it. But if we must keep trusting God for something that hasn’t happened yet, it teaches us to wait patiently and confidently.”* (Romans 8:24-25, Living Bible)

## **X. PROMISE OF FUTURE SHARED POWER WITH CHRIST IN ETERNITY**

Said Jesus, *“Let not your heart be troubled. You are trusting God, now trust in me. There are many homes up there where my Father lives and I am going to prepare them for your coming. When everything is ready, then I will come and get you, so that you can always be with me where I am. If this weren’t so, I would tell you plainly.”* (John 14: 1-3, Living Bible)

Wrote Paul, *“...I am comforted by this truth, that when we suffer and die for Christ it only means that we will begin living with Him in heaven. And if we think that our present service for Him is hard, just remember that some day we are going to sit with Him and rule with Him.”* (II Timothy 2:11-12, Living Bible)

How significant is this earthly existence for one who anticipates God’s favor resting upon him forever! Life for one on this planet is filled with dignity when he realizes

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<sup>8</sup> The Living Testament, p. 361)

that “it is the Father’s great pleasure to give the eternal kingdom to the children of men”!

Notes C. S. Lewis, “...The promises of scripture may very roughly be reduced to five heads. It is promised, firstly, that we shall be with Christ; secondly, that we shall be like Him; thirdly, with an enormous wealth of imagery, that we shall have ‘glory’; fourthly, that we shall, in some sense, be fed or feasted or entertained; and, finally, that we shall have some sort of official position in the universe – ruling cities, judging angels, being pillars of God’s temple.”<sup>9</sup>

What is the proper response of the believer who is told about these future possibilities? He is filled with “wonder, love, and praise.” These promises seem to be too good to be true, but the Christian believes them even though they boggle his imagination! The wonder-filled believer knows that God is lavish in His gifts of grace. The Bible says, “*It has not even entered into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who love Him!*”

## **CONCLUSION:**

**On what basis does God impart a sense of great significance to Man? In light of what God has done and in light of what God has promised to believers, what kind of response should believers give to God’s grace initiatives?**

**These are the questions we have sought to answer in this message.**

**In summary, what characteristics best describe a person whose self-esteem is Biblically-based?**

- 1. He is a grateful person, for he knows he is the product of a special creation, a person made in God’s image, wonderfully and complexly made by a personable Creator.**
- 2. He is a humble and repentant person, for he knows that he is a sinner whose sins helped crucify the Son of God. He sees himself as an object of God’s special love demonstrated on Mount Calvary when the atoning blood of Christ was shed for the forgiveness of the entire human race.**
- 3. He is a surrendered person, having yielded all of his own so-called ‘rights’ to Christ, for he knows that Christ has purchased him with his own blood.**
- 4. He is an others-oriented person, serving others rather than serving himself, using all of his God-given gifts to edify the Body of Christ (the Church).**

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<sup>9</sup> The Living Testament, p. 358

5. He is an **obedient person**, responding quickly to God's call to ministry and outreach, as Isaiah responded with eagerness to God's call (Isaiah 6:1-6).
6. He is a **cooperative person**, surrendering himself as a tool in the hands of God, realizing that God's redemptive purposes are fulfilled only through willing servants.
7. He is a person who is **sensitive to the presence of the mighty Holy Spirit in his life**, and he surrenders his body as the temple that the Holy Spirit constantly indwells and controls.
8. He is a person who is **proud to be identified with both Christ's suffering and Christ's glory**. He maintains **courage** as he suffers on earth with Christ, and he is filled with **joy** as he anticipates future glory in heaven which someday he will share with Christ.
9. He is a person who is **learning patiently to wait upon God** until the time in the future when he shall receive his new resurrected body.
10. He is a **person who is filled with "wonder, love, and praise"** as he contemplates the glory that shall someday be his, when God shall assign to him an official position of power in eternity where he shall reign with Christ.

**This is the profile of the person whose self-esteem is developed as a result of possessing the Biblical knowledge of God's grace initiatives toward mankind.**

*PART II*  
*ESTABLISHING OUR HIGH*  
*CALLING*

*“THE AMBASSADOR OF  
CHRIST”!*

*Chapter 10*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

# CHAPTER 10

## OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:** THE AMBASSADOR FOR CHRIST!  
**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Timothy 4:7-8; Philippians 3:12-14  
**TEXT:** “*We are trying to help Him to win men.*” (II Corinthians 6:1)  
Barclay)

### INTRODUCTION:

Paul takes a common earthly experience and uses it to draw out spiritual lessons. One very vivid analogy which Paul raises often is the analogy of a Christian as an ambassador.

### PROPOSITION:

Barclay notes three likenesses between the duties of an ambassador and a Christian: (1) An Ambassador is commissioned to go to a strange country, (2) An Ambassador speaks in behalf of his country, (3) An Ambassador represents his country.

#### I. AN AMBASSADOR IS COMMISSIONED TO GO TO A COUNTRY

- A. Attitude of the Ambassador
  - a. Honor of the Ambassador
  - b. Responsibility of the Ambassador
- B. Qualities of an Ambassador
  - a. Faith of an Ambassador
  - b. Patience of an Ambassador

#### II. AN AMBASSADOR SPEAKS IN BEHALF OF HIS COUNTRY

- A. Attitude of Ambassador’s Message
- B. Content of the Ambassador’s Message

#### III. AN AMBASSADOR REPRESENTS HIS COUNTRY

### CONCLUSION:

A Christian is an ambassador that is commissioned by God to go forth into the world, not to sympathize with the world’s values but to become involved in the world’s burdens.

A Christian is an ambassador who speaks in behalf of his Saviour, seeking to persuade men on the basis of love to give their lives to Christ.

**A Christian is an ambassador who represents his Savior by loving actions as well as by loving words.**

## CHAPTER 10

**SUBJECT:** AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST  
**SCRIPTURE:** II Corinthians 5:20-6:2  
**TEXT:** *“We are trying to help Him to win men.”* (II Corinthians 6:1, Barclay)

### INTRODUCTION:

Paul uses many interesting analogies in speaking of the Christian life. He calls the Christian a Soldier of Christ (II Timothy 2:3, 4), the Athlete of Christ (II Timothy 2:5), and the Toiling Husbandman of Christ (II Timothy 2:6, 7). Paul takes a common earthly experience and uses it to draw out spiritual lessons.

One very vivid analogy which Paul uses often is the analogy of a Christian as an ambassador.

### PROPOSITION:

Let us investigate into what Paul has to say about a Christian as an ambassador. Barclay notes three likenesses between the duties of an ambassador and a Christian. (1) An Ambassador is commissioned to go to a Strange Country; (2) An Ambassador Speaks In Behalf of his Country, (3) An Ambassador represents his Country.

#### I. AN AMBASSADOR IS COMMISSIONED TO GO TO A STRANGE COUNTRY.

An ambassador is sent by one country to another country, temporarily to reside in the strange country. The ambassador learns to live with people of different customs and a different language. The American ambassador to France does not become a Frenchman, but remains an American and merely learns how to communicate to the French government officials. A Christian is like an ambassador. He lives in this world, takes part in the affairs of this world and associates with the people of this world, but a Christian is not a citizen of this world. A Christian is a citizen of heaven, and therefore he is naturally different. A Christian maintains different standards, values, and goals. A Christian is not preoccupied with materialism but is living for the heavenly treasure. A Christian knows that he has not only a body to nurture, but that he also has a soul to save. A Christian is not living for time alone, but he is also living for eternity.

A Christian is living for two worlds – the world of physical, temporal existence, and the world of spiritual, eternal reality. Earthly experiences are viewed in the light of

**the eternal realm. Because the Christian has one over-ruling loyalty in life, all other loyalties must succumb to this supreme loyalty. Because the Christian is possessed by one all-consuming loyalty, he must be willing to be different and, if need be, stand alone in a hostile world that is attempting to force its temporal values upon the single-minded Christian. A Christian lives in the world but does not succumb to the evil influences of the world.**

**While the Christian does not sympathize with the world's values, the Christian does carry his mission within the world. Just as an Englishman is still an Englishman and carries on his work as a British ambassador although he may be in France, so the Christian must always carry on his great Christian mission in the midst of a Christless world.**

**Jesus prayed to His Father in behalf of his disciples; *"I do not ask that you should take them out of the world, but that you should preserve them from the Evil One. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Consecrate them by the truth; your word is truth. As you send me into the world, I send them into the world."* (John 15:15-18, Barclay)**

**The Christian is not an escapist. He seeks not to isolate himself from the world, but rather to actively evangelize within the world. In fact the world is the main stage of his activity. Just as the work of the ambassador is carried on in a strange country, so the work of the Christian is carried on in the world of men with all of their hostilities and sins. An ambassador will make needed preparation in his own country before leaving for the foreign country, but his fruitful labors are carried on in a strange land. A Christian will make needed preparation in the secret closet and the lone study, but he will carry out his most fruitful labors in the highways and byways of this problematic world.**

**Says Barclay: "The kind of Christianity which buries itself in a Monastery or a convent would not have seemed Christianity to Jesus at all. The kind of Christianity which finds the essence of the Christian life in prayer and meditation, and in a life withdrawn from the world, would have seemed to Jesus a sadly truncated version of the faith He died to bring to men. It was Jesus' insistence that it was in the hurly-burly and the rough and tumble of life that a man must live out his Christianity. Of course there is need of prayer and meditation and quiet times, times when we shut the door upon the world to be alone with God, but all these things are not the end of life; they are the means to the end; and the end of life is to demonstrate the Christian life in the ordinary work of the world. Christianity was never meant to withdraw a man from life; it was meant to equip him better for life."<sup>1</sup> An ambassador is commissioned to carry on his work within a foreign land. A Christian is like an ambassador. A Christian is separated from the values and practices of the world, but is intimately involved in the needs of the world.**

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay's John, v.2:252

## **A. Attitude of the Ambassador**

Let us note the attitude with which a Christian as an ambassador carries on his work.

1. **Honor of the Ambassador.** In the Roman Empire of Paul's day, there were certain provinces called imperial provinces. These provinces were war-like in nature and constituted a danger of the Roman order and peace. The Emperor had troops stationed in these provinces to maintain order, and the Emperor chose a direct representative to administer the province in behalf of the Emperor. The word Paul uses for ambassador is the word used of the Representative, who is chosen and commissioned by the Emperor. A Christian is chosen and commissioned by God to represent Christ's cause and person. Jesus said, "*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you.*" (John 15:16)

2. **Responsibility of the Ambassador.** An ambassador lives not for himself, but for his country. It is not for his own honor and prestige that he labors, but for the honor and prestige of his country. A good ambassador lives not to please himself, but rather to serve his countrymen.

So it is with a true Christian. A Christian is called by God, not to live a self-centered life, but rather a life of service. He finds his joy in honoring his Master. A Christian is called and commissioned to serve and not to draw attention to himself. (When a Greek Spartan won a victory in the Olympic Games, he was rewarded by being given the opportunity to stand beside his king in battle. "There was a Spartan wrestler at the Olympic Games; he was offered a very considerable bribe if he would abandon the struggle; but he refused. Finally after a terrific effort he won his victory. Someone said to him: "Well, Spartan, what have you got out of this costly victory you have won?" He answered: 'I have won the privilege of standing in front of my king in battle.' His reward was to serve and, if need be, to die for his king.")<sup>2</sup>

## **B. Qualities of an Ambassador**

1. **Faith of an Ambassador.** One quality of a good ambassador is faith. He believes in his country, and stands up for the principles his country believes in. A good ambassador believes that his country's policy is right, and is not swayed or influenced by the pressure to conform to a policy of ignoble quality. An American ambassador stands up for what he considers being right and is proud to be called an American because he believes in his country.

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<sup>2</sup> Barclay's Timothy, p. 49

**2. Patience of an Ambassador. An Ambassador deals with people, and therefore must learn to understand people, with all of their differences. An ambassador must be patient with people if he is to be successful as a policy-maker. Treaties are usually made after considerable discussion and debate. The hot tempered, narrow-minded, and unsympathetic person is not qualified to sit behind treaty-making tables for hours, facing men of a different culture and debating an intricate and pains-taking issue. Only the patient man, who is able to get along with people, can be the ambassador for his country.**

**The Christian is an ambassador, and as such is a patient person. He is able to endure the hard person, to love the unlovely, and care for the indolent. Barclay says about the quality of longsuffering: “It is the ability not to lose patience when people are foolish, not to grow irritable when people seem unteachable. It is the ability to suffer fools gladly, to accept the folly, the perversity, the blindness, and ingratitude of men, and still to remain gracious, and still to toil on.”<sup>3</sup>**

## **II. AN AMBASSADOR SPEAKS IN BEHALF OF HIS COUNTRY**

**An ambassador transmits the message which his country has committed to him. So it is with the Christian. The Christian must convey God’s message to the world. Let us note the attitude by which the Christian ambassador delivers his message, and let us also note the content of the Christian message.**

### **A. Attitude of Ambassador’s Message**

**The Christian is certain about the message he presents. There is no quiver of doubt or fear in his voice, but rather certainty and confidence. He is absolutely sure that his answer is the only adequate solution to the world’s problems. He is dogmatic because he is acquainted with the Christ who said that He is the only to God, righteousness, and peace. A Christian is certain of his message, because it is God’s message and not his own opinions or conclusions. As Barclay says, “The true envoy of Christ has reached past the stage of perhaps and maybes and possibly, and speaks with the accent of the certainty and the authority of one who knows.”<sup>4</sup>**

### **B. Content of the Ambassador’s Message**

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<sup>3</sup> Barclay’s Timothy, p. 226

<sup>4</sup> Barclay’s Titus, p. 260

**The content of the true ambassador's message realistically conveys the policy of the ambassador's country. An ambassador is careful to avoid all the extraneous material and irrelevant points in his message. It is his purpose specifically to relate only the essential, fundamental, and important points which concisely convey the true image of his country's position, purpose, and policy.**

**The Christian is careful to convey God's message clearly and simply. A Christian knows what the Christian message is, and seeks to emphasize the essential and fundamental characteristics of Christianity.**

**The essence of the Christian message is not fear but love. Writes Barclay, "It is worth remembering that the greatest evangelist and missionary the world has ever seen was out, not to terrify men by shaking them over the flames of hell, but to move them to astonished submission at the sight of the love of God. The dynamic of Paul's gospel was love, not fear."<sup>5</sup>**

**What was Paul's message? It is found in our Scripture reading: "*We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who had no acquaintance with sin to be sin for us, that through Him we might become the righteousness of God.*" (II Corinthians 5:21, Barclay)**

**A Christian is one who knows Christ, not secondhand, but rather firsthand. A Christian knows that Christ has not come to condemn or to paralyze one with fear, but rather to draw the sinner to Himself by the cords of love.**

**The predominant note in the Christian's message is not fear of future punishment, but rather hopes of eternal life. The Bible says that God is a Saviour. Too many people have painted a picture of the God of the Old Testament as a God of wrath who is ready to punish humankind. Such people then say that somehow the Loving Jesus appeased the anger of God and changed his attitude toward humankind. The Bible gives no such picture. God has always been a God of love. God has always wished to help man. The first thing that God has always wanted to do is to save man; the last thing God has wanted to do is to condemn man. God is a God of love, and if we as ambassadors would be true to our commission, we would emphasize love more, and fear and punishment less.**

**The message of Christianity is a message of hope. Writes Barclay; "The Christian offer is the offer of God's power for our frustration, of God's serenity for our dispeace, of God's truth for our guessing, of God's goodness for our moral failure, of God's joy for our sorrow."<sup>6</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> Barclay's Timothy, p. 164

<sup>6</sup> Barclay's Titus, p. 261

In his travels, John Wesley came into Newcastle one day where he was appalled at the wickedness of the people. Said Wesley about the conditions he observed: "So much drunkenness, cursing, and swearing (even from the mouths of little children), do I never remember to have seen and heard before." Early on a Sunday morning, Wesley and one of his followers went to the poorest part of the town, and sang the hundredth Psalm. A crowd gathered, and soon Wesley was preaching to the degraded people. After the message, the crowd was amazed and did not immediately disperse. Said Wesley to the crowd; "If you desire to know who I am, my name is John Wesley. At five in the morning, with God's help, I design to preach again." Early the next morning Wesley spoke to a large crowd and told them of Christ's love and how Christ was wounded for them. How did the crowd respond? They received him gladly, heard him eagerly, and even clutched his coat. They begged Wesley to stay with them.<sup>7</sup> The message whose predominate note is fear, may repel, but the message whose predominate note is love, will attract and save. There is a place for fear, but Christianity is basically the religion of love.

### **III. AN AMBASSADOR REPRESENTS HIS COUNTRY**

One country often judges another country by the type of behavior which an ambassador displays. A haughty and proud ambassador may give the people to whom he speaks the impression that his country is conceited and unsympathetic.

Said Lightfoot, the great Bishop of Durham, about the ambassador's mission, "The ambassador, while acting, acts not only as an agent, but as a representative of his sovereign...The ambassador's duty is not only to deliver a definite message, to carry out a definite policy; but he is obliged to watch opportunities, to study characters, to cast about for expedients, so that he may place it before his hearers in its most attractive form."<sup>8</sup>

The Christian ambassador's mission is to honor the Saviour, not only by what he says, but by what he does. The critical eye of the world is fixed on the life of the professing Christian. The Christian must ever seek to carefully represent Christ by the type of behavior he displays. The Christian must be winsome, attractive, and beautiful and honest in his behavior.

An evangelist entered a city bus, gave his fare to the bus driver, and went to his seat where he soon discovered that he had been given back too much change by the bus driver. The Evangelist hesitated for a moment and was tempted to not say anything to the bus driver, since only a small amount of change was involved in the mistake. But then the evangelist got up from his seat and said to the driver, "You gave me too much change." "Yea, I know I did," said the driver. "I heard you speak at the

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<sup>7</sup> Story told by Leslie Church in Knight of the Burning Heart, p.122

<sup>8</sup> Barclay's Corinthians; p. 235

**revival meeting last night on the subject of honesty. I wanted to see if you meant what you said.”**

**A high profession, accompanied by low living, is a hindrance to the cause of Christ. Says Barclay regarding Christian behavior: “Every Christian, whether he likes it or not, is an advertisement for Christ and Christianity. The honor of the Church, the honor of Christ is in the hands of His followers. We judge a shopkeeper by the kind of goods he sells; we judge craftsman by the kind of articles he produces; we judge a Church by the kind of men it creates; and therefore men judge Christ by His followers.”<sup>9</sup>**

**Dick Sheppard, a great open air preacher who spoke to people who were outside of the Church, declared that the “greatest handicap the church has is the unsatisfactory lives of professing Christians.”<sup>10</sup> Let it be said of our church, “The greatest asset that our church has is the outstanding lives of its members whose lifestyle is Christlike!”**

**The Christian is the only Bible that many people in the world will ever read. What do sinners observe from reading your life? Do they learn about love, kindness, gentleness and long-suffering, or do they learn more about what they already know – strife, bitterness, snobbery, and covetousness? Remember, you may be the only Christian that someone may ever meet. What kind of representative are you? Are you one that truly exemplifies Christ?**

## **CONCLUSION:**

**A Christian is an ambassador who is commissioned by God to go forth into the world, not to sympathize with the world’s values but to become involved in the world’s burdens.**

**A Christian is an ambassador who speaks in behalf of his Saviour, seeking to persuade men, on the basis of love, to give their lives to Christ. Paul said, “We are trying to help Him (Christ) to win men.” (II Corinthians 6:1, Barclay) The language of the Christian message is not condemnation but love.**

**A Christian is an ambassador who represents his Savior by loving actions as well as by loving words. Said one person to a professing Christian, “What you do speaks so loud that I can’t hear what you say.” The profession of one’s faith should genuinely represent the spiritual possession of one’s life.**

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<sup>9</sup> Barclay’s Corinthians, p. 208, 209

<sup>10</sup> Barclay’s Corinthians, p. 209

*“THE ATHLETE OF CHRIST”!*

*Chapter 11*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

# CHAPTER 11

## OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:** THE ATHLETE OF CHRIST!  
**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Timothy 4:7-8; Philippians 3:12-14  
**TEXT:** *“Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.”*  
(Hebrews 12:1b)

### INTRODUCTION:

One of Paul’s favorite analogies was the analogy of a Christian as an athlete.

### PROPOSITION:

Paul notes first that both an athlete and a Christian must submit himself to rigorous discipline. Paul also notes that both an athlete and a Christian must strive towards one goal. Paul further notes by implication that both an athlete and a Christian must guard against over-confidence.

- I. The Athlete of Christ Exercises Rigorous Discipline
- II. The Athlete of Christ Strives Toward Our Goal.
- III. The Athlete of Christ Guards Against Over-Confidence

### CONCLUSION:

Just as an athlete submits his body and mind to rigorous discipline, so the Christian learns to exercise discipline in his body, in his mind, and in his soul.

A good athlete is a single-minded person, one who strives toward one goal. So it is with the Christian.

The Christian must realize that he cannot rest on his laurels or be satisfied with any accomplishments.

## CHAPTER 11

**SUBJECT:** THE ATHLETE OF CHRIST  
**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Timothy 4:4, 8; Philippians 3:12-14  
**TEXT:** *“Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.”*  
(Hebrews 12:1b)

### INTRODUCTION:

One of Paul’s favorite analogies was the analogy of a Christian as an athlete. Paul describes the striving for the prize in I Corinthians 9:24; Paul describes the hindrances to the runner in Galatians 5:7; Paul describes the athlete’s pressing toward the goal in Philippians 3:14; Paul describes the athlete’s stripping for the contest in Hebrews 12:1; the home stretch of the athlete is referred to in 2 Timothy 4:7; and the prize of the winning is noted in 2 Timothy 4:8.

It is probable that Paul loved to watch the powerful Greek athletes as they strove to win the race. Paul probably attended the Greek Olympic Games and possibly the Corinthians’ Isthmian games. Both were filled with excitement as hundreds gathered to watch the strong runners pit their abilities each against the other.

### PROPOSITION:

Let us see what Paul has to say about the Christian as an athlete for Christ. Let us see how the Christian is like an athlete. Paul notes first that both an athlete and a Christian must submit himself to rigorous discipline. Paul also notes that both an athlete and a Christian must strive towards one goal. Paul further notes by implication that both an athlete a Christian must strive towards one goal. Paul further notes by implication that both an athlete and a Christian must guard against over-confidence. Let us note each of these likenesses in detail.

#### I. THE ATHLETE OF CHRIST EXERCISES RIGOROUS DISCIPLINE

It is common knowledge to every athlete that discipline is essential to his success. A good athlete eats balanced meals, gets plenty of sleep, and daily trains and exercises. Harmful habits have no place in the athlete’s life. Not only does the athlete exercise physical discipline, but he also exercises mental discipline. He thinks, dreams, and talks about success, and runs the race in his mind before ever going on to the running course.

I know something about the athlete’s life, having run in track for several years. I know the importance of exercising – or as the athlete says, ‘warming up’ – before a race. One time I didn’t ‘warm up’ sufficiently, and, as a consequence, I had to stop after running only half the race, because of a pulled muscle.

**A good coach is one who realizes the importance of rigorously training his athletes. My junior high coach used to make us run as many as three or four miles at a time. To prod us on when we became tired, he drove behind us with his jeep, honking his horn at us when we slowed down too much.**

**As a junior in high school, I distinctly remember the rigorous practice that some of us runners underwent, just the week before the big state track meet. I thought the coach would run our legs off that week! However, that hard training paid off, for the next week at the state track meet, our school took first place. At that track meet I had my best recorded time for running the quarter mile. (51.6 seconds)**

**A young twenty-year-old fellow, Jim Ryan, was once the world's champion mile runner. He knows what discipline is. It is reported that he arose early in the morning and ran six or more miles before school. Again in the afternoon he ran another six miles or more. Each week he ran from seventy to one hundred miles. He knew what it is to endure pain and to continue to run even when he would have liked to have stopped. He denied himself ease and indulgence and he lived a life of strict, rugged discipline. He paid the price to become a great athlete.**

**The Christian too must learn to live a disciplined life. Christ came not to make life easy, but to make men great. There is no place, at all, for complacency, or indulgence in the Christian's life. Because the Christian is living for eternity, his life must be at full pitch and full effort. There is no vacation from the Christian life. The Christian is one who knows the urgency of life. He is running the race of life and has a great prize to win.**

**The Christian must discipline his body, mind, and soul. There are normal drives and appetites for the body, which can bring glory to God, if they are properly used. However, these legitimate physical drives can be misused and misdirected by Satan, and sin then results. Sin is a perversion of natural desire. Jesus wrote, "A man's temptation is due to the pull of his own inward desires, which can be enormously attractive." The desire for sexual fulfillment is legitimately fulfilled in marriage, but can be misused outside of wedlock. The desire for food is natural but this desire can become undisciplined and gluttony then results. These and other desires of the body must be disciplined.**

**The athlete of Christ must discipline his mind. Says Barclay: "It is one of the tragedies of life that men refuse to think until they are incapable of thinking. We can never solve problems by refusing to see them or by running away from them."<sup>1</sup> Most Christians must discipline their minds to memorize more of God's Word. The mind of the Christian should practice the art of meditation, and the maturing mind is the mind which receives its nourishment from diligent study and deep reading.**

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<sup>1</sup>Barclay's Corinthians p. 95

**The athlete of Christ disciplines his soul. How does the Christian discipline his soul? He learns by learning to face sorrows with fortitude and endurance. Barclay defines endurance as "...the courageous and triumphant ability to bear things which enable a man to pass the breaking-point and not to break and always to greet the unseen with a cheer." Barclay further comments, "The Christian is the athlete of God whose spiritual muscles become strong from the discipline of the training of difficulties."<sup>2</sup>**

**The Christian also disciplines his soul by learning to face disappointment with courage. The courageous man is the man of faith who is not daunted by disappointments, but who is patient in waiting when nothing seems to be happening. As Barclay notes, "The hardest time of all is the time in between. At the moment of decision there is the excitement and the thrill; at the moment of achievement there is the glow and glory of satisfaction; but in the in-between time there is necessary the ability to plod and to wait and to work and to watch when nothing seems to be happening...the man of faith is the man whose hope is flaming bright, whose effort is intensely strenuous even in the grey days when there is nothing to do but to wait."<sup>3</sup>**

**The Christian also disciplines his soul by learning to face temptations as an aid rather than as a hindrance to one's growth. Says Barclay: "What we call temptation is not meant to make us sin; it is meant to enable us to conquer sin. It is not meant to make us bad, it is meant to make us good. It is not meant to weaken us, it is meant to make us emerge stronger and finer and purer from the ordeal. Temptation is not the penalty of being a man, temptation is the glory of being a man. It is the test which comes to a man whom God wishes to use."<sup>4</sup>**

**The attitude of the Christian must be like that expressed by John Newton:**

**"Why should I complain of want or distress,  
Temptation or pain? He told me no less;  
The heirs of salvation, I know from His Word,  
Through much tribulation must follow their Lord."<sup>5</sup>**

**The athlete of Christ is one who disciplines his body, mind, and soul, in order to win the prize at the sunset of life's short day.**

## **II. THE ATHLETE OF CHRIST STRIVES TOWARDS ONE GOAL**

**A good athlete thinks of nothing but his goal. Because there is a goal to reach and a prize to win, the runner is willing to endure pain, hardship, and loneliness as he runs his long laps.**

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<sup>2</sup> Barclay's Corinthians, p. 190

<sup>3</sup> Barclay's Hebrews, p/ 163, 164

<sup>4</sup> Barclay's Matthew, vol. 1, p. 56

<sup>5</sup> John Newton, Prayer and Life's Highest, p. 126

**When the Greeks fought against the Persians at the Battle of Marathon, and won over the Persians despite fearful odds against the Greeks, a Greek soldier was sent as a runner to carry the news to Athens. This soldier ran all the way day and night, and when he reached Athens he gasped, “Rejoice, we have conquered.” As he delivered his message he fell dead. This runner had a goal, and nothing else mattered – not even his pain and exhaustion which caused his death.**

**The Christian is in the race of life. He has a goal to reach, a crown to win, and a God to glorify. Nothing else matters. Some would call such a Christian narrow-minded and fanatical. The Bible calls such a Christian single-minded, and declares that the single-minded person is the integrated person whose life is full and meaningful. The athlete of Christ cannot be split in his loyalties or divided in his interests; he must strive for one goal only – and that Goal is God.**

**The last event of the state track meet in which our high school track team took first place, was the mile relay. It was necessary for the relay team to do well in this event, to guarantee final victory in our school. Our relay team was behind in the race during the first three laps. In order to win the race, the last relay runner would have to run exceptionally hard and pass his opponents. The relay runner of this last lap was behind until about the last one hundred yards. It was then that he strained every muscle in order to pass his competitors. As the sidelines of the track were cheering teammates, and at the focus of his eyes was the finish line. Ralph Boswell forgot his pain and strain and dashed toward the finish line to win a victory for our team, which resulted in enough points to give our track team first place in state.**

**The greatest athletes of Paul’s day competed in the Olympic Games. The winner in the Greek athletic contests was crowned with the coveted laurel wreath. This wreath was a symbol of great honor, but this wreath soon withered and dried up in a few days.**

**Paul says that the crown of the Christian will not fade, wither, or die, but that the crown of reward awaiting the Christian is eternal. Paul says the reward of the Christian is a “*crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give.*” (2 Timothy 4:8) If an athlete will strive hard to win a corruptible reward, how much more should a Christian strive to win the incorruptible crown of life? The goal and the crown of the Christian is infinitely greater than any earthly reward.**

**The Christian must become goal-oriented. We are living in a world in which there is excessive activity, but few real and worthy goals. Says Barclay: “Someone once drew a cartoon showing two men on Mars looking down at the people in this world scurrying here, there, and everywhere. One said to the other, ‘What are they doing?’ The other replied, ‘They are going.’ ‘But,’ said the first, ‘where are they**

going?’ ‘Oh’, said the other, ‘they are not going anywhere; they are just going.’ And to go just anywhere is the certain way to arrive nowhere.”<sup>6</sup>

**The Christian must be one who has a high motivation in life because he has one great goal.**

**The athlete of Christ must always be careful to have his eyes on the right goal of life. One time I was ahead in a race and thought I had passed the finish line, when in reality I was about ten feet from it when I stopped. I stopped because I had my eyes on the wrong goal. Because I stopped, one of my competitors passed me and won the race. A Christian must not be distracted by inferior goals, but must fix his gaze upon the Supreme Goal which is Christ.**

**An inferior and wrong goal which the athlete of Christ can get his eye on is the goal of materialism. Money can be greatly used by a person, or money can greatly use a person. Money can either be the servant or the master of man. When man develops the greedy and grasping hand, money becomes his master. When man uses money as a means to a great and noble end, then money is merely the servant of man. The athlete of Christ must make Christ the Master and Coach of his life. All things must be brought into submission to Christ.**

**The athlete of Christ strives towards one All-Supreme Goal. That goal is to please God. To please God “man must be dead to all selfish interests that would quench his love for Christ and his passion for souls.”**

**George Muller was one whose goal of life was to please God. Said Muller: “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; died to the approval or blame of my brethren and friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God.”<sup>7</sup>**

**In order to please God one must greatly care for others. One man whose heart beat with passion for souls was John Wesley. Said one of Wesley’s contemporaries, regarding Wesley’s passion for souls; “To one great purpose he dedicated his power of body and mind; for this he relinquished all honor and preferment. At all times and in all places, in season and out of season, by gentleness, by terror, by argument, by persuasion, by reason, by every motive and every inducement, he strove with unwearied assiduity, to turn men from the error of their ways and awaken them to virtue and religion. To the bed of sickness, or the couch of prosperity; to the prison, to the hospital, to the house of mourning or the house of feasting, wherever there was a friend to serve or a soul to save, he readily repaired. He thought no office too humiliating, no condescension too low, no undertaking too arduous to reclaim the**

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<sup>6</sup> Barclay’s Corinthians, 96

<sup>7</sup> George Muller, Prayer and Life’s Highest, p. 120

meanest of God's offspring. The souls of all men were of equal value in his sight and the salvation of the immortal creature unutterably precious."<sup>8</sup>

The athlete of Christ strives and presses toward the goal. Said Paul: *"Forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching out for the things which are in front, I press on toward the goal, in order that I may win the prize which God's upward calling in Christ Jesus is offering to me."*

### **III. THE ATHLETE OF CHRIST GUARDS AGAINST OVER-CONFIDENCE**

Many start in a race but sometimes not all who start finish the race. I have seen some mile runners start the race at a fast pace and lead the race for the first two or three laps, and then wear out on the last lap and badly lose the race. Some runners start a race and never finish; other runners start first and end the race last. Both types of runners are plagued by over-confidence, one of the chief hindrances to success.

When runners are over-confident, they usually under-estimate their opponent's strength. One time when I was running a race and was in first place, I became over-confident and slowed down on the last ten yards of the race. I thought I had won the race and could therefore relax at the last. I learned too late that my opponent was stronger than I thought, as he passed me and won the race by about a foot. I lost the race because of overconfidence.

An attitude of over-confidence can be one of the chief stumbling blocks in the pathway of the athlete of Christ. Paul sadly asked the Galatians: *"Ye did well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?"* (Galatians 5:7)

Paul always guarded against over-confidence in his own life. Paul said, *"I therefore so run as one who knows his goal; I fight, not like one who shadow-boxes; but I batter my body; I make it also my slave; lest after I have preached to others I myself should fail to stand the test."*<sup>9</sup>

At the end of life, Paul could say, *"I have fought the good fight; I have completed the course; I have kept the faith."* How wonderful to be able to say that at the end of one's life. It is tragic that some people start well and never finish. Says Barclay, "It is easy to begin; it is hard to finish. The one thing necessary for life is staying-power, and that is what so many people lack. It was suggested to a certain very famous man that his biography should be written while he was still alive. He absolutely refused to give permission, and his reason for his refusal was: 'I have seen so many men fall out on the last lap.' It is easy to wreck a noble life by some closing folly; it is easy to spoil a fine record, in our work both in the world and in the Church, by something which spoils it all."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Goodly Heritage, p. 69

<sup>9</sup> Barclay's 1 Corinthians 9:26, 27

<sup>10</sup> Barclay's Timothy, pg. 241, 242

**The children of Israel who were delivered out of the land of Egypt, failed because of over-confidence. They started well but never completed their journey. No adults who left Egypt entered the promised land of Canaan, except Joshua and Caleb. The sins of the Israelites are the same sins that each Christian must guard against. In I Corinthians 10:1-13 these sins are revealed. They are: (1) sin of idolatry, (2) sin of fornication, (3) sin of presumption, (4) sin of murmuring.**

**As Christians, we must guard against the sin of idolatry. We can succumb to the spirit of the age and be swept into the materialistic whirlpool. The precious Word can become chocked out through the cares of life, even as legitimate as many of them are.**

**As Christians, we must guard against the sin of fornication. The earnest Christian, who has been called to live an upright life of purity, must reject the lure of sensual pleasure. The Christian dare not flirt with sin, but instead abhor evil and flee all lust.**

**As Christians, we must guard against the sin of presumption. The Christian dare not presume upon God's mercy, and think that He can carelessly sin and easily find forgiveness. Sin breaks God's heart and sent His Son to a cross. The Christian dare not fall into the devil's trap and adopt the philosophy: "It's all right. God will forgive."**

**The Christian must guard against the sin of murmuring. We American Christians are the richest and most healthy people in the world. We are blessed with more opportunities in education and job advancements, etc. We have so much, while others have so little. And yet, we sometimes are like the Israelites – chronic complainers and unthankful for the miracles God has wrought for us.**

**Many tears have been shed by the repentant, backslidden Christians who failed to realize that the race is not finished until death. Over-confidence leads to multiple sins, among which are the ones previously mentioned.**

**Let this be our attitude and prayer of life:**

**"I want a principle within of jealous godly fear  
A sensibility of sin, A pain to feel it near.  
Help me the first approach to feel of pride or wrong desire;  
To catch the wand'ring of my will, And quench the kindling fire.**

**The Scriptures exhort us to be watchful and vigilant. Jesus said, "*Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptations: the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak.*" (Matthew 26:41) Peter says, "*Awake: be on the alert! Your enemy the devil like a roaring lion, prowls around looking for someone to devour.*" (I Peter 5:8, N.E.B.)**

## **CONCLUSION:**

**Paul calls the Christian an athlete of Christ. Just as an athlete submits his body and mind to rigorous discipline, so the Christian learns to exercise discipline in his body, in his mind, and in his soul.**

**A good athlete is a single-minded person, one who strives toward one goal. So it is with the Christian. The Christian is able to brave pain, persecution, perplexities, and cares in order that he may reach his supreme goal, which is Jesus Christ.**

**The downfall of the athlete is over-confidence, and so it is with the Christian. The Christian must realize that he cannot rest on his laurels or be satisfied with any accomplishments. The Christian must ever be on his guard against sin. The race is not over until we cross the 'finish line', when Christ calls us home to heaven. Jesus said, "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*"**

**Crown of Life! – That is the reward of the athlete of Christ, who is disciplined, single-minded, and never overly confident.**

*THE SOLDIER OF CHRIST*

*Chapter 12*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

## CHAPTER 12

### OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:** THE SOLDIER OF CHRIST  
**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Timothy 1:18-19, 11 Timothy 2:3-4, Ephesians 6:10-17  
**TEXT:** *“Fight the good fight of the faith.”*

#### INTRODUCTION:

Paul likens the Christian life to a campaign in which a constant battle is waged against the enemy.

#### PROPOSITION:

Let us carefully note Paul’s description of the Christian campaign against evil.

#### I. LENGTH OF CAMPAIGN

- a. Because the Christian campaign is as long as life itself, it is necessary for the Christian to guard against complacency and self-confidence.
- b. One danger the soldier of Christ faces is the temptation to under-estimate the power and strength of the enemy.
- c. One of the temptations, which Christians oftentimes face, is the temptation to rest on the laurels of one’s past achievements.

#### II. QUALITY OF CAMPAIGN

#### III. WEAPONS FOR THE CAMPAIGN

#### CONCLUSION:

The Christian is involved in a life-long spiritual campaign against the forces of evil.

The soldier of Christ is fighting for a great cause and thus gives himself willingly and wholeheartedly to the battle.

The weapons of faith and a good conscience are effective weapons in the spiritual warfare of life. Faith is the staying power of the Christian life and gives certainty to this life and assurance of eternal life hereafter. The tender, God-controlled conscience is awake to the presence of sin and speaks out against social injustice.

## CHAPTER 12

**SUBJECT: THE SOLDIER OF CHRIST**  
**SCRIPTURE: 1 Timothy 1:18-19; 11 Timothy 2:3-4; Ephesians 6:10-17**  
**TEXT: “Fight the good fight of the faith.”**

### INTRODUCTION:

Paul uses many analogies to describe the Christian life. Paul says the Christian is an ambassador, a disciple, an athlete, a toiler, and a soldier. It is the last analogy that we are especially interested in now.

Paul likens the Christian life to a campaign in which a constant battle is waged against the enemy. Paul speaks in detail about the nature of the Christian’s battle in Ephesians 6 and says there that the enemy is not of flesh and blood, but is spiritual in nature. He outlines the spiritual weapons that the Christian must put on in order successfully to wage the battle.

Paul calls the Christian a soldier. He called his companions in the faith “*fellow soldiers*”. (Philemon 2, Philippians 2:25) He exhorted Timothy to “*endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*” (2 Timothy 2:3)

Paul believed that the atmosphere was filled with demonic spirits which were seeking to defeat and to destroy Christians. Paul considered the universe as the stage of spiritual battle between good and evil. Paul classed all men in either the army of God or the army of Satan.

### PROPOSITION:

Let us carefully note Paul’s description of the Christian campaign against evil. Paul exhorted Timothy to “wage a fine campaign.” Let us think about the Christian Campaign, (1) considering the Length of the Campaign, (2) considering the Quality of the Campaign, and (3) considering the Weapons for the Campaign.

#### I. LENGTH OF CAMPAIGN

Says Barclay about the length of the campaigning, “It is not to a battle that we are summoned; it is to a campaign. Life is one long campaign; life is a service from which there is no release. Life is not a short, sharp struggle after which a man can lay aside his arms and rest in peace; to the end of the day life is an unceasing campaign...It is there that the danger of life enters in. It is necessary to be forever on guard and on the watch...There are no periods of relaxation in the Christian

**life... We must remember that we are summoned to a campaign which goes on as long as life goes on.”<sup>1</sup>**

- a. Because the Christian campaign is as long as life itself, it is necessary for the Christian to guard against complacency and self-confidence. It has been correctly said, “Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom.” Paul’s exhortation must be heeded by every earnest Christian. “Let him who thinks that he stands secure take care lest he fall.”<sup>2</sup>**

**Barclay notes that the Acropolis of Sardis (of which Revelations 3:3 speaks) “was built on a jutting spur of rock that was held to be impregnable. When Cyrus was besieging it he offered a special reward to any who could find a way in. A certain soldier, Hyeroeades by name, was watching one day and saw a soldier in the Sardian garrison drop his helmet accidentally over the battlements. He saw him climb down after it and marked his path. That night he led a band up the cliffs by that very path and when they reached the top they found it quite unguarded; so they entered in and captured the citadel, which was too safe.”<sup>3</sup>**

**The Christian must ever be watchful, vigilant, and careful in order that he might always guide his footsteps aright. The Christian must give no place to the devil, but must always build up a strong defense against the enemy through earnest prayer and careful alertness.**

**The easy life often times becomes the complacent life which leads to degeneracy and decay. “The classic example of that is what happened to the armies of Hannibal. Hannibal of Carthage was the one general who had routed the Roman legions. He alone had conquered the conquerors. But the Romans were a people who often lost a battle but who seldom lost a campaign. Winter came and the campaign had to be suspended. Hannibal wintered his troops in Capua which he had captured. Capua was a city of luxury. And one winter in Capua did what the Roman legions had not succeeded in doing. One winter there with its luxury so sapped the morals of the Carthaginian troops that when the spring came and the campaign was resumed they were unable to stand before the Romans. Ease had ruined them when struggle had only toughened them.”<sup>4</sup>**

**When troops in an army suddenly face the danger and threat of the oncoming enemy, they become more alert and unified to fight against the common enemy. It is at such times of emergency that courage is especially shown.**

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay’s Timothy, p. 59

<sup>2</sup> Barclay’s Timothy, p. 59

<sup>3</sup> Barclay’s I Corinthians 10:12

<sup>4</sup> Barclay’s Hebrews p. 143

**Oftentimes the person, who is going through trouble and adversity, draws so much nearer to God than the person who is having it easy in life. President Lincoln once said: “I have often been driven to my knees in prayer because I had nowhere else to go.”<sup>5</sup>**

**b. One danger the soldier of Christ faces is the temptation to underestimate the power and strength of the enemy. To develop a false sense of security oftentimes leads to devastation and destruction. America learned her lesson the hard way at Pearl Harbor. To constantly remind us of that lesson, there are stickers here and there which say: “Remember Pearl Harbor.”**

**Comments one man on Pearl Harbor: “One outstanding thing that we remember is how a sense of overconfidence and false security led to a lack of alertness and to tragic disaster. Even when Sergeant Joseph L. Lockard, in charge of an aircraft detector unit, reported to his superior officer readings which showed that a large number of unidentified planes were approaching, approximately 132 miles away, his superior ignored his report. A precious hour which elapsed before the planes struck was wasted. Men thought that ‘it couldn’t happen’, but it did.”<sup>6</sup>**

**One of the greatest needs in the Christian life is consistency. The growth of many is in spasms, irregular and uncertain. The greatest test of the genuineness and thoroughness of one’s Christianity is the test of time. A true Christian is enabled to remain faithful through all the changes and chances of life. The Christian must remain alert and not let himself be lulled to sleep by over-confidence and false security. Said one, “If things are going well, ask the Lord to sanctify the joy. If the sky is overcast, seek refuge in the Lord.”<sup>7</sup>**

**c. One of the temptations which Christians oftentimes face is the temptation to rest on the laurels of one’s past achievements. In the Book of Judges, one can note a uniform cycle which the Israelites went through as a result of their complacency which they developed after a victory over their oppressors. When the Israelites were harshly oppressed, they would pray and God would send them a deliverer, and they would be set free from their oppression. After enjoying freedom and prosperity for a time, the Israelites would develop complacency which led to apostasy and finally oppression by an enemy once again. In their oppression they would again pray and be delivered, only to fall back again into apostasy which led to further oppression. This cycle was repeated several times during the time of the Judges.**

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<sup>6</sup> Three Types of Eternal Security by B.L. Olmstead, p. 29

<sup>7</sup> The War Cry

**Barclay so well comments by saying, “We will do well to be specially carefully on our guard after every time when life has brought us to the heights, for it is just then that we are in gravest danger of the depths”<sup>8</sup> After the high moment of Jesus’ baptism, Jesus was led away into the wilderness, where He underwent severe temptation.**

**One time after John Bunyan had preached a great sermon, he was complimented by one who said, “That was a great sermon, Mr. Bunyan.” Said Bunyan, not in scorn but in all honesty, to the one who complimented him, “Thank you, but the devil already told me that as soon as I finished my sermon.” It is after we have experienced a high moment of great victory that we must guard against falling into sin. Because the Christian Campaign is as long as life itself, we must ever be on our guard.**

**d. Quality of Campaign. What kind of campaign is the Christian called to? Paul tells Timothy that the campaign which the Christian is involved in is a “fine campaign”. The word in Greek which Paul uses to describe the campaigning is Kalos. Says Barclay: “This word Kalos does not mean only something which is good and strong; it means something which is fine and attractive and winsome and lovely.”<sup>9</sup>**

**Because the quality of the campaign is fine and good and attractive, the soldier of Christ must be possessed of the qualities of nobility, greatness, and beauty. There are no grudging or unwilling draftees in God’s army, but only volunteers whose lives are lovely, gracious, and winsome. The soldier of God is a good man taking part in a fine campaign.**

**Goodness is a quality in the soldier of Christ which is actively manifested. Barclay relates an incident to illustrate this. “There was a soldier who was wounded in battle. The padre (chaplain) crept out to him and did what he could for him. He stayed with him when the remainder of the troops retreated. In the heat of the day he gave him water from his own water-bottle, while he himself remained parched with thirst. In the night, when the chill frost came down, he covered the wounded man with his own coat, and finally wrapped him up in even more of his clothes to save him from the cold. In the end the wounded man looked up at the padre. ‘Padre,’ he said, ‘you’re a Christian?’ ‘I try to be’... said the padre. ‘Then’, said the wounded man, ‘if Christianity makes a man do for another man what you have done for me, tell me about it, because I want it.’”<sup>10</sup>**

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<sup>8</sup> Barclay’s Matthew, Vol. 1, p. 58

<sup>9</sup> Barclay’s Timothy, p. 59

<sup>10</sup> Barclay’s Romans, p. 159

**The Christian seeks to honor his Chief Commander, Jesus Christ, by obeying his commands and possessing his traits. One has said that a saint is a person who makes it easier to believe in Jesus Christ.**

**Whether a Christian is a foot soldier or an officer, a follower or a leader, in the army of God, he serves with gratitude and courage. To be a member of a great cause, more than compensates for any hardship or suffering. Many soldiers are proud of their battle wounds because they are visible marks of courage which were earned in the midst of a great battle.**

**When the Hungarians sought to become nationally independent from the Soviet rule of Communism in 1956, new Soviet forces came into Hungary and brutally oppressed the Hungarians. Hundreds of Hungarians, freedom fighters, were fighting against great and brutal forces, but they were willing to fight to their death because they were fighting for a great cause. So it is with the soldier of Christ.**

**A great soldier is one who unquestionably obeys his commander, even though the soldier may not understand the decisions of the commander. The commander sees the over-all picture, while the soldier sees only a small part of the campaign. The Christian unquestionably obeys His Divine Commander.**

**A great soldier is one who is willing to die for his country. Says Barclay: "Someone recorded a conversation between Marshal Foch and an officer in the 1914-1918 war. 'You must not retire,' said Foch, 'you must hold on at all costs.' 'Then,' said the officer aghast, 'that means we must all die.' And Foch answered: 'Precisely!' The supreme soldier's virtue is that he is faithful unto death."<sup>11</sup> Because the Christian is a soldier within a great army and is serving a Mighty Commander, he is willing to die for the cause. The campaign in which the Christian is involved is a "fine campaign."**

**e. Weapons of the campaign. Paul exhorted Timothy to "*wage a fine campaign, maintaining your faith and a good conscience all the time.*"<sup>12</sup> The weapons for the great campaign are faith and a good conscience.**

**One great weapon of warfare is faith. "It is told that, before a great battle Napoleon would stand in his tent alone; he would send for his commanders to come to him, one by one; when they came in, he would say no word to them, but he would look them in the eyes, and shake them by the hand; and they would go out prepared to battle and to die for the**

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<sup>11</sup> Barclay's Timothy, p. 184

<sup>12</sup> Barclay's Timothy, 1:18b

general whom they loved.”<sup>13</sup> Napoleon’s men had great faith in him and great faith in the cause for which they were fighting. God can inspire faith in the heart of the despairing, and courage in the heart of the fearful. Faith is the staying power in the Christian life.

John Knox was one great man who experienced the staying power of faith, although he became depressed in feelings at times. In 1554, John Knox had to flee from his country to escape the hatred of Mary Tudor. He wrote of his feelings when he said, “Not only the ungodly, but even my faithful brethren, yea, and my own self, that is, all natural understanding, judged my cause to be irremediable...The frail flesh, oppressed with fear and pain, desireth deliverance, ever abhorring and drawing back from obedience giving. O Christian brethren, I write by experience...I know the grudging and murmuring complaints of the flesh; I know the anger, wrath, and indignation which it conceiveth against God, calling all. His promises in doubt, and being ready every hour utterly to fall from God. Against which remains only faith.”<sup>14</sup>

“O for a faith that will not shrink,  
Tho’ pressed by ev’ry foe.  
That will not tremble on the brink  
Of any earthly woe!”

Paul urged Timothy to “*fight the good faith of faith; lay hold on eternal life, to which you are called.*” (I Timothy 6:12, Barclay) Faith gives certainty to this life and assurance of eternal life hereafter. The world is searching for certainty in life. Said Goethe, “Tell me of your certainties, I have doubts enough of my own.”<sup>15</sup>

The man of faith has a great certainty of the reality of God’s presence. “Joseph Twitchehell tells how he went to visit Horace Bushnell when Bushnell was an old man. At night Bushnell took him out for a walk on the hillside. As they walked in the dark, suddenly Busnell said, ‘Let us kneel and pray’ and so he prayed. Twitchell, telling of it afterwards, said, ‘I was afraid to stretch out my hand in the darkness in case I should touch God.’”

The man who is equipped with the weapon of faith is ready to face his persecutors with courage. In the early days of Christianity, one Christian told his persecutors that nothing they could do could shake his faith in God. Said the judge to the Christian man, “Do you really think that the like of you will go to God and His glory?” Said the Christian man, “I do not think, I know.”

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<sup>13</sup> Barclay’s Hebrews 181

<sup>14</sup> Barclay’s Timothy,, p. 60

<sup>15</sup> Barclay’s Corinthians, p. 145

**At one time in Bunyan's life, he was plagued by uncertainty. He said, "Everyone doth think his own Religion rightest, both Jews, Moors and Pagans; and how if all our Faith and Christ and Scriptures should be but a 'Think so' too?" Then the day came when Bunyan's faith became a flame and he then cried out, "Now I know! I know!" Faith gives certainty that God's presence is real and that heaven's rewards are real.**

**"Once the papal envoy threatened Martin Luther with what would follow if he persisted in his course and warned him that in the end he would be deserted by all his supporters. 'Where will you be then?' demanded the envoy. 'Then as now' Luther answered, 'in the hands of God.'<sup>16</sup> To be in the hands of God is to be in the safest place of all. The man of faith places his confidence in God, despite external persecutions and internal fears.**

**"If God be for us, who can be against us?" Another great weapon of the Christian soldier is a good conscience. Peter says, "This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully."**

**Paul said that it was his goal "*to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.*" (Acts 24:16) The man with the pure conscience is powerful, because he is free to speak for God, without bringing a snare upon himself and upon his cause. Blessed is the man who has nothing to hide, but whose actions are Christ-honoring because he has a God-sensitized conscience.**

**When John Knox rebuked Queen Mary for her proposed marriage to Don Carlos, at first, she tried anger and outraged majesty and then she tried 'tears in abundance'. Knox's answer was, 'I never delighted in the weeping of any of God's creatures. I can scarcely well abide the tears of my own boys, whom my own hand correcteth, much less can I rejoice in Your Majesty's weeping. But I must sustain, albeit unwillingly, Your Majesty's tears rather than I dare hurt my conscience or betray my commonwealth through my silence.'<sup>17</sup>**

**"It was said of John Knox, as his body was being lowered into the grave, 'Here lies one who feared God so much that he never feared the face of man.'<sup>18</sup> The sensitized, God-controlled conscience is a powerful weapon in the spiritual campaign of life. I like the song "I Want A Principle Within":**

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<sup>16</sup> Barclay's Acts. p. 39

<sup>17</sup> Barclay's Corinthians, pg. 200,201

<sup>18</sup> Barclay's Luke, p. 164

**“From thee that I no more may stay,  
No more thy goodness grieve,  
Grant me the filial awe I pray,  
The tender conscience give;  
Quick as the apple of an eye,  
O God, my conscience make!  
Awake my soul when sin is nigh,  
And keep it still awake.”**

## **CONCLUSION:**

**Paul says, “*Fight the good fight of faith.*” The Christian is involved in a life-long spiritual campaign against the forces of evil. The Christian soldier must not seek escape from the battle, but rather courageously fight in the front lines for God.**

**The soldier of Christ is fighting for a great cause and thus gives himself willingly and wholeheartedly to the battle. There are no draftees in God’s army but only volunteers. The volunteer of Christ is a member of a fine campaign and thus must be a good soldier. A good soldier seeks to imitate the qualities of his Chief Commander – Jesus Christ. Thus, the good soldier is attractive, winsome, and lovely. The fragrance of Christ’s love comes from his life.**

**The weapons of faith and of a good conscience are effective weapons in the spiritual warfare of life. Faith is the staying power of the Christian life and gives certainty to this life and assurance of eternal life hereafter. The tender, God-controlled conscience is awake to the presence of sin and speaks out against social injustice.**

**The soldier of Christ is involved in a great, lifetime campaign against sin, and thus must be fully equipped for the battles of life.**

**“Stand up! Stand up! For Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross! Lift high His royal banner!”**

*“THE TOILER OF CHRIST”!*

*Chapter 13*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

## CHAPTER 13

### OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:** THE TOILER OF CHRIST  
**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Timothy 2:6-7; James 5:7-8  
**TEXT:** *“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless’ come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” (Psalms 126:6)*

#### INTRODUCTION:

The Toiling Husbandman or farmer and the Christian have some interesting similarities.

#### PROPOSITION:

It is two of the similarities that we want to notice. Both the farmer and the Christian must be (1) Patient, (2) Persistent.

- I. PATIENCE OF TOILING HUSBANDMAN
- II. PERSISTENCE OF TOILING HUSBANDMAN

#### CONCLUSION:

The farmer must work and then wait for the harvest. The Christian must sow the seed of God’s Word and leave the harvest to the years. There are few quick results, but there are sure and lasting results. All a Christian laborer needs to be concerned about is that he faithfully sows the seed. To God belongs the harvest. The farmer must be persistent in his seed preparation, planting, fertilizing, irrigating, and cultivating, all of which eventually leads to a Harvest. Paul says, *“...let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Galatians 6:9)*

## CHAPTER 13

**SUBJECT:** THE TOILER OF CHRIST  
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**TEXT:** *“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” (Psalms 126:6)*

### INTRODUCTION

The Bible compares the Christian life to many things. It calls the Christian an Ambassador, a Disciple, an Athlete, a Soldier, and a Toiler.

It is this last analogy, which we are concerned about in this message. The Toiling Husbandman or farmer and the Christian have some interesting similarities.

### PROPOSITION:

It is two of the above similarities that we want to take notice of. Both the farmer and the Christian must be (1) Patient, (2) Persistent.

#### I. PATIENCE OF TOILING HUSBANDMAN

The Christian is like the farmer in that both the Christian and the farmer must be willing to work and then to wait patiently. One who wants quick or immediate results would not be a successful farmer. A farmer has to plant the seed and to wait patiently for germination and growth before he can harvest a crop. A farmer plants many seeds, all of which he knows will not germinate and grow. He knows that some seeds will fall in unfavorable ground and will thus die. This fact does not discourage him, for he knows that enough seeds will fall into good ground and that he will be guaranteed a good harvest. He has so much faith in these seeds that he bases his success as a farmer on those seeds.

Jesus told a parable, which likened the Christian unto a farmer who sows seeds. A Christian is like a farmer. A Christian sows many seeds, not all of which fall into good ground. Some seeds fall on hard ground; other seeds fall on shallow ground; other seeds fall on thorny ground. None of the crops from these seeds fully develops, but die instead. However, some seeds will fall into good ground, and from these seeds will come a bountiful harvest. It will take time, but the harvest is sure to come.

Jesus told this parable to encourage his disciples. Christ knew that his message and the message of the disciples would sometimes fall on hardened ground – on deaf ears and shut minds, who would refuse to receive the Word. He knew that His message

**and the message of His disciples would fall on shallow ground and on shallow minds, representing persons who would quickly and emotionally receive the message. However, these persons would fail to think the message through and thus they would become barren fall-outs. He knew the message would sometimes be received gladly by some Because Jesus knew that not all would receive the good word, he warned his disciples not to be discouraged. Jesus told his disciples to be encouraged, for there would be some who would receive the Word. From these lives, there would come a gracious harvest. To sow the Word takes patience; to wait for the harvest takes patience. However, although there are no quick results, there are sure results. The harvest takes patience. However, although there are no quick results, there are sure results. The harvest will come, therefore do not become weary in your good work, but be faithful and encouraged. The Christian can be as sure of his harvest as the farmer can be of his.**

***“The seed is the Word of God.” (Luke 8:11). Just as a farmer is guaranteed a harvest if he follows physical laws, so a Christian is guaranteed a harvest if he follows spiritual laws. The harvest is sure. Said God through Isaiah, “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it will not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10, 11)***

**Jacob Deshazer’s life is a classic example of the biblical promise that God’s Word will not return to him void. As an American war prisoner in a Japanese prison, Jacob Deshazer found God through reading the Bible. The prayers of his godly mother were answered. Deshazer could not get away from the memory of his early training in the Bible. The seed of the Word was implanted in his heart and it eventually germinated into life to produce a harvest.**

**Abraham Lincoln was greatly influenced by his Christian stepmother. The Bible was one of the few books he possessed as a boy, and which he studied diligently and memorized extensively. Wrote Hamilton Wright Mabie concerning the Bible’s influence in Lincoln’s life: “These sixty-six books emancipated him at once from the harsh and narrow conditions in which he was born; they set him in the great currents of human life; they brought before him the highest ideals of human character; and above all, for the purposes of education, they presented to his imagination the loftiest examples of human speech.”<sup>1</sup>**

**As Christians, we need to learn the same lesson that the farmer has learned. That lesson is the lesson of patience. The farmer has learned to work and then to wait. We as Christians need also to learn that there are no quick results. As Barclay says, “We live in an age which looks for quick results, but in the sowing of the seed we**

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<sup>1</sup> Hamilton Wright Mabie, *Prayer and Life’s Highest*, p. 38

**must sow in patience and sow in hope, and sometimes we must leave the harvest to the years.”<sup>2</sup>**

**As Christians, we often want to take two steps at one time in order to immediately realize our goals. One young Christian testifies to the lesson in patience that God had to teach her. Wrote this woman, (who was once an enthusiastic woman of the world) to a friend, “The Spirit is my check valve. I am so eager – eager to live, eager to learn, eager to go ahead, eager to love, eager to climb the ladder more than one step at a time! In all things, the Spirit says to me, ‘Thus far and no farther now!’ Always the Spirit inspires, controls, and demands obedience. When I feel that driving, burning enthusiasm deep within, the Spirit never fails to remind me, ‘Proceed with caution. Take time for all things; Rome was not built in a day.’ God said to me, ‘Mary, I have the whole universe to consider, not just you!’ (My, how deflating it was to hear that the first time.)”<sup>3</sup>**

**One good story, which illustrates the fact that the harvest must oftentimes be left to the years, is a story out of the life of H.L. Gee. Barclay tells the story. “In the Church where he (H.L. Gee) worshipped there was a lonely old man, old Thomas. Thomas had outlived all his friends and hardly anyone knew him. Thomas died. H.L. Gee had the feeling that there would be no one to go to the funeral so he decided to go, so that someone might follow old Thomas to his last resting-place. There was no one; and it was a wild, wet day. The funeral reached the cemetery; it was during the war; and at the gate, there was a soldier waiting. He was an officer, but on his raincoat, there were no rank badges. The soldier came to the graveside for the ceremony; when it was over he stepped forward and standing before the open grave, he swept his hand to a salute that might have been given to a king. H.L. Gee walked away with this soldier, and as they walked, the wind blew the soldier’s raincoat open; and now H.L. Gee saw the soldier’s badges of rank; the soldier was nothing less than a brigadier. The soldier said to H.L. Gee, ‘you will perhaps be wondering what I am doing here. Years ago, Thomas was my Sunday school teacher. I was a wild lad and a sore trial to him; he never knew what he did for me; but I owe everything I am or will be to old Thomas; and today I had to come to salute him at the end.’”<sup>4</sup>**

**We need to learn the same lesson that the Old Testament patriarchs learned – that we are oftentimes simply a link in the fulfillment of a promise. Note what the patriarchs might say to us if they were here. “God’s promise is true, for God never breaks a promise; I may not live to see it; death may come to me before that promise becomes a fact and that dream a reality; but I am a link in the fulfillment of that promise; whether or not that promise comes depends on me.”<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, Matthew vol. 2, p. 71

<sup>3</sup> Prayer and Life’s Highest, p. 39

<sup>4</sup> Barclay’s, Mathew v. 2, p. 70

<sup>5</sup> Barclay’s Hebrews, p. 174

**Jim Elliot was one who never saw the results of his labor. He sowed the seed, but his death was instrumental in bringing about the harvest of that seed. The very ones who murdered Elliot are now Christians and are in turn seeking to win their fellow tribesmen to Christ.**

**Jesus said, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” (John 12:24) Through the sacrifice of Jim Elliot’s life, many have seen the manifested love of Christ and have turned to Christ. Said Elliot: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”**

**Patience is an essential quality in the Christian’s life, just as it is a necessary quality in the farmer’s life. The Christian Toiler must be willing to labor without seeing quick or sudden results. Paul Rees said, “Take the pioneer missionaries, who were the trailblazers in world evangelism a century ago. Some of them, like the Moffatts and the Morrises, went for years before they witnessed a single conversion among the pagan people to which they preached. Was their lives stagnate and sterile? Perish the thought! In them, the fragrant graces that Paul calls ‘*the fruit of the Spirit*’ were ripening. In them, the intimacies, which are possible between a redeemed soul and God, were growing richer. In them a faith, which, to be sure, was sometimes drastically tested, was sinking deeper roots.”<sup>6</sup>**

**The Christian Toiler must not become discouraged, for Jesus promised that there will be a sure harvest, although some will not receive the Word. The Christian Toiler must be faithful in his work of sowing the seed, and sometimes “leave the harvest to the years”. If you personally get quick results from your witnessing, just remember that you are reaping the harvest of a soul now because someone before you sowed the seed. Some sow, some water, some harvest – but God alone gives the increase. We are only co-workers.**

## **II. PERSISTENCE OF TOILING HUSBANDMAN**

**A Christian is like a farmer in that both are persistent. The farmer’s life is both a life of thought and action. The Christian’s life is also both a life of thought and action. Both are important and essential to success.**

**The farmer’s success depends a lot upon proper planning and right timing. The farmer must consider how much seed is necessary, when to plant the seed, when to fertilize, to cultivate, and to irrigate, and when to harvest. There is planning behind successful farming, but planning without action is useless and fruitless. Success in farming depends also upon intelligent action. Simply to have plans without putting them into action is a waste of time and only produces frustration and barrenness. Plan your work and work your plan!**

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<sup>6</sup> Prayer and Life’s Highest, p. 67

**The Christian is also a man of both thought and action. Meditation, study, and preparation are all important, but thought without action is useless. Strategy is important, but a plan without active participation frustrates the purpose of the plan.**

**Christianity is essentially a life of action, and not a series of brief emotional experiences. Barclay well describes the Christian life when he says, “Christianity is not an emotional experience; it is a way of life. The Christian is not meant to luxuriate in an experience, however wonderful; he is meant to go out and live a certain kind of life in the teeth of the world’s attacks and problems. It is commonest thing in the world of religious life to sit in church and to feel a wave of feeling sweep over us. It is a not uncommon experience when we sit alone to feel Christ very near to us. However, the Christianity, which has stopped there, has stopped halfway. That emotion must be translated into action. Religious feeling can never be a substitute for religious doing. Christianity can never be an experience of the secret place; it must be a life in the market place.”<sup>7</sup>**

**Wesley said he was a man of one Book – the Bible. The seed is the all-important thing to the farmer. It is the seed that is all-important to the farmer and it is the Bible, which is all-important to the Christian. It is the proper care and use of the seed that guarantees the success of the farmer. It is also the proper use of the Word that guarantees the success of the Toiler of Christ. The proper use of the Word involves not only thought but also action.**

**We have the Bible today because some were willing to express their faith in action, despite the cost of such action. The Bible was translated into the English language at a great cost. William Tyndale gave England its first printed Bible. For this translation, Tyndale says that he suffered “poverty, exile, bitter absence from friends, hunger and thirst and cold, great dangers and innumerable other hard and sharp fighting’s.” When the authorities burned his translated Bible, he said, “They did none other thing than I looked for; no more shall they do if they burn me also.” Finally, Tyndale was martyred in 1536 for his faith. He was persistent even unto death. His dying prayer was “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes!” Tyndale’s persistence paid off, for eventually the common populace of England had access to the Bible.**

**Paul exhorted Timothy to “*herald forth the word; be urgent in season and out of season.*” Perhaps this could be interpreted as follows: “Preach the Word when it is permissible and lawful and preach the Word when it is forbidden and unpopular.”**

**Perhaps to preach the Word in season could mean to preach the Word when it is permissible and lawful. Because we possess the freedom to worship, we should be spreading the gospel with double fervor. We should be taking advantage of all modern media of communication. By word of mouth, through pictures, and by**

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<sup>7</sup> Barclay’s Romans, p. 87

**good deeds we should boldly proclaim the Gospel of Christ, while we still enjoy the priceless gift of freedom.**

**Perhaps to preach the Word out of season could mean to preach the Word even when it is forbidden and unpopular. The Christian must be persistent to preach the word, despite his circumstances, whether they are favorable or unfavorable. The Word of God will prevail, despite man's effort to destroy it.**

**“Andrew Melville was one of the earliest heralds of the Scottish Reformation. One day the Regent Morton sent for him and denounced his writings. ‘There will never be quietness in this country,’ he said, ‘till half a dozen of you be hanged or banished from the country’. ‘Tush! Sir,’ answered Melville, ‘threaten your courtiers in that fashion. It is the same to me whether I rot in the air or in the ground. The earth is the Lord’s; my fatherland is wherever well doing is. I have been ready to give my life when it was not half as well worn, at the pleasure of my God. I lived out of your country ten years as well as in it. Yet God be glorified, it will not lie in your power to hang nor exile His truth!’”<sup>8</sup> The messenger may be silenced, but the message of truth lives on, and shall certainly bring forth a harvest.**

**The following testimony by Richard Wurmbrand shows the persistency of the Christians behind the Iron Curtains who suffered for their faith. Wurmbrand tells of his own experience of preaching the Word while in prison: “It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners. It was an understanding that whoever was caught doing this received a severe beating. A number of us decided to pay the price for the privilege of preaching, so we accepted their terms. It was a deal, we preached and they beat us. We were happy preaching. They were happy beating us, so everyone was happy.**

**“The following scene happened more times than I can remember: a brother was preaching to the other prisoners when the guards suddenly burst in surprising him half way through a phrase. They hauled him down the corridor to the ‘beating room’. After what seemed an endless beating, they brought him back and threw him – bloody and beaten - into the prison floor. Slowly, he picked his battered body up, painfully straightened his clothing and said, ‘Now, brethren, where did I leave off when I was interrupted?’ He continued his Gospel message! I have seen beautiful things.”<sup>9</sup>**

**Both the farmer and the Christian must be persistent. There are no scheduled hours of work for the farmer. He may work from early dawn until late at night by means of light from his tractor. So it is with Christians. They must work at all times, in all places, and under every circumstance. There is no release from the Christian life. He must preach persistently in season and out of season, when it is lawful to preach and when it is unlawful to preach. He must be willing to preach in**

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<sup>8</sup> Barclay's Timothy, p. 193

<sup>9</sup> Tortured For Christ, p. 24

**the open to the masses or be willing to preach in secret to the few. As one man said, "Take or make your opportunity to speak for Christ."<sup>10</sup>**

## **CONCLUSION:**

**There are at least two qualities that both the successful farmer and the successful Christian have in common. One is patience; the other is persistence. Each is on the opposite side of the same coin. Both must work together in close conjunction. The farmer must work and then wait for the harvest. The Christian must sow the seed of God's Word and leave the harvest to the years. There are few quick results, but there are sure and lasting results. All a Christian laborer needs to be concerned about is that he faithfully sows the seed. To God belongs the harvest. The farmer must be persistent in his seed preparation, planting, fertilizing, irrigating, and cultivating - all of which eventually leads to a Harvest. Paul says, "*...let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*" (Galatians 6:9)**

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<sup>10</sup> Barclay's Timothy, p. 235

*WHAT IF I YIELDED TO  
TEMPTATION*

*Chapter 14*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

## CHAPTER 14

### OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:** WHAT IF I YIELD TO TEMPTATION?

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalms 51

**TEXT:** *“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’ – and you forgave the guilt of my sins.”* (Psalms 32:5, NIV)

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

What happens when one does fall on his face spiritually? Does God care for people who miserably fail?

#### **PROPOSITION:**

You need not yield to temptation, but what should you do if you do yield to temptation and find yourself sinning against God? There are important and specific steps we must take if we yield to temptation?

- I. RECOGNIZE THE REALITY AND THE SERIOUSNESS OF SIN.
- II. DO NOT RATIONALIZE OR DENY YOUR SIN.
- III. ACCEPT PERSONAL MORAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR FAILURES AND YOUR SINS.
- IV. RECOGNIZE THAT FORGIVENESS IS ALWAYS COSTLY.
- V. CONFESS ALL YOUR SINS TO GOD, AND REPENT DEEPLY OF YOUR SINS.
- VI. ACCEPT GOD’S FORGIVENESS GRATEFULLY AND HUMBLY.

- VII. AFTER YOU HAVE CONFESSED YOUR SINS TO GOD, BE WILLING, IF NECESSARY, TO CONFESS YOUR SINS TO OTHERS.**
- VIII. FORGIVE YOURSELF AND LEARN VALUABLE LESSONS FROM YOUR MORAL FAILURE.**
- IX. AFTER YOU HAVE ACCEPTED THE FORGIVENESS OF GOD, AND AFTER YOU HAVE FORGIVEN YOURSELF, “THEN PUT YOURSELF AGAIN UNDER GOD’S CONTROL AND SUBMIT TO HIS TESTINGS”.  
(Bastian)**
- X. ACCEPT WITHOUT COMPLAINT THE God-ALLOWED CONSEQUENCES FROM YOUR PAST WRONG MORAL DECISIONS (SINS), BUT EXPECT GOD TO CONTINUE TO USE YOU EVEN WHILE YOU ARE SUFFERING FROM THE CONSEQUENCES.**

**CONCLUSION:**

**Remember what steps to take (from a Biblical perspective) if you find that you have yielded to temptation, and consequently have grievously sinned against your loving Saviour.**

## CHAPTER 14

**SUBJECT:** WHAT IF I YIELD TO TEMPTATION?

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**TEXT:** *“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’— and you forgave the guilt of my sins.”* (Psalms 32:5)

### INTRODUCTION:

Is it necessary for a believer to yield to temptation? The simple and important answer to that question is “No”. Jesus ‘suffered being tempted’, and yet He never once sinned! Hebrews 2:18 states: *“For since He (Jesus) himself has now been through suffering and temptation, He knows what it is like when we suffer and are tempted, and He is wonderfully able to help us.”* (Living Bible)

God promises to help us during temptation. *“And no temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can’t stand up against it, for He has promised this and will do what He says. He will show you how to escape temptation’s power so that you can bear up patiently against it.”* (I Corinthians 10:13, Living Bible)

As believers, we need never to yield to temptation. We can say ‘No’ to Satan’s allurement. Because God controls even the temptations that beset us, every believer can handle temptation. God is strong, able, and willing to help every believer during his times of moral struggle and spiritual warfare. Jesus has already won the battle on Mount Calvary, and the power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that is available to give Christians victory over temptation. We do not work for a victory; we work from a victory. The victory belongs to Jesus, and each believer has a right and a responsibility personally to appropriate that historic victory as His own personal victory.

Great is God’s protection of His trusting children. *“The Lord is faithful; He will make you strong and guard you from satanic attacks of every kind.”* (II Thessalonians 3:3, Living Bible) *“He is able to keep you from slipping and falling away, and to bring you, sinless and perfect, into His glorious presence with mighty shouts of everlasting joy. Amen.”* (Jude 24, Living Bible)

**“The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,  
I will not, I will not desert to His foes;  
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,  
I’ll never, no, never, no, never forsake!”  
(How Firm A Foundation)**

**“And though this world, with devils filled,  
Should threaten to undo us;  
We will not fear, for God hath willed  
His truth to triumph through us.  
The prince of darkness grim,  
We tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure,  
For Lo, his doom is sure;  
One little word shall fell him.”  
(A Mighty Fortress Is Our God)**

**Yes, Jesus has come to save us from our sins (Matthew 1:21) – not in our sins. John wrote, “My children, in writing these to you my purpose is that you should not commit sin.” (I John 2:1; I John 3:9, NEB)**

**“So victory over temptation should be the norm. Nothing below this is healthy. Even so, we do sometimes fail. We get careless, we stealthily lessen our trust in God, and we let a spirit of disobedience bewitch us. Suddenly, we have yielded to temptation and are filled with sorrow.”<sup>1</sup>**

**“Does Jesus care when I’ve tried and failed  
To resist some temptation strong;  
When for my deep grief I find no relief;  
Tho’ my tears flow all the night long?**

**O yes, He cares; I know He cares,  
His heart is touched with my grief;  
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,  
I know my Savior cares.”  
(Does Jesus Care?)**

**Have you ever failed morally, spiritually, or socially, and after your failure, wondered if God still cared for you? Have you ever felt so guilty that you had a hard time thinking that you could ever love yourself again? Have you ever had a hard time looking at yourself in the mirror after you did, said, or thought something that was ignoble? Have you ever had an experience when you felt, like Simon Peter, that you had denied your Lord? “The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.” (Luke 22:61-62)**

**He who climbs the highest, may fall the hardest. Jesus warned us to watch and to pray, lest we fall into temptation. He said that the spirit of man is willing but that the flesh is weak. Everyone is vulnerable at one time or another. Wrote Paul to the overly confident Corinthian believers: “So let the man who feels sure of his standing today be careful that he does not fall tomorrow.” (I Corinthians 10:12, Phillips)**

<sup>1</sup> Bastian’s A Faith To Grow BY; pg. 42, 43

**What happens when one does fall on his face spiritually? Does God care for people who miserably fall?**

**It is interesting that the Bible records the failures of its heroes. “Noah got drunk, Moses got angry, and Gideon got scared. Peter could be inconsistent, Paul was inconsiderate, Thomas doubted, Martha pouted. But God dealt with them and used every one of them for His glory and for our blessing.”<sup>2</sup>**

## **PROPOSITION:**

**You need not yield to temptation. What should you do if you do yield to temptation and find yourself sinning against God? There are important and specific steps we must take if we yield to temptation.**

### **I. RECOGNIZE THE REALITY AND THE SERIOUSNESS OF SIN.**

- **Sin blunts one’s sensitivity to spiritual matters.**
- **Sin obscures one’s witness for God.**
- **Sin causes one to lose his fellowship with God.**
- **Sin makes it easier to continue to sin. (What one abhors, he begins to tolerate; what one tolerates, he begins to enjoy.)**
- **Sin can cause others to fall (weaker brothers).**
- **Sin can open the door to a life of apostasy. (Have you heard of the man who one time posed for ‘Christ’ in an art studio, and who – many years later – was asked to pose for Judas Iscariot, for he had gone so deeply into sin that he was not recognized as the same man who had earlier posed for Christ? Sin had taken its toll on this man!)**

**One of Paul’s companions left Paul and went into worldliness. “*Demas, in love with this world hath forsaken me.*”**

**In spite of Jesus’ pleas of love, Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus and Judas killed himself. He became known as the ‘son of perdition’. Jesus said of him that it would have been better if he had not been born. Instead of repenting, as Peter did, he hardened his heart and committed suicide!**

### **II. DO NOT RATIONALIZE OR DENY YOUR SINS**

- **There are those who compare their sins favorably to someone else’s sins. God is our standard – not someone else.**
- **There are those who minimize the seriousness of sins by failing to realize that a life of sinning not only breaks one’s fellowship with God, but also severs one’s relationship with God.**

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<sup>2</sup> *Briscoe; What Happens When Life Doesn’t?, p. 36*

- **There are those who strangely believe that, once they are sanctified (filled with the Spirit), it is impossible to sin. Those with such a static view of sanctification tend to deny their sins, calling them mere mistakes or human weaknesses.**

### **III. ACCEPT PERSONAL MORAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR SINS.**

**Do not scapegoat your guilt on others and do not blame Satan. It is true that others can influence us wrongly, and it is true that Satan is called the Tempter, but it is also true that (as James writes) “...a man’s temptation is due to the pull of his own inward desires, which greatly attract him.” (James 1:14, Phillips)**

**Every temptation is resistible. No one needs yield to temptation. It is because one has become careless or overconfident that he has fallen into sin. Jesus said, “*Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit, indeed, is willing, but the flesh is weak.*” Jesus did not say the flesh is sinful, but He did say it is weak. Man’s natural and legitimate desires can become the ‘bridgehead’ or door to sinning. Failure to guard one’s affections can result in one becoming vulnerable to sin.**

### **IV. RECOGNIZE THAT FORGIVENESS IS ALWAYS COSTLY. It took Jesus’ death to make possible your forgiveness! Recognize that, because of Christ’s blood atonement on the Cross, you may be forgiven and restored to fellowship.**

**Never forget that your forgiveness is costly. It is because of the shed blood of Jesus on the cross that God is able to forgive you of all your sins. “*My little children, I am telling you this so that you will stay away from sin. But if you sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father. His name is Jesus Christ, the one who is all that is good and who pleases God completely. He is the one who took God’s wrath against our sins upon Himself, and brought us into fellowship with God; and he is the forgiveness for our sins, and not only ours but the entire world’s.*” (I John 2:1-2, Living Bible)**

**God has turned His just wrath against sin upon Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ.**

**A simple analogy would be that of a parent who is wrathful because of his child’s disobedience. The child deserves punishment, but the parent takes the punishment for the child and thus releases the child from the punishment and at the same time appeases the wrath of himself – the parent.**

**As Stott so clearly states: “It is an appeasement of the wrath of God by the love of God through the gift of God. The initiative is not taken by man, nor even by Christ, but by God Himself in sheer unmerited love. His wrath is not averted by any external gift, but by His own self-giving to die the death of sinners. This is the means He has Himself contrived by which to turn His own wrath away.”**

**V. CONFESS ALL YOUR SINS TO GOD, AND REPENT DEEPLY OF YOUR SINS.**

**Humility and contrition is the door back to God. Peter, after his betrayal of Jesus, wept bitterly and repented wholeheartedly. Do not try to conceal your sins. Wrote David (after he had sinned grievously), “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.” (Psalm 32:3) If you yield to temptation, follow David’s example! He wrote, “Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’ – and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” (Psalm 32:5)**

**VI. ACCEPT GOD’S FORGIVENESS GRATEFULLY AND HUMBLY.**

**Never take God’s forgiveness for granted! One man was asked how he could sin so brazenly. He replied something like this: “O, I am not worried, for it is God’s business to forgive!” Such blasphemy! Remember that God is not obligated to forgive anyone! Forgiveness is a gift of God’s mercy. We cannot earn it, deserve it, or purchase it! We can only receive it with brokenness and humility. We all deserve to die! If God gave us what we deserved, we would all be in hell!**

**Notes Barclay, “It is a terrible thing to seek to trade on the mercy of God. It is a terrible thing to make the mercy of God an excuse for sinning. Think of it in human terms. How despicable it would be for a son or a daughter to consider himself or herself free to sin, because he or she knew that a father or a mother would forgive. That would be taking advantage of love to break love’s heart.”<sup>3</sup>**

**Sin is not a virtue! “Well then, shall we keep on sinning so that God can keep on showing us more and more kindness and forgiveness? Of course not! Should we keep on sinning when we don’t have to?” (Romans 6:1,2a, Living Bible)**

**VII. AFTER YOU HAVE CONFESSED YOUR SINS TO GOD, BE WILLING, IF NECESSARY TO CONFESS YOUR SINS TO OTHERS.**

**Notes Bastian: “If in your lapse you have wronged others, make amends. If you have wronged God alone – by a failure in your imagination, for example – confess to Him. If you have wronged another person, correct it with him. If you have wronged the Church, confess to the church. This is a costly thing to do. But it is right, and doing so will help prevent future failures.”<sup>4</sup>**

**Restitution – i.e., confessing your sin to someone else whom you have wronged – is a ‘bitter pill’ to swallow, but restitution will give you at least four positive benefits:**

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<sup>3</sup> Barclay’s Romans; p. 86

<sup>4</sup> Bastian’s A Faith to Grow By, p. 43

(a) it will give you humility which, in God's eyes, is very valuable. ("God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble"); (b) it will give you a 'clear conscience' that is important if you are to maintain your joy and confidence in Christian living; (c) it will leave a positive witness with the one whom you have wronged. God can use your humble confession to another as a means to incite repentance in the life of that other person to whom you are confessing. Confession is often contagious. Unbelievers (as well as believers) are impressed with persons who are courageous enough to confess their wrongs, especially in a world where most like to blame others rather than accept personal moral responsibility for actions. You do not lower yourself, but you raise yourself in the estimation which others have of you, when you confess your sins to them; (d) it will act as a deterrent against further sinning in the future. Anything that is so painful (and humbling) as restitution is, will act as a barrier against yielding to temptation in the future.

#### **VIII. FORGIVE YOURSELF AND LEARN VALUABLE LESSONS YOU'RE YOUR MORAL FAILURES.**

Notes William Sangster, "Once you have accepted the forgiveness of God, don't brood over the past. There are many people in the family of God, who do not doubt God's forgiveness, but are never able to forgive themselves. The memory of their sin lacerates them. It is hardly ever out of their minds. So, far from being able, as some are, to forgive themselves lightly, they seem unable to forgive themselves at all. Just like some unhealed wound in the body, this unhealed wound in the spirit drains their strength, hinders their progress, pours pus into the blood stream, and keeps them in a state of spiritual invalidism.

"God has forgiven you: forgive yourself. Who are you to have superior moral values to the Almighty God? Here are two things, which will help you to forgive yourself.

- (1) **"Can't you see that your unwillingness to forgive yourself is a form of spiritual pride?"** What you are really saying, at the deep level of your mental and emotional life is this: 'How could I ever have done that?' (Note the stress on the 'I'.) 'Me! A spiritual giant like me!'...No, look! That self-hate is doing you no good...It is life poison injected into your veins. Accept the forgiveness. You cannot undo the past and God has forgiven you. If God has forgiven you, who can justly accuse you? That is the first thing: forgive yourself.
  
- (2) **"Here is the second. In some mysterious way – beyond your human fathoming – God can use sin...the God who is mighty in creation is also mighty in transformation."**<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Daily Readings; p. 71

**God will not allow anything in your past life to be wasted. He can take even the bad of one's past and use it in the development of Good! One man, before he was a believer, involved himself in deceptive practices and ended up in prison for several months. After becoming a Christian and after he was released from prison, he began a Christ-centered prison ministry, which gained national recognition and acceptance! So whatever your past sins are, confess them to God, and allow God to use even your past sins to bring about some good! Doing this helps you to learn to forgive yourself. Simon Peter, after his dreadful fall into sin, wept bitter tears of regret and remorse. However, God's mercy made possible the forgiveness of Peter and, as a result, Peter was restored to dignity and usefulness. However, after Peter's terrible fall, caused largely because of pride and overconfidence, Peter forever thereafter maintained a spirit of deep humility and trust in Christ alone.**

**Allow your failures to help you to develop greater character in Christ-likeness. If you have been lustful in the past, be notable for your moral purity now! If pride has been your downfall, let yourself be clothed with the 'garments of humility'. If stinginess has been a problem for you, then make generosity a way of life now!**

**Where you were in the past weak, you can now be strong. The eagle with a broken wing can be healed and can again soar high in the sky! The future for people who have failed can still be bright because of God's mercy and God's love and forgiveness. (Broken bone can be strong; where film is spliced, it is stronger!)**

**After you have received God's forgiveness, then forgive yourself and learn valuable lessons from your moral failures!**

**IX. AFTER YOU HAVE ACCEPTED THE FORGIVENESS OF GOD, AND AFTER YOU HAVE FORGIVEN YOURSELF, "THEN PUT YOURSELF AGAIN UNDER GOD'S CONTROL AND SUBMIT TO HIS TESTING."<sup>6</sup>**

**Remember, that what is from Satan's viewpoint a temptation is from God's viewpoint a test. God intends to use problems and troubles in life to produce steadfastness in believers. Christlike character is achieved in the life of a believer through the testing experiences of life. When we look at temptation from God's viewpoint, then temptation becomes, not a stumbling block to defeat us, but a steppingstone to perfect us! Notes Barclay: "Now here is a great and uplifting truth. What we call temptation is not meant to make us sin; it is meant to enable us to conquer sin. It is not meant to make us bad, it is meant to make us good. It is not meant to weaken us, it is meant to make us emerge stronger, finer, and purer from**

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<sup>6</sup> Bastain

the ordeal. Temptation is not the penalty of being a man, temptation is the glory of being a man. It is the test which comes to a man whom God wishes to use.”<sup>7</sup>

Remember, all throughout life, we will encounter temptation. It was even so with Jesus. After Jesus successfully resisted the devil and overcame temptation, what does the Scripture say about Satan? “And when he (Satan) had exhausted every kind of temptation, the devil withdrew until his next opportunity.”<sup>8</sup>

After you have overcome temptation, just remember that temptation will eventually return. Satan only leaves for a while.

Also, remember the benefits from successfully meeting temptation:

**“Yield not to temptation,  
For yielding, is sin,  
Each victory will help you,  
Some other to win.”**

Expect continuing or periodic temptations, for Satan does not easily give up, but remember that, what are temptations from Satan’s viewpoint are tests from God’s viewpoint. God will allow continuing trials (temptations) to come to our lives in order to perfect our character. Peter, in his letters, had much to say about the purpose of trials. *“These trials are only to test your faith, to see whether or not it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests gold and purifies it – and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold; so if your faith remains strong after being tried in the test tube of fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day of his return...Dear friends, don’t be bewildered or surprised when you go through the fiery trials ahead, for this is no strange, unusual thing that is going to happen to you. Instead, be really glad – because these trials will make you partners with Christ in his suffering, and afterwards you will have the wonderful joy of sharing his glory in that coming day when it will be displayed.”* (I Peter 1: 7; 4:12, 13)

**X. ACCEPT WITHOUT COMPLAINT THE GOD-ALLOWED CONSEQUENCES FROM YOUR PAST WRONG MORAL DECISIONS (SINS), BUT EXPECT GOD TO CONTINUE TO USE YOU EVEN WHILE YOU ARE SUFFERING FROM THE CONSEQUENCES.**

It is true that, as an on-going consequence of his sins, David faced serious troubles in his household for years, following his restoration to God. Even though God forgave David his terrible sins, there were some consequences that David lived with for many years. Internal rebellion, dissensions, and plots made life weary at times for David. However, in spite of the ongoing consequences that David had to bear because of his past sins, David enjoyed restored fellowship with God.

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<sup>7</sup> Barclay’s Matthew, p. 56

<sup>8</sup> Phillips Luke 4:13

When David confessed his sins to God, he cried out, *“Restore to me the joy of your salvation.”* (Psalm 51:12a) Joy that is lost because of willful sinning, can be restored because of sincere confession and total surrender.

David further prayed, *“Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.”* (Psalm 51:13) The joy which God gives to the repentant believer is combined with dignity which comes as a result of God’s willingness to use a restored believer in effective evangelistic ministry! *“They will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.”* (Psalm 51:13) A person who personally experiences forgiveness and inner cleansing is equipped to help others whose experiential needs are the same as his own.

So, while David had to bear some of the scars of his past sins, David’s future was not totally jeopardized by his past sins. Yes, David had to live with some regrets because of the wrongs of his past, but David’s fellowship with God was mended and his joy was restored. God continued to use David effectively and no greater compliment could be given to any man than this: *“He was a man after God’s own heart!”* This shows us that, however bad our past has been, if we confess our sins and if we surrender totally to God, we too (like David) can ‘turn our scars into stars’!

Let me share a dramatic example of this truth. I once received a letter from a convicted man – a man who was a backslidden believer, but, one who had been restored to fellowship with God. I met him while I had Wednesday morning Bible studies at the County Jail. Here is an excerpt from his letter:

**“I was given a 32 year sentence in Fort Collins. It came as no surprise. My attitude was one of a fighter, knocked down but not knocked out...I have had the ultimate privilege of leading a young man to Jesus in this jail and the Lord used me in preventing a suicide, so I am not idle at all. I don’t believe for a second that God put me in here, but I do believe He will use me where I am at...I turned myself in on all this. I could not run from God any longer. Being right with God meant more to me than being physically free. I believe with all my heart I will be free again on the outside to lead a productive life, one that will count for Jesus, so while I am disappointed in some things, I am not discouraged.”<sup>9</sup>**

## **CONCLUSION:**

**What if you yield to temptation? Here is what to do:**

- 1. Recognize the reality and the seriousness of sin.**
- 2. Do not rationalize or deny your sins.**
- 3. Accept personal moral responsibility for your failures and your sins.**
- 4. Recognize that forgiveness is always costly.**

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<sup>9</sup> Personal letter, June, 1987

- 5. Confess your sins to God, and repent deeply of your sins.**
- 6. Accept God's forgiveness gratefully and humbly.**
- 7. After you have confessed your sins to God, be willing, if necessary, to confess your sins to others.**
- 8. Forgive yourself and learn valuable lessons from your moral failures.**
- 9. Put yourself again under God's control and submit to His testing.**
- 10. Accept without complaint the God-allowed consequences from your past wrong moral decisions (sins), but expect God to continue to use you even while you are suffering from the consequences.**

*BEWARE OF 'IFY'  
CHRISTIANS*

*Chapter 15*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

## CHAPTER 15

### OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:** BEWARE OF 'IFY' CHRISTIANS  
**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 3:1-3

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

*“Judaizers” were the Jewish leaders who imposed harsh rules and regulations upon Gentiles (non-Jew by birth) as the required means by which persons could be right with God. These “Judaizers” were so wrong in their understanding of God’s plan for man’s salvation, that Paul angrily called them “dogs”! (Philippians 3:2)*

#### **PROPOSITION:**

- I. **THERE ARE NO 'IF'S' IN GOD'S LOVE.**
  - a. **One Cannot Merit God's Love.**
  - b. **God Loves Everyone Equally and Unconditionally.**
  
- II. **THERE ARE TO BE NO 'IF'S' IN THE CHRISTIAN'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS.**
  
- III. **THERE ARE TO BE NO 'IF'S' IN THE CHURCH'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE OF PEOPLE.**
  - a. **This Unconditional Love Must First Be Expressed Toward All True Christians Regardless of Denominational Affiliation.**
  - b. **This Unconditional Love Must Next Be Expressed Toward All Mankind Regardless of Various Conditions.**

#### **CONCLUSION:**

**There is no “ifiness” in God’s love. There is to be no ‘ifiness’ in our love for other people. Moreover, there is to be none of that exclusive, sectarian, ‘ify’ spirit in the local Church.**

## CHAPTER 15

**SUBJECT: BEWARE OF 'IFY' CHRISTIANS**  
**SCRIPTURE: Philippians 3:1-3**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

**“The Judaizers believed that Jesus was the Saviour of Israel only and taught that of a person could come to Christ to be saved only through the doors of Judaism. They insisted that all of the legal, ritual, and religious qualifications and demands of the Jews to be fulfilled impeccably before a person could grow in Christ. Paul’s obvious anger as he speaks of them was caused by the way they tried to undo his teaching and ministry. They followed him wherever he went, contradicting his message of justification by faith and righteousness of God through Christ. And they remained behind after he left a city to confuse the fellowship of grace in the newborn Christians.<sup>1</sup>**

**“Paul called them dogs. What a strange twist since the Gentiles were often called dogs by strict Jews. He takes the very disparaging term the Jewish teachers would have used for Gentiles and flings it back in their faces.”**

**The Judaizers were ‘IFY’ religious teachers. Said they: (‘IFY’ was their characteristic).**

**“IF a man wishes to be saved, he must earn credit in the sight of God by countless deeds of the law.”**

**“IF a man who is a Gentile wants to be accepted by God, he must become as it were, a Jew, and, to be thus accepted, he must receive Jewish circumcision.”**

**“IF a man wished to enjoy a right relationship with God, he must keep the Old Testament Law’s countless rules and regulations.”**

**Notes Ogilvie: “I remember a British theologian friend who was in a debate over the question of prevenient grace. His opponent maintained that God’s love was expressed after we believe and fulfill the demands of righteousness. My friend’s response was undeniably direct. ‘You’re a bloomin’ Judaizer, that’s what!’” (97)**

### **PROPOSITION:**

**God’s love for people is unconditional, and so must ours be. God is not ‘ify’ in His acceptance and love of people, and neither must we be ‘ify’ in our acceptance of people.**

#### **I. THERE ARE NO ‘IF’S’ IN GOD’S LOVE.**

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd Ogilvie; Let God Love You; p. 97

**Another way of saying this is: God's love includes all. He loves every man equally and unconditionally.**

**a. One Cannot Merit God's Love. Religious performance can never merit God's love. For instance, tithing is good, but we must remember that tithing is not meritorious. I have done no great thing when I have tithed; it is simply a love token of gratitude to my Master to whom I am endlessly in debt.**

**For instance, Church attendance is important, and beneficial, and even commanded in Scriptures. But I am no more worthy before God simply because I attend Church regularly. I do not gain extra favor with God because I attend Church regularly. I glorify God and benefit myself by so doing, but I do not put God in my debt by attending Church. Some people seem to think that Christians attend Church to gain God's favor and attention, or to build a few 'brownie points' with God.**

**For instance, Bible reading is important, in fact, vital to spiritual health and well-being. But, reading the Bible so often does not make me more acceptable before God. I read the Bible, not because my chances of pleasing God and gaining heaven are greater, but because the Bible is God's love letter and I want to grow in love with God.**

**Those who feel that they qualify for God's love because they read the Bible a lot, have a very wrong conception of both God's love and the purpose of God's Word.**

**Note what Spurgeon says on this point: "Christ has made a complete atonement; and there is none other plan by which sinners can be made at one with God, except by Jesus' precious blood. I may make sacrifices; I may mortify my body; I may be baptized; I may receive sacraments; I may pray until my knees grow hard with kneeling; I may read devout words until I know them by heart; I may celebrate masses; I may worship in one language or in fifty languages; but I can never be at one with God, except by blood; and that blood, 'the precious blood of Christ.'"<sup>2</sup>**

**One can never merit God's love. For one to attempt to please God by mere human reformation and to think he makes himself more worthy or fit before God in this manner, has not discovered the meaning of God's love, nor the depth of human depravity.**

**b. God Loves Everyone Equally and Unconditionally. This means that God loves everyone equally regardless of moral condition. Just because one is a Christian does not mean that God loves him more than the sinner.**

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<sup>2</sup> The Passion and Death of Christ; p. 36

**Being a Christian benefits me, glorifies God, and assures me of a glorious eternal destiny. But, God loves all equally and unconditionally. God's love for the sinner is as great as His love for the saint.**

**How then can Jesus' treatment of sinners (like the hypocritical Pharisees) be explained? Jesus' reactions to the Pharisees are the reactions of injured and hurt love. God loved even the hypocritical, hardened Pharisees so much that, instead of being cold, indifferent, and hostile to them, Jesus hotly and passionately confronted them with words of rebuke and warning, and condemnation. He loved the sinner so much that He expressed great hate for the sinful actions and attitudes, which had so degraded the sinner. Jesus attempted to shock the Pharisees into spiritual reality. He sought to unmask their falsehoods. He revealed their deceptive role playing. He pierced through their pretenses. He tried to shake them loose from their spiritual lethargy and spiritual indifference. He tried to soften their hardened hearts.**

**All of these drastic actions of Jesus were the actions of holy love – a love that was tender and terrible at the same time. A love which sought redemption of the people upon whom sin had taken its paralyzing toll.**

**God loves all men unconditionally – and that includes hardened sinners like the hypocritical Pharisees.**

**There were no 'If's' in Jesus' love. He never loved people conditionally. He never said, 'If you are morally clean, then I will accept you. He never said 'If you are a Jew, then I will accept and love you.**

**How could God's unconditional love be reconciled with the fact of God's damnation of the sinner to Hell?**

**Let us remember always that every characteristic of God's Nature is simply an extension and manifestation of Love. 'God is Love' inherently, eternally, and irrevocably.**

**Therefore, in a true sense God never sends anyone to Hell. God is long-suffering, and not willing that any should perish. God's perfect will is that all should be saved. But because God is perfect love, God cannot coerce man. Love can plead and persuade, but love cannot force. Man is free to accept or to reject love. Man, based on his choice, must live, in time and eternity, with either results or consequences.**

**God has a permissive will as well as a perfect will. God will permit a man to spurn mercy and to reject love's call. Not even God can keep a man from serving Satan and choosing consequently, Satan's destiny – the Lake of Fire.**

**Therefore, if a man goes to hell, it is not because there was no God of Love who did everything He could to keep that man out of Hell. What more can God do than that which He hath done?**

**It has been suggested, further, that for God to force a sinner into heaven against his will to live eternally, would be to force a sinner to live in an environment very alien to the sinner's nature. The sinner who had to dwell in an environment of absolute holiness would be not heaven to the sinner, but hell!**

**Love permits the sinner to go to an environment of total selfishness (Hell), an intensified form of the kind of environment, which the sinner chose on earth.**

**God loves the sinner so much, even in eternity, that He will allow the sinner to exist eternally in the kind of environment that he has chosen and experienced in a limited way on earth, namely, an environment of total self-centeredness and selfishness without the Lordship of Jesus. Someone said that the characteristic of lost souls is "their rejection of everything that is not simply themselves."<sup>3</sup>**

**Hell, then, is an extension of a man's selfish existence on earth. We need not think of a bad man's perdition as a sentence imposed on him but as "the mere fact of being what he is."<sup>4</sup>**

## **II. THERE ARE TO BE NO 'IF'S' IN THE CHRISTIAN'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS.**

**How different is Jesus' unconditional love of people from our conditional love of people. We are too often, IFY Christians. "I will love you if..." "We become Judaizers with the people in our lives. We withhold love, approval, and affirmation until some mysterious moment when people are worthy. This cranky negativism exudes a spirit of anxious insecurity in people, prompting them to feel they must do something to please us."<sup>5</sup> People around us think they have to earn our love.**

**Lloyd Ogilvie tells of such a person in his Church. He relates, "Tears were streaming down her face as she left church. The theme of the service had been unqualified love: God's for us and the need for us to love unqualifiedly the people around us. The illustrations in the sermon had been painfully personal and many of them had dealt with relationships with family and friends. God had given this woman a great gift; He had shown her the agonizing portrait of her life. She was rankled, horrified and then disturbed by the dolorous emotional condition she had created in her house. Later when we talked in depth, she gave me a handle to understand her problems. She said, "I've been an 'ify' Christian. You know, I will**

<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, quote of Hugel; PAIN; p. 123

<sup>4</sup> C.S. Lewis, Ibid; p. 123

<sup>5</sup> Let God Love You; p. 98

love you 'if'. I will accept you 'if'. I will give myself 'if...' her whole life had developed around this manipulative syndrome. It was her way of getting what she wanted. Together we searched in her background for reasons for this behavior. As I suspected, she had been loved that way and was repeating the process.”<sup>6</sup>

How often we qualify our acceptance of people. We draw up our own list of conditions for acceptance of persons – if they are like us in their background, if they are like us in their theology, if they like our kind of music, if they have had our kind of religious experience or emotional experience, if they will ask our forgiveness, if, if, if, on and on the list of 'ifs' grows. We are 'ify' Christians. Our love and acceptance, like the Judaizers in our Bible reading, is conditional. We draw up many qualifications, either consciously or unconsciously.

Now, make no mistake about it. We are not asked to become alike in our life style, religious experience, or cultural likes and dislikes. Neither are we asked to condone people's behavior, which is less than Christlike. We are not even asked to become close friends with everyone.

But we are asked to love unconditionally, with no 'Ifs'. Jesus loved everyone unconditionally – the nice and the nasty, the Jew and the Gentile, the young and the old, the respected and the despised, the rich and the poor, the cultured and the uncouth, the literate and the illiterate, the saint and the sinner.

To accept people unconditionally is to accept and to love them without forcing our personal convictions upon them. There are 'grays', as well as 'blacks' and 'whites' in the Christian life. The man who is possessed by unconditional love will EXPOSE his convictions (unapologetically and joyously) but he will never IMPOSE his convictions on others. To use the crude expression, he will never 'cram his views down someone else's throat.' Love respects and tolerates legitimate differences.

An 'Ify' Christian is one who accepts and loves people conditionally. But Jesus said every believer is to love even his enemies, unconditionally! Quickly one can see that such a love is not a human attainment but a divine enablement. Such love is a supernatural gift of God. Only when God's very love is shed abroad in one's heart can he love the loveless and unlovely.

The word used in the Scriptures for such love is the Greek word 'agape'. Let us explore the meaning of this great word. To receive and to exercise 'agape' love is to be delivered from the 'Ify' syndrome. God's love is unconditional. Therefore, the man who receives God's love as his gift will exercise unconditional love in human relationships. There are No 'Ifs' in this divine love.

“Agape demands the exercise of the whole man. Christian love must not only extend to our nearest and our dearest, our kith and kin, our friends and those who

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid; p. 96

**love us; Christian love must extend to the Christian fellowship, to the neighbor, to the enemy, to the entire world.**

**“Now, all the ordinary words for love are words which express an emotion. They are words, which have to do with the HEART. They express an experience, which comes to us unsought, and, in a way, inevitably. We cannot help loving our kith and kin; blood is thicker than water. We speak about ‘falling in love’. That kind of love is not an achievement; it is something that happens to us and which we cannot help. There is no particular virtue in falling in love. It is something with which we have little or nothing consciously to do; it simply happens. But agape is far more than that.**

**“Agape has to do with the MIND: it is not simply an emotion which rises unbidden in our hearts; it is a principle by which we deliberately live. Agape has supremely to do with the WILL. It is a conquest, a victory, and achievement. No one ever naturally loved his enemies. To love one’s enemies is a conquest of all our natural inclinations and emotions.**

**“This agape, this Christian love, is not merely an emotional experience which comes to us unbidden and unsought; it is a deliberate principle of the mind, and a deliberate conquest and achievement of the will. It is, in fact, the power to love the unlovable, to love people whom we do not like. Christianity does not ask us to love our enemies and to love men at large in the same way as we love our nearest and our dearest and those who are closest to us; that would be at one and at the same time impossible and wrong. But it does demand that we should have at all times a certain attitude of the mind and a certain direction of the will towards all men, no matter who they are.**

**“What then is the meaning of this agape? The supreme passage for the interpretation of the meaning of agape is Matthew 5:43-48. We are there bidden to love our enemies. Why? IN ORDER THAT WE SHOULD BE LIKE GOD. And what is the typical action of God that is cited? God sends his rain on the just and the unjust and on the evil and the good. That is to say – NO MATTER WHAT A MAN IS LIKE, GOD SEEKS NOTHING BUT HIS HIGHEST GOOD.**

**“Let a man be a saint or let a man be a sinner, God’s only desire is for that man’s highest good. Now, that is what agape is. Agape is the spirit which says: ‘No matter what any man does to me, I will never seek to do harm to him; I will never set out for revenge; I will always seek nothing but his highest good.’ That is to say, Christian love, agape, is UNCONQUERABLE BENEVOLENCE, INVINCIBLE GOOD WILL. It is not simply a wave of emotion; it is a deliberate conviction of the mind issuing in a deliberate policy of the life; it is a deliberate achievement, conquest, and victory of the will. It takes all of a man to achieve Christian love; it takes not only his heart; it takes his mind and his will as well.**

**“When we understand what agape means, it amply meets the objection that a society based in this love would be a paradise for criminals, and that means simply letting the evil-doer have his own way. If we seek nothing but a man’s highest good, we may well have to resist a man; we may well have to punish him, we may well have to do the hardest things to him – for the good of his immortal soul.”**

**“But the fact remains that whatever we do to that man will never be purely vindictive; it will never even be merely retributory; it will always be done in that forgiving love, which seeks, not the man’s punishment, and still less the man’s annihilation, but always his highest good. In other words, agape means treating men as God treats them – and that does not mean allowing them unchecked to do as they like.”<sup>7</sup>**

### **III. THERE ARE TO BE NO ‘IF’S’ IN THE CHURCH’S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE OF PEOPLE.**

**Jesus hated sin. Make no mistake about it. He despised hypocrisy in some of the Pharisees. He drew up conditions for discipleship – ‘deny self, take up cross daily, and follow Him.’ He qualified those who would enter heaven – ‘those who entered the narrow gate and who walked the strait and narrow pathway.’ He communicated the standards for membership in the Kingdom.**

**Yes, Jesus spoke of Conditions and so must the Church of Christ. Conditions for becoming a Christian; conditions for becoming a Spirit-filled Christian; conditions for becoming a member of the visible, local Church. There is nothing unbiblical about a Church having a Membership Covenant. Not to communicate conditions for certain important things is to communicate ‘fuzzy’ and unpredictable standards. Quality living is committed living, based on Biblical conditions!**

**However, while Jesus communicated conditions for quality living, He never loved or accepted people conditionally. He loved everyone unconditionally.**

**The Church too must love everyone unconditionally. Everyone must be accepted into the Church fellowship on an equal basis, regardless of background, race, age, class, culture or moral condition.**

**a. This Unconditional Love Must First Be Expressed Toward All True Christians Regardless of Denominational Affiliation. As a believer, you do not need to sacrifice your own denominational distinctive to become ecumenical in spirit. You must defend truth and doctrinal purity, and yet, while doing this, exhibit a tenderness and love towards groups, which differ from your group.**

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<sup>7</sup> Barclay’s New Testament Words; pg. 20-23

**To love and to accept all true Christians unconditionally, while it does not mean that you must give up your distinctives to become ecumenical in spirit, on the other hand, it means that you will never become sectarian. That is to say, you, as a believer, and the Church which you help compose, must never develop an exclusive, better-than-thou, judgmental, critical spirit towards other Christians and other Christian groups. Some churches have manifested the ‘IFY’ spirit, which is a divisive spirit. Some Churches say, “We will accept you into our fellowship and love you as a true Christian, IF you are baptized in our Church and baptized a certain way.” Or, “We will love and accept you IF you join our Church. We have a special revelation from God.” Or, “We will accept you as a spiritual person and real Christian only IF you speak in tongues as an evidence that you are Spirit-filled.” Or “We will love you and accept you as a true Christian only IF you believe in the pre-millennial view of the Second Coming of Christ, as we do”.**

**Such ‘Ify’ Christians and ‘Ify’ churches tend to destroy the unity of the Faith and unified and lovely witness in the world. Said Jesus, “*A new commandment I give unto you. That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*” (John 13:34, 35) This love is to be unconditionally expressed among believers and true Christian churches.**

**“Jesus turns to the world and says, ‘*I’ve something to say to you. On the basis of my authority, I give you a right: you may judge whether or not an individual is a Christian on the basis of the love he shows to all Christians.*’ In other words, if people come up to us and cast in our teeth the judgment that we are not Christians, because we have not shown love toward other Christians, we must understand that they are only exercising a prerogative which Jesus gave them”<sup>8</sup>**

**b. The Unconditional Love Must Next Be Expressed Toward All Mankind Regardless of Various Conditions. Notes Francis Schaeffer, “All men bear the image of God. They have value, not because they are redeemed, but because they are God’s creation in God’s image. Modern man, who has rejected this, has no clue as to who he is, and because of this, he can find no real values for himself or for other men. Hence, he downgrades the value of other men and produces the horrible thing we face today – sick culture in which men treat men as inhuman, as machines. As Christians, however, we know the value of men.**

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<sup>8</sup> Schaeffer: The Church at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, p. 137

**“All men are our neighbors, and we are to love them as ourselves. We are to do this based on creation, even if they are not redeemed, for all men have value because they are made in the image of God. Therefore, they are to be loved even at great cost. This is, of course, the whole point of Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan: Because a man is a man, he is to be loved at all cost.**

**“There are two humanities. That is true. Some men made in the image of God still stand in rebellion against him, some by the grace of God have cast themselves upon God’s solution.**

**“Nonetheless, there is another very important sense only one humanity. All men derive from one origin. By creation, all men bear the image of God. In this sense, all men are of one flesh, one blood.**

**“Hence, the exclusiveness of the two humanities is undergirded by the unity of all men. Moreover, Christians are not to love their believing brothers to the exclusion of all men. In addition, Christians are not to love their believing brothers to the exclusion of their non-believing fellowmen. That is ugly. We are to have the example of the Good Samaritan consciously in mind at all times.**

**“The observable and practical love among true Christians that the world has a right to be able to observe in our day certainly should cut without reservation across such lines as language, nationalities, national frontiers, younger and older, colors of skin, levels of education and economics, accent, line of birth, the class system in any particular locality, dress, short or long hair among whites and African and non-African hairdos among blacks, the wearing of shoes and non-wearing of shoes, cultural differentiations and the more traditional and less traditional forms of worship”.<sup>9</sup>**

## **CONCLUSION:**

**The ‘IFY’ Syndrome – that is what we have looked at in this message. There is no “ifiness” in God’s love. There is no ‘ifiness’ in our love for other people. Moreover, there is to be none of that exclusive, sectarian, ‘ify’ spirit in the local Church.**

**Unconditional love – not conditional. Beware of the ‘ify’ syndrome.**

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<sup>9</sup> Schaeffer; p. 133-135, 140

*MOTIVATIONS FOR LIFE'S  
SPIRITUAL RACE*

*Chapter 16*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

## CHAPTER 16

### OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:** MOTIVATIONS FOR LIFE'S SPIRITUAL RACE  
**SCRIPTURE:** II Corinthians 4:16-5:10  
**TEXT:** *"The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."* (II Timothy 4:6b-8)

#### INTRODUCTION:

It was on September 6, 1998, that one of my great friends, Mrs. Lee, age 103, went home to heaven. Her life and her faith in Christ stood the 'test of time.' She was 'faithful to the very end' of her very long life! The Lord said, *"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"*.

#### PROPOSITION:

God has provided wonderful motivations and aids to believers, to successfully "run the race of life."

- I. LOOKING UP (TO HOVERING ANGELS ABOVE US TO MINISTER TO US).
- II. LOOKING AROUND (TO HEAVENLY SAINTS IN HEAVENLY GRANDSTANDS CHEERING US ON).
- III. LOOKING WITHIN (TO HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN US WHO COMFORTS AND STRENGTHENS US).
- IV. LOOKING AHEAD (TO OUR WELCOMING GOD AND HIS PROMISE OF ETERNAL REWARDS).

#### CONCLUSION:

Be aware and enjoy the God-given motivations for successfully running Life's Spiritual Race!

## CHAPTER 16

**SUBJECT:** MOTIVATIONS FOR LIFE'S SPIRITUAL RACE  
**SCRIPTURE:** II Corinthians 4:16-5:10  
**TEXT:** *“The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” (II Timothy 4:6b-8)*

### INTRODUCTION;

It was on September 6, 1998, that one of my great friends, Mrs. Lee, age 103, (a beloved Korean lady whose speech I never understood) went home to heaven. Mrs. Lee consistently and enthusiastically ran the spiritual race of life. She was not a ‘quitter’ in the race of life, but she persevered until the very end of her human life. The spiritual race for her was not a short ‘hundred yard race’, but, instead, it was a lifetime ‘marathon’. Her race in life was very long, and sometimes very difficult, wrought with many trials, tests, and temptations to despair. But she never gave up. She kept her faith in Christ and she crossed the ‘finish line’ of her long and arduous race with great triumph and victory! She became a true convert to Christ and to the Christian way, in Korea, when she was about 24 years of age. That means that she travelled the Christian ‘course of life’ for nearly 80 years! Through all the ‘ups and downs’, the ‘changes and the chances’ of life, amidst the successes and the failures and the losses and the gains of life, Mrs. Lee maintained a steadfast purpose and a deep commitment of her whole soul to Christ her Lord! She was faithful “in season and out of season”, when it was easy and when it was difficult to live the Christian life, in sorrow and in joy, in the company of many fellow believers and when she had to ‘stand alone’ for Christ, during times of peace and during times of great conflicts and spiritual persecutions! Her life and her faith in Christ stood the ‘test of time.’ She was ‘faithful to the very end’ of her very long life! The Lord said, *“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”*.

### PROPOSITION:

God has provided wonderful motivations and aids to believers, to successfully “run the race of life.”

#### I. LOOKING UP (TO HOVERING ANGELS ABOVE US TO MINISTER TO US).

The guardianship of the protecting angels should give the trusting believer great comfort. “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against

a stone.” (v. 11-12) The writer of Hebrews notes that the angels are ministering spirits who are sent by God to serve those who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14). Doubtless, there are countless times when God’s protecting angels stand guard over persons to prevent serious accidents or perhaps to ward off even the physical forces of disease. The trusting believer does at times escape the ravages of diseases and the physical calamities of accidents. However, physical protection is not unconditionally guaranteed to devout followers of Christ. But even if believers do strike their feet against the hard stones of physical or economic adversities (such as illness or bankruptcy), the ‘stones’ will not ultimately hurt and destroy them. Some good will come out of every hardship.

The greater ministry of the guardian angels is in the spiritual realm. The angels will guard the unsuspecting saint against the snares and tricks of the devil. The trusting heart will find a ‘way of escape’ during the hour of temptation. The angels will guard him against satanic attacks of all sorts. The angels will lift him up, not allowing him to strike his foot against the stones of moral disaster. Amidst great moral dangers – dangers described in vivid terms: ‘the lion’, ‘the cobra’ (v. 13) – the guardian angels will enable the trusting believer to be victorious. “*You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.*” (Psalms 19:13) Says Spurgeon: “The strongest foe in power, and the most mysterious in cunning, shall be conquered by the man of God.”

## II. LOOKING AROUND (TO HEAVENLY SAINTS IN HEAVENLY GRANDSTANDS CHEERING US ON).

During our Christian race of life, “*we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses.*” (Hebrews 12:1) Just as weary runners receive courage to continue to run because of the applause and cheers of the crowd in the grandstands, so spiritual runners on earth can gain great motivation to continue their race, because of the many heavenly witnesses in the grandstands, cheering them on.

Perhaps, although we cannot say with absolute certainty, the redeemed saints in heaven are looking down from their glorious abode, as spectators look down from a grandstand on the courageous runners on a track. William Barclay believes that such is the case: “It is of the very essence of life that life is lived in the gaze of the heroes of the faith who lived and suffered and died in their day and generation. How can a man avoid the struggle for greatness with an audience like that looking down upon him?”<sup>1</sup>

There is abundant evidence that, when God deems it helpful, God allows earthly visits from these heavenly saints – all for the purpose of encouraging Christians who may be struggling under some special trial during their race of life. Allow me to share a few such incidences.

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay’s Hebrews; p. 196

One person in my childhood who greatly influenced me to be a Christian was my great aunt (my grandmother's sister). She was a cripple all of her life, but she lived to be an old person. Only hours after she was born, she was stricken with polio and therefore she never knew what it was to walk without leg braces. She never married and was dependent upon other family members, including my grandmother, to care for her. She was one of the kindest Christians I ever knew. She gave me my first Bible in which she wrote, "*My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.*" (Psalms 62:5) My 'Aunt Mary' was no stranger to pain and disappointment, as she hobbled along in life. But she was always sweet in her spirit and my grandmother wept when 'Aunt Mary' died. The sorrow my grandmother felt in her loneliness was great, and comfort in her loss was hard to find. One night God gave my grandmother a vision of 'Aunt Mary.' 'Aunt Mary was dressed in garments of pure white, her face radiant with the countenance of heavenly strength and health. My grandmother knew that 'Aunt Mary' was with Jesus. Suspended in mid-air, looking upwards toward heaven, 'Aunt Mary' seemed to be saying to my grandmother, 'Come on up, Edna.'

Writes J.B. Phillips: "Many of us who believe in what is technically known as the Communion of Saints must have experienced the sense of nearness, for a fairly short time, of those whom we love soon after they have died. This has certainly happened to me several times. But the late C.S. Lewis, whom I did not know very well and had only seen in the flesh once, but with whom I had corresponded a fair amount, gave me an unusual experience. A few days after his death, while I was watching television, he 'appeared' sitting in a chair within a few feet of me, and spoke a few words, which were particularly relevant to the difficult circumstances through which I was passing. He was ruddier in complexion than ever, grinning all over his face and, as the old-fashioned saying has it, positively glowing with health. The interesting thing to me was that I had not been thinking about him at all. I was neither alarmed nor surprised. He was just there – 'large as life and twice as natural'. A week later, this time when I was in bed, reading before going to sleep, he appeared again, even more rosily radiant than before, and repeated to me the same message, which was very important to me at the time. I was a little puzzled by this, and I mentioned it to a certain saintly bishop who was then living in retirement in Dorset. His reply was, 'My dear John, this sort of thing is happening all the time'."<sup>2</sup>

### **III. LOOKING WITHIN (TO HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN US WHO COMFORTS AND STRENGTHENS US).**

Following is a brief summary of the wonderful multiply ministries of the Holy Spirit:

- 1. Convict the sinner and show him the availability of Christ's righteousness and deliverance from judgment. "And when he (the Holy**

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<sup>2</sup> The Newborn Christian; pg. 213-214

*Spirit) has come he will convince the world of its sin, and of the availability of God's goodness, and of deliverance from judgment." (John 16:8)*

2. Provide assurance that one's sins are forgiven. *"For the Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts, and tells us that we really are God's children." (Romans 8:16)*

3. Fill and control the life of the believer. *"Don't drink too much wine, for many evils lie along that path; be filled instead with the Holy Spirit, and controlled by him." (Ephesians 5:18)*

4. Sheds abroad God's love in the heart of the believer. *"We feel the warm love everywhere within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love." (Romans 5:5)*

Commander Brengle, of the Salvation Army, began his little book with this startling sentence: "On January 9, 1885, at about nine o'clock in the morning, God sanctified my soul. It was a Heaven of love that came into my heart. I walked out over Boston Column before breakfast, weeping for joy and praising God. Oh, how I loved! In that hour, I knew Jesus, and I loved Him till it seemed my heart would break in love. I loved the sparrows, I loved the dogs, I loved the horses, I loved the little urchins on the streets...I loved the whole world."

Love is the very essence of the Christian life and is the capstone of all the Christian graces. Said John Wesley: "Religion is the simplest thing that can be conceived. It is only humble, gentle, patient love."

5. Gives inner strength to live a victorious life. Wrote Paul, *"When I think of the wisdom and scope of his (God's) plan I fall down on my knees and pray to the Father of all the great family of God – some of them already in heaven and some down here on earth - that out of his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you the mighty inner strengthening of his Holy Spirit." (Ephesians 3:14, 15)*

6. Prays for a believer during his distresses. *"And in the same way – by our faith – the Holy Spirit helps us with our daily problems and in our praying. For we do not even know what we should pray for, nor how to pray as we should; but the Holy Spirit prays for us with such feeling that it cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows, of course, what the Spirit is saying as he pleads for us in harmony with God's own will." (Romans 8:26, 27)*

7. Empowers a believer to witness boldly to the unsaved people. *"But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power to testify about me with great effect, to the people in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, about my death and resurrection." (Acts 1:8)*

**8. Imparts Joy as a perpetual gift to the yielded believer.** In her book, 'Beyond Our Selves', Catherine Marshall writes about the ministry of the mighty Holy Spirit, in one of her chapters. She says, "The exuberance of the men who experienced the Spirit at Pentecost was such that they were accused of being drunk with new wine. Emotion beyond embarrassment, beyond caring what other people thought, towards the release of bound personalities – all this is there for anyone to read. I have watched the same process today in those whom the Holy Spirit touches. Feelings are sensitized. Life takes on relish. Joys are heightened. Here is the way one woman described her encounter with the Spirit: '...I saw no new thing, but I saw all the usual things in a miraculous new light. I saw for the first time how wildly beautiful and joyous, beyond any words of mine to describe, is the whole of life. Every human being...every sparrow that flew, every branch tossing in the wind, was caught up in and was a part of the whole mad ecstasy of loveliness, of joy, of importance, of intoxication of life...'

Catherine Marshall goes on to say: "In the experience of everyone to whom I have talked about the Spirit, the word joy stands out. In the rebirth of our emotional selves this seems to be the essential missing ingredient which the Holy Spirit supplies. I have written earlier in this book of the joy of childhood. For me it was in the fragrance of mint and honey suckles, the feel of bare feet on moss, ice-cold apples, the magnificent fury of a thunderstorm, and the far horizons of blue Appalachians. And all my life I have felt that this early joy was trying to teach me something, that it was not just a sentiment restricted to childhood. It seemed to reveal something fundamental and basic about the nature of the universe itself. Surely, I was right; surely, this is the way things are in God's world! But only now do I see how God intends for us to know this. It is the Holy Spirit who is to open our eyes to the joy which undergirds the universe."<sup>3</sup>

**9. Gives guidance and counsel amidst life's decisions.** Said Jesus: "*When the Holy Spirit, who is truth, comes, he shall guide you into all truth, for he will not be presenting his own ideas, but will be passing on to you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He shall praise me (Jesus) and bring me (Jesus) great honor by showing you my glory.*" (John 16: 13, 14)

**10. Gives comfort during times of sorrow and loss, and when great courage to face life is needed by the believer.** "*I (Jesus) will ask the Father and he will give you another Comforter, and he will never leave you.*" (John 14:16)

The meaning behind the word for Holy Spirit is also the idea of an encourager. The Holy Spirit then is "one who puts courage into the faint-

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<sup>3</sup> Catherine Marshall. Beyond Our Selves, pg. 240-241

hearted, one who nerves the feeble arm for fight, one who makes a very ordinary man cope gallantly with a perilous and a dangerous situation.”<sup>4</sup>

Rickie and Larry Higbee lost their 27-year-old son, Scott, because of cancer. In the midst of deep sorrow and many tears because of their great and heart-wrenching loss of their beloved son whom they had so hoped would be healed, they manifested incredible courage and gratitude during the memorial service and at the very time they and other family members scattered their son’s ashes among the rocks in the mountains (up the Poudre Canyon near the spot where Scott had shot his only elk just two years before). Rickie said, as she was scattering the ashes, that she felt such overwhelming gratitude to Almighty God for creating Scott and for giving Scott to them as parents. She thought of the miracle of creation – dust we are and unto dust we all shall return. How she praised God for the miracle of life, and especially for her son! That ability, amidst deep sorrow, to praise her God, was the result of the indwelling and enabling Holy Spirit who is our Comforter and Helper amidst the great tragedies and losses of life!

**11. The guarantee that a believer will eventually receive heaven as his eternal reward and home.** Wrote Paul, *“These earthly bodies make us groan and sigh, but we wouldn’t like to think of dying and having no bodies at all. We want to slip into our new bodies so that these dying bodies will, as it were, be swallowed up by everlasting life. This is what God has prepared for us and, as a guarantee, he has given us his Holy Spirit.”* (II Corinthians 5:4, 5) *“He (God) has put his brand upon us – his mark of ownership – and given us his Holy Spirit in our hearts as guarantee that we belong to him and as the first installment of all that he is going to give us”.* (II Corinthians 1:22) *“And because of what Christ did, all you others too, who heard the Good News about how to be saved, and trusted Christ, were marked as belonging to Christ by the Holy Spirit, who long ago had been promised to all of us Christians. His presence within us is God’s guarantee that he really will give us all that he promised; and the Spirit’s seal upon us means that God has already purchased us and that he guarantees to bring us to himself. This is just one more reason for us to praise our glorious God.”* (Ephesians 1:13, 14)

#### **IV. LOOKING AHEAD (TO OUR WELCOMING GOD AND HIS PROMISES OF ETERNAL REWARDS).**

Because she endured to the end of life as a faithful servant, full of God’s love, now Mrs. Lee has been ‘crowned with the crown of eternal life’ in heaven, where she will forever rejoice in the presence of her Lord and in the presence of all the saints of the ages and of the myriads of holy angels! It is no wonder that, shortly following her death, her daughter and son-in-law, Martha and Richard Sloan, sang hymns and prayed and praised their Lord, in thanksgiving for their mother and in gratitude to their Lord for taking their mother to her ‘home sweet home’! No longer a pilgrim

<sup>4</sup> Barclay’s: More New Testament Words; p. 134

on earth, but now a first-rate citizen of heaven itself! For the Bible says, *“To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord”*. The last breath she breathed on this earth introduced her to the first breath of ‘celestial air’ in heaven. On early Sunday morning ( Sept. 6, 1998) – the first day of the week in which weekly we Christians celebrate the resurrection of Christ which vanquished death forever – Mrs. Lee entered the ‘pearly gates’ of heaven.

It gives the Heavenly Father great pleasure to give His children the reward of Heaven. Those who are faithful to the end – who keep running the race of life – will be granted *“the Crown of Life.”* (John 14: 1-3) Heaven – described as a glorious city, and likened to pure gold and clear glass. Heaven – God’s dwelling place prepared for those earthlings who love and who serve Christ, a place of holiness and beauty and unity and perfection and joy. Heaven – a place where there are no tears of sorrow and grief, and no sickness or pain or death. A place where there is no sin, temptation, trials, or hard tests. Heaven - a place where there is no need for the sun or the moon, for Christ Himself is the source of all light. In heaven, there is no night. There is no aging. No separation from those we love. Heaven – a place where the focus of all is on Christ alone. A place where there is no competition or comparison among jealous-ridden persons. A place where all serve each other with holy love and gladness. A place of perfect harmony and unity where ‘all is for each, and each is for all’. Serving each other without the physical limitations of a human body. Heaven – a place of joyful singing and happy serving and constant learning. A place where all the saints will learn from one another and all will learn forever from the ‘Master Teacher’ Himself – the Lord Jesus Christ. Heaven - a place where each will become more like God forever – without, of course, ever actually becoming gods. The excitement of eternal growth in knowledge and in holy wisdom and understanding! No longer seeing reality as if peering through a hazy glass, but instead seeing reality with our spiritual eyes as a result of being given a ‘spiritual body’. Heaven – a place where we will no longer walk by faith, but a place where we shall behold Christ, face to face in all His glory!

As it was for Mrs. Lee, so it will be for every other true believer when he or she dies. Death for the believer is not the end, but it is the beginning, not the sunset but the sunrise! Not a fearful enemy, but a kind friend, which allows the believer to enjoy the nearer presence of Christ in heaven.

Death for the believer is like going from the basement of the house to the top story of the house. Death allows the Christian to reach his destination. Death for the Christian is like crossing the “finish line” after a long marathon run.

Death is not a loss for the believer; death is the doorway into eternal life in heaven. Paul wrote, *“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!”* Christians are only pilgrims on this planet. Dying allows the believer to “go home”! Perhaps Mrs. Lee’s favorite Scripture was John 14:1-3 that reads: *“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and*

*prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”*

**Placing your faith in the Deathless One – Jesus Christ – you shall never die! Of course, your body will die and return to dust, but you as a believer will never die! Said Jesus, “If a man keeps my saying he shall never see death.” (John 8:5) *Whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die.*” (John 11:16) Notes J.B. Phillips, “It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the meaning that Christ intended to convey was that death was a completely negligible experience to the man who had already begun to live life of the eternal quality.”**

**Said the great 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelist D.L. Moody, “Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it! At that moment, I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all – out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal; a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, a body fashioned like unto His glorious body...That which is born of flesh may die, that which is born of the Spirit will live forever.”<sup>5</sup>**

**Because Mrs. Lee, for so very long, gladly followed her Lord amidst many times of suffering, loss, deprivation, persecution, and sorrow, now she has been graduated into the class of the eternally redeemed where she will share the ‘glory of her Lord’ forever!**

**As it was in the case of Mrs. Lee, so it is with all of us believers who still remain on earth. As she longed for many years, so we who remain on earth continue to long to experience the ‘glory’ of the Lord in heaven.**

**Concerning the ‘glory’ of heaven for which all true Christians ‘hunger and thirst’, the famous author C.S. Lewis writes: “The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son – it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.**

**“For glory means good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgement, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last.**

**“Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the**

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<sup>5</sup> Angels by Bill Graham; pg. 162, 163

**truest index of our real situation. And to be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honor beyond all our merits, and also the healing of that old ache.**

**“We are to shine as the sun; we are to be given the morning star. “We want something else which can hardly be put into words – to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.**

**“At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get in.**

**“The whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy. As St. Augustine said, the rapture of the saved soul will ‘flow over’ into the glorified body.”<sup>6</sup>**

**Because Mrs. Lee was faithful until the very end of her earthly life, now she has been ushered into her eternal home. By God’s enabling power, Mrs. Lee has ‘gotten in’ – no longer a travelling pilgrim on earth but now a permanent citizen of that heavenly city! Wrote Paul, *“For we know that when this tent we live in now is taken down – when we die and leave these bodies – we will have wonderful new bodies in heaven, homes that will be ours forevermore, made for us by God himself, and not by human hands. How weary we grow of our present bodies. That is why we look forward eagerly to the day when we shall have heavenly bodies which we shall put on like new clothes. For we shall not be merely spirits without bodies. These earthly bodies make us groan and sigh, but we would not like to think of dying and having no bodies at all. We want to slip into our new bodies so that these dying bodies will, as it were, be swallowed up by everlasting life. This is what God has prepared for us and, as a guarantee; he has given us his Holy Spirit.”* (2 Corinthians 5:1-5, Living Bible)**

**Yes, think of it. Mrs. Lee now in eternity ‘shines as the noonday sun’! She has been given ‘the morning star’! On earth, she ran a good race, and she finished the ‘course’ of faith in great triumph and victory! Henceforth, there is laid up for her the ‘crown of life’, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will surely award to her in her heavenly home! Let us follow her noble example and run well our own spiritual race of life! And then we too will some day share with Mrs. Lee the ‘glory of heaven’ with our Lord and Master!**

## **CONCLUSION:**

**Be aware and enjoy the God-given motivations for successfully running Life’s Spiritual Race!**

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<sup>6</sup> C.S. Lewis’s sermon entitled “The Weight Of Glory”

1. **Look Up** - (*To Heavenly Angels above us who minister to us*). Hebrews 1:14
2. **Look Within** - (*To Holy Spirit within us who comforts and strengthen us*). John 14 and 16.
3. **Look Around** - (*To Heavenly Saints In Heaven's Grandstands Who Cheer Us On*). Hebrews 12:1
4. **Look Ahead** - (*To Our Welcoming God and His Promise of Eternal Rewards*). II Timothy 4:7-8

*DISCOVERING THE 'SECRETS'  
TO PERSONAL RENEWAL*

*Chapter 17*

*of*

*MARKS OF OUR CALLING*

## CHAPTER 17

### OUTLINE

**SUBJECT:**        **DISCOVERING THE ‘SECRETS’ TO PERSONAL RENEWAL**

**SCRIPTURE:**    **Isaiah 40:28-31**

**TEXT:**            *“Though our bodies are dying, our inner strength in the Lord is growing everyday.” (II Corinthians 4:16)*

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

What is the ‘secret’ to remaining alive, dynamic, contagious, full of energy? Even though our outward frame is dying, is it possible for our inner spirit to be growing? What is the secret to daily renewal? Happiness is not an accident; happiness is a bi-product of a certain and definite life-style – the life-style of a true Christian who is closely following Christ and practicing Biblical principles.

- I.     **KEEP FREE OF BITTERNESS.**
- II.    **KEEP YOURSELF FREE FROM THE COMPETITIVE ‘RAT RACE’.**
- III.   **MAINTAIN BIBLICAL GOALS OF EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP.**
- IV.   **KEEP THE HOME FIRES BURNING BRIGHTLY.**
- V.    **KEEP LAUGHTER ALIVE IN YOUR LIFE.**
- VI.   **KEEP A ‘CLEAR CONSCIENCE’.**
- VII.  **KEEP DIVERSION AND VARIETY IN YOUR LIFE.**
- VIII. **KEEP YOURSELF PHYSICALLY FIT AND HEALTHY.**
- IX.   **PRAY MUCH ABOUT EVERYTHING AND WORRY ABOUT NOTHING.**
- X.    **BE A PART OF A SMALL SUPPORT GROUP ON A WEEKLY BASIS.**
- XI.   **READ POSITIVE BOOKS THAT WILL ENCOURAGE YOU AND INSPIRE YOU TO HOLY LIVING.**
- XII.  **DEVELOP POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS ‘SETBACKS’, ‘PROBLEMS’, AND ‘TRIALS’.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**Following these steps will always bring renewal to your body, mind and spirit.**

## CHAPTER 17

**SUBJECT: DISCOVERING THE ‘SECRETS’ TO PERSONAL RENEWAL**

**SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 40:28-31**

**TEXT: *“Though our bodies are dying, our inner strength in the Lord is growing everyday.”* (II Corinthians 4:16)**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

I recently talked to a woman whose uncle died at the age of 104. This woman with whom I visited told me that her uncle lived by himself until he was 101, at which time he took a hard fall that placed him in a nursing home the last 3 years of his long life. She said he was happy and full of life, even driving his own car during his 90’s! I quickly asked her what she thought was the ‘secret’ to his longevity! I suggested that he must have taken good care of himself. “Well”, she said rather jokingly, “I guess one reason he lived so long is that he had oatmeal and grapefruit for breakfast about every morning!”

Was it ‘oatmeal’ and ‘grapefruit’ that gave him daily physical renewal? Obviously, to believe that was the answer to his daily maintenance of health and longevity of life, would be to be very simplistic. No doubt, there was a combination of many factors that together resulted in long life – perhaps factors like a positive mental attitude, an active prayer life, a life of loving relationship and creative projects, plenty of fresh air and good diet and daily exercise, and probably heredity.

In the physical realm, it is not always easy to analyze the factors that, in combination, produce longevity of life, but in the spiritual realm it is not difficult to list the keys or ‘secrets’ to maintained health and true happiness.

### **PROPOSITION:**

Have you known older Christians who are radiant in their countenance, sweet in their spirit, progressive in their attitudes, energetic in their lifestyle – persons who have obviously learned the secret of daily renewal?

Wrote Paul, *“Though our bodies are dying, our inner strength in the Lord is growing every day.”* (II Corinthians 4:16, Living Bible) Paul discovered the ‘secret’ to daily renewal.

What is the ‘secret’ to remaining alive, dynamic, contagious, full of energy? Even though our outward frame is dying, is it possible for our inner spirit to be growing? Must we grow weak and decrepit in our spirits as well as in our bodies, or is it possible to mount up with

wings like an eagle and to run and not grow weary and to walk and not faint? (Isaiah 40)  
What is the secret to daily renewal? Is there a 'Fountain of Youth' from which Christians may drink daily, the result of which is perpetual enthusiasm and contagious happiness?

Who does not want to be happy and healthy throughout his/her life. Happiness is not an accident; happiness is a bi-product of a certain and definite life-style – the life-style of a true Christian who is closely following Christ and practicing Biblical principles!

Here is a 'recipe for true happiness' – the secrets to personal renewal.

### **I. KEEP FREE OF BITTERNESS.**

Never forget the warning of Hebrews 12:15 – *“Watch out that no bitterness takes root among you, for as it springs up it causes deep trouble, hurting many in their spiritual lives.”*

Jesus taught us to pray, *“Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”* If we do not forgive, then we cannot be forgiven! Remember, no one can do you more wrong than the wrong you have already done to Jesus! Your sins and mine were the kinds of sins that helped crucify Jesus Christ! Yet, Christ forgives us! Should we not therefore forgive the sin, which others have done against us?

Bitterness defiles you, dissipates your energy, hinders your relationship with God, alienates you from others, distorts your vision of reality, and misdirects your attention away from God!

To forgive another is not to condone the sins of another. It is not to declare that suddenly you are a 'bosom buddy' of the person whom you forgive. But to forgive is to release the person into the hands of a just God to whom alone belongs the right to exercise vengeance. Paul advises, *“Never pay back evil for evil. Don't quarrel with anyone. Be at peace with everyone, just as much as possible. Never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for He has said that He will repay those who deserve it.”* (Romans 12:18-19, Living Bible)

### **II. KEEP YOURSELF FREE FROM THE COMPETITIVE 'RAT RACE'.**

In other words, do not fall into the trap of our society – namely, the trap of fierce competition. Do not compare yourself with others. Do not try to 'keep up with the Jones'. Be content with what you have! Remember, life does not consist in the abundance of things which a man possesses. Enjoy the simple lifestyle. Do not forget: *“It is more blessed (and fun) to give than it is to receive!”* Learn to enjoy without needing to own! Enjoy the beauties of nature, which cost you nothing. Enjoy the warm hug of a friend, the smile of a child, the breath-taking sunset – none of which costs you a penny!

**Keep yourself free from the “Success Syndrome” of our society. Repudiate society’s standards for success – Power, Pleasure, Money! Success in God’s eyes is measured by Tender Compassion, Genuine Humility, And Joyful Service! Wrote Paul to Timothy, “*We didn’t bring any money with us when we came into the world, and we can’t carry away a single penny when we die. So we should be well satisfied without money if we have enough food and clothing.*” (I Timothy 6:7-8, Living Bible) Have you read Hebrews 13:5 recently? - “*Stay away from the love of money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, ‘I will never, never fail you nor forsake you.’*”**

**If you know Christ Jesus as your personal Saviour, you are truly rich! You have everything you will ever need, if you have the intimate friendship of Jesus – the Lover of your soul!**

**Competition breeds envy and jealousy. Keep yourself free from envy and jealousy, and avoid all horizontal comparisons. Keep your eyes on Jesus, that is, keep your vertical outlook on life and avoid the horizontal comparisons! Be genuinely glad when your peers succeed and never take secret delight when others fail. Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep!**

**When my father-in-law, (Glenn White) was in his middle 80’s, he shared a personal letter with me, from a long-time friend. My father-in-law (who died several years ago) was a godly man, a rugged rancher who all of his life worked hard with his hands. He was a happy and successful rancher, but more than that, a dynamic Christian who was full of energy and a ‘bundle of joy’. Everyone enjoyed his presence, for he was a real friend to many. My father-in-law did not attend college, but began to manage his father’s ranch immediately after he graduated from high school. My father-in-law’s high school roommate Glenn Archer, was very brilliant, and went on to become a highly educated executive, who for many years was well-known at the White House in Washington D.C., a rather influential man in government, but a man who remained approachable and humble. A true servant in society! It was this man, Glenn Archer, who wrote a very warm letter to my father-in-law. After I read the letter, my father-in-law said something like this to me: “Ron, Glenn Archer was always smarter than I was in school and the girls wanted to date him more than they did me. He was well educated and esteemed by his profession, but I never was jealous of him. It never bothered me that he was more handsome, educated, well-known as a great speaker and influential in government”. My father-in-law was a happy and contented man, a man who gladly accepted himself without comparing himself with others. No jealousy, no envy – important for renewal.**

**Compare yourself with yourself and with God’s standard for you, but never compare yourself with someone else. Learn from others, but never be envious of**

others. Imitate the good traits in their lives, but never try to become another person. Accept yourself for who you are, what you are becoming as a follower of Christ.

### **III. MAINTAIN BIBLICAL GOALS OF EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP.**

Let the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) be the master passion of your life. The Bible says, *“He who wins souls is wise!”* Let the greatest joy of your life be the winning of another person to Christ. There is nothing that will renew your own spirit more than sharing the Good News of Christ with a lost soul, introducing new believers to your local Church! Lose yourself in ‘love projects’. Involve yourself creatively in building bridges of friendship to the lonely and lost people around you who need to know your Saviour and whose lives need the enrichment of loving relationships within your local Church!

### **IV. KEEP THE HOME FIRES BURNING BRIGHTLY.**

In other words, turn your hearts toward your home – your spouse and your children and your extended family members! Make your home a ‘haven of rest’, a place of solace and comfort where all in your family can build a wholesome self-esteem through unconditional love and positive affirmations and creative family projects. Take time for your ‘primary human relationships’ – your immediate family! The family that plays together and prays together will stay together!

### **V. KEEP LAUGHTER ALIVE IN YOUR LIFE.**

The Bible tells us that the “joy of the Lord is our strength”. The Bible speaks of that “joy which is unspeakable and full of glory”! Proverbs 17:22 says, *“A cheerful heart does good like medicine, but a broken spirit makes one sick.”*

Just as medicine helps to heal the body, so good humor and joyful laughter helps to heal the spirit. Cultivate the ability to see the ‘funny side’ of life! Develop a good sense of humor! Don’t take yourself too seriously! A hearty laugh can do ‘wonders’ for you. Never laugh at people, but laugh with people.

E. Stanley Jones tells of a time when He was giving an invitation for personal commitment. At first, he thought he would get them to stand, but then he decided on getting them to put up their hands instead. In his mind, he got the two thoughts mixed, and he ended up saying to the crowd of people at the end of a serious-minded message: “Everybody who wants this blessing put up your feet!” Needless to say, at the end of the service, he saw people gathered in clumps doubling with laughter.

**I myself have had some good laughs at myself at the Sunday Dinner table, as my dear wife and daughters have informed me of some ‘blurps’ in my sermons.**

**I still laugh at myself (even though it was not very ‘funny’ at the time) when I think of the time (about 11 p.m. at night) when I was riding home on my bike from my office. I had no lights on the bike, and I was riding on the wrong side of the road. Suddenly and totally unexpectedly I met another fast-riding biker coming from the opposite direction! We collided going at a rather fast speed, and we were both knocked out. Both of our jaws were cracked, and we were both taken to the hospital in the same ambulance – and my old Schwinn Bike (which I still ride today) was not even bent! I was rejoicing so much in the fact that I had just led a couple to Christ in my office late that night, that I was totally oblivious to danger and I failed to obey the simple rule of riding my bike on the right side instead of on the left side of the road!**

**I still laugh at myself when I think of the Saturday night when I stuffed myself with so many servings of delicious ‘battered beans’ that I was so bloated the next morning (Sunday Morning), I had to call Bill Hoffman, (a long-time friend and fellow pastor) to take the morning service! Gluttony, pure gluttony! Battered beans, and more battered beans – rendered me ineffective on a Sunday Morning!**

**I recall with chagrin the Sunday Morning when I greeted a guest who had verily walked into our front door to worship. I proceeded to shake hands with the finely dressed gentleman, but in the process of bringing my hand to his hand to shake, I caught his long hanging necktie in my hand and I pulled his tie completely off! It was one of those snap-on ties. Tell me, how do you remedy that problem? I am sorry to tell you, but that man never came back to our Church after that morning! Someone said, “It is better to laugh rather than to cry over ‘spilled milk!’”**

**Do not be afraid to laugh. It is good for your emotions! At one vacation I found myself ‘splitting my sides’ as I was watching an hilarious ‘Walt Disney’ comedy. I did not realize that my brother-in-law was taking an extended video of me laughing. It is quite a ‘sight to behold’ – watching myself cackling and cackling!**

**Good laughter is like medicine to the spirit! “To set a group of people merrily, innocently laughing is to do the will of your Father which is in heaven.”<sup>1</sup>**

**Notes E. Stanley Jones, “A continuous flow of happy laughter is the most health-giving exercise you can take. It tones up the whole system. When I say ‘happy laughter’, I do not mean laughter over jokes, but laughter that comes out of the depths – laughter from within, laughter because you can’t help it, laughter that**

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<sup>1</sup> Handel Brown

laughs itself, incorrigible laughter, laughter when there is nothing to laugh about – except the love of God, life, the future, everything.

“Doctors tell us that unhappiness kills more people, especially old people, than any other single thing. Then Jesus is the most health-giving influence that ever came into human living. He reconciles us to God, to ourselves, to our bodies, to our neighbors, to life itself. Given that you can’t help but laugh – laugh at the rhythm of things. Is this Pollyannaism? No, it is the joy of helping others, of creativeness, of knowing you have in Jesus the answer, the real answer to the world’s sin and consequent sorrow. Christian joy is joy with its sleeves rolled up, ready to go anywhere, to do anything, suffer anything to help a suffering humanity and help it to sing.

“A minister once wrote me: ‘Thank you for putting my stars back in my sky - they had all gone out.’ Jesus does that. He puts our stars back in our skies and a song in our hearts and on our lips.”<sup>2</sup>

#### VI. KEEP A ‘CLEAR CONSCIENCE’ BY DAILY CONFESSING ANY KNOWN SIN IN YOUR LIFE.

Remember, *“If we confess our sins to him, he can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong because Christ died to wash away our sins.”* (I John 1:9, Living Bible) Be daily accountable before God. Let the ‘blood of Jesus’ cleanse you every day.

Paul the apostle sought always to maintain a good conscience. When he gave his defense before the Jewish Council in Jerusalem, Paul declared, *“Brothers, I have always lived before God in all good conscience.”* (Acts 23:1) Doubtless, this was one of the ‘secrets’ to Paul’s unusual vitality and spiritual accomplishments. Later, when Paul was defending himself and his ministry before Ananias the Jewish High Priest, he declared, *“I try with all my strength to always maintain a clear conscience before God and man.”* (Acts 24:15, Living Bible).

Paul also encouraged his new converts to keep their conscience clear. He wrote to his beloved son in the faith – Timothy – and encouraged him to keep his trust in Christ. *“Cling tightly to your faith in Christ and always keep your conscience clear, doing what you know is right. For some people have disobeyed their consciences and have deliberately done what they knew was wrong. It isn’t surprising that they soon lost their faith in Christ after defying God like that.”* (I Timothy 2: 19, Living Bible) If we wish to avoid a ‘spiritual shipwreck’, we must keep a ‘clear conscience’.

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<sup>2</sup> A Song of Ascents; pg. 350, 351

**When the Holy Spirit pricks our conscience, and convicts us of wrong, it behooves us quickly to confess our sins to God and to ‘plead the atoning blood of Jesus’.** Wrote John, *“My little children, I am telling you this so that you will stay away from sin. But if you sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father. His name is Jesus Christ, the one who is all that is good and who pleases God completely. He is the one who took God’s wrath against our sins upon himself, and brought us into fellowship with God; and he is the forgiveness for our sins, and not only ours but all the world’s.”* (I John 2:1-2, Living Bible)

**Believers who don’t confess their sins to God, will find their spiritual lives suffering greatly. Unconfessed guilt can even cause physical problems! Hear David’s testimony, as recorded in Psalms 32: 1-6.** *“What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record. There was a time when I wouldn’t admit what a sinner I was. But my dishonesty made me miserable and filled my days with frustration. All day and all night your hand was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day until I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, ‘I will confess them to the Lord.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. Now I say that each believer should confess his sins to God when he is aware of them, while there is time to be forgiven. Judgment will not touch him if he does.”* (Psalms 32:1-6, Living Bible)

**It is possible for one to so harden his heart to God and to so close his ears to the Spirit’s wooing, that he no longer even feels a compunction when he sins. Wrote Paul to Timothy, “But the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some in the Church will turn away from Christ and become eager followers of teachers with devil-inspired ideas. These teachers will tell lies with straight faces and do it so often that their consciences won’t even bother them.”** (I Timothy 4:1-2, Living Bible) Allowing one’s conscience to become ‘seared’ leads to spiritual ‘death’ – the opposite of spiritual ‘renewal’!

**One of the ‘secrets’ to maintain a vital relationship with God is to develop a tender heart and to maintain a sensitive, Spirit-controlled conscience. Here is a good prayer to pray daily:**

**“That I from Thee no more may part,  
No more Thy goodness grieve,  
The filial awe, the fleshly heart,  
The tender conscience, give;  
Quick as the apple of an eye,  
O God, my conscience make!  
Awake my soul, when sin is nigh,**

**And keep it still awake.”  
(I Want A Principle Within)**

Someone may rightly ask; “Is one’s conscience always a reliable guide to determine what is right or wrong?” In answering that question, it is important to realize that one’s conscience is one of the greatest ‘gifts’ which God has given to mankind. It is God’s intention that one’s conscience becomes so well developed and properly sensitized, such that indeed the conscience is a guide in regularly determining right ethical behavior. However, one’s conscience is something like a computer. “Good information (data) in, Good information out”. On the other hand: “Garbage in, Garbage out’. The conscience must be ‘fed’ with the Word of God – the Truth regarding Man, Sin, God, Jesus Christ, the World. The conscience, through prayer, must be trained and developed by the blessed Holy Spirit. Therefore, because the conscience must be trained, and because the conscience can be fed with wrong ‘information’ – such as false notions and impressions - the conscience, alone, is NOT a totally reliable guide to make judgments in all ethical situations.

Listen to the Apostle John’s wise advice: *“My children, let us love not merely in theory or in words – let us love in sincerity and in practice! This is how we shall know that we are children of the truth and can reassure ourselves in the sight of God, even if our own conscience makes us feel guilty. For God is greater than our conscience, and he knows everything.”* (I John 3:18-20, Phillips)

Notes John Stott: “The suggestion seems to be (from verse 20) that it may not be either an unusual or an infrequent experience for the Christian’s serene assurance to be disturbed. Sometimes the accusations of our ‘conscience’ will be true accusations, and sometimes they will be false...In either case, the inner voice is not to overcome us.”<sup>3</sup>

Scott continues, “Our conscience is by no means infallible; its condemnation may often be unjust. We can, therefore, appeal from our conscience to God who is greater and more knowledgeable. Indeed, He knows all things, including our secret motives and deepest resolves, and, it is implied, will be more merciful towards us than our own heart. His omniscience should relieve, not terrify, us. So it is knowledge which alone can quiet the condemning heart, our own knowledge of our sincere love for others and supremely God’s knowledge of our thoughts and motives. Stronger than any chemical tranquillizer is trust in our all-knowing God.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Tyndale Bible Commentary; The Epistles of John; p. 145

<sup>4</sup> Ibid; p. 146)

**The one who experiences the divinely-imparted love can be assured that he is of the Truth, and therefore he can have a tranquil heart. “It is the mind’s knowledge by which the heart’s doubts may be silenced...Love is the final objective test of our Christian profession, for true love, in the sense of self-sacrifice, is not natural to man in his fallen state. Its existence in any man is evidence of new birth and of the indwelling Spirit, and it shows itself ‘in deed’. ‘There are actual things we can point to - not things we have professed or felt or imagined or intended, but things that we have done.’ (Law) If we thus love ‘in truth’ (v. 18), we may indeed have full assurance in our hearts. ‘The fruit of love is confidence.’<sup>5</sup> (Wescott).”**

**Suppose the condemnation, which you feel, is because of real sin in your life, and is not the result of false guilt? Then recognize that the Sovereign mercy and love of God is still ‘greater than your heart’ (I John 3:20). God knows your heart and can judge rightly. Whatever the source of condemnation – be it false guilt or real guilt – God is greater than the condemnation and can restore the believer to true confidence!**

**Remember, Christ is greater than our hearts, and He will stand guard over our hearts to deliver us from all guilts – both real guilts and false guilts! Committing all of our guilt’s daily to Christ’s cleansing blood is one of the big ‘secrets’ to maintaining vitality in the Christian life. A great ‘key’ to daily renewal in the Christian life!**

## **VII. KEEP DIVERSION AND VARIETY IN YOUR LIFE.**

**It is not in the Bible, but it is nevertheless good sense: “Variety is the spice of life!” God created a world full of variety, so God is pleased when we enjoy variety. Try something new, or do the same thing differently. Take a new route to the bank, or surprise your family with an unexpected outing. Develop new hobbies. Involve yourself in a new ministry, which you have never tried before. Don’t be afraid of failure. A worse failure is never trying anything new. Edison performed a large variety of experiments – about 10,000 – before he perfected the electric light bulb! God is the God of the New and the God of Surprises and Miracles! He is the God of infinite variety! Launch out into the depths of new knowledge in God’s Word and attempt new feats for Christ! Read a new book on a new subject that you have never explored before! Visit a new neighbor! Try a new recipe! Experiment with a new method of teaching! Send a fresh ‘love note’ to a parent or a friend! Without losing your focus and without spreading yourself too thin, keep a variety of projects ‘going’ at one time. Projects like teaching a Sunday School class of small children and also visiting the elderly in the nursing home! Put your fears aside and try to**

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid; pg. 145, 146)

lead someone to Christ by sharing the plan of salvation with him. Expand your horizons and broaden your social circles to include many new friends! Variety and diversity of work and relationships and projects keep you interested in life and makes life far more exciting. In God's vast world of variety, there should never be a problem with boredom and monotony! Variety and diversity bring personal renewal!

#### **VIII. KEEP YOURSELF PHYSICALLY FIT AND HEALTHY.**

You have only one body for life, so be kind to your body! If you don't keep 'in touch' with your body regularly through proper diet and rigorous exercise, the day will come when your body will get 'in touch' with you – through excess fat and aching muscles and clogged arteries and premature death! I know of one man – a former president of a holiness seminary – who actively pursued a daily program of physical exercise throughout his long life. On his 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday, he went water skiing, using only one foot for hundreds of yards, to demonstrate his physical fitness (the results of a lifetime of respecting his physical 'temple').

“John Wesley, though no physician, gave this simple prescription for good health. It includes helpful spiritual advice. ‘Observe...exactness in your regimen or manner of living. Use plain diet. Go to bed early. Above all, add...that old fashionable medicine, prayer. Be as clean and sweet as possible in houses, clothes, and furniture. Water is the wholesomest of all drinks; quickens the appetite, and strengthens the digestion most. Spirituous liquors are a certain, though slow, poison. Exercise is indispensably necessary to health and long life. Walking is the best exercise. All violent and sudden passions dispose to...acute diseases. The love of God...prevents all the bodily disorders the passions introduce, by keeping the passions themselves within due bounds.’”<sup>6</sup>

#### **IX. PRAY MUCH ABOUT EVERYTHING AND WORRY ABOUT NOTHING.**

Prayer renews, and worries tear down one's very spirit and body. To catch people's attention and to make a point, one Church wrote these words on a placard where all could see them: “Why Pray When You Can Worry?”

What a Friend we have in Jesus,  
All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!  
O What peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,

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<sup>6</sup> Demaray, *Alive To God Through Prayer*, p. 101

**All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer!”**

**Putting your trust in Jesus is the best antidote for worry, and the best way to be renewed daily! Said Jesus, “Don’t worry about things – food, drink, and clothes. Look at the birds! They don’t worry. Your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are far more valuable. Will worries add a single moment to your life? If God cares for flowers, won’t he care for you? So don’t worry about food and clothing. Your heavenly Father knows you need them, and he will give them. So don’t be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrows too.” (Portions from Matthew 6:25-34, Living Bible)**

**Paul’s advice is good advice for us: “Don’t worry about anything; instead pray about everything; tell God your needs and don’t forget to thank him for his answers. If you do this, you will experience God’s peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7, Living Bible)**

**Trust in Christ Jesus – i.e., cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you! Put yourself into His arms, and listen for the heartbeat of His love for you!**

**“No matter what may be the test,  
God will take care of you;  
Lean, weary one, upon His breast,  
God will take care of you.  
God will take care of you,  
Thro’ every day, o’er all the way;  
He will take care of you.”**

**What is one of the ‘secrets’ to personal renewal? It is simple, childlike trust in your heavenly Father! Believing that God will take care of you!**

**X. BE A PART OF A SMALL SUPPORT GROUP ON A WEEKLY BASIS.**

**Where two or three are gathered in Christ’s name for prayer and for mutual support, Christ is there! He will renew you as you help renew others in your small group. Are you needing personal renewal? Then become a faithful participant in a small group – a tender loving group! Be willing to be open and honest and transparent. Be willing to humble yourself to learn from others and to give to others. “Admit your faults to one another and pray for each other so that you may be**

*healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous man has great power and wonderful results.” (James 5:16, Living Bible)*

Here is one of the ‘secrets’ to personal renewal – being a part of a small support group that meets weekly! A group that will love and accept you unconditionally, and that will pray for you, and that will affirm your worth often and that will correct you gently.

Wrote Paul to the Galatians: *“Share each others troubles and problems, and so obey our Lord’s command. If anyone thinks he is too great to stoop to this, he is really a nobody.” (Galatians 6:2, 3, Living Bible)* *“Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. (James 5:16)*

#### **XI. READ POSITIVE BOOKS THAT WILL ENCOURAGE YOU AND INSPIRE YOU TO HOLY LIVING.**

There is no lasting personal renewal unless and until there is renewal of one’s mind! Wrote the Psalmist, *“Oh, the joys of those who do not follow evil men’s advice, who do not hang around with sinners, scoffing at the things of God. But they delight in doing everything God wants them to, and day and night are always meditating on his laws and thinking about ways to follow him more closely.” (Psalms 1:1,2 Living Bible)*

If you want renewal, real renewal, let God’s thoughts become your thoughts! Spend time meditating upon the Holy Scriptures! Involve your mind in creatively thinking of new and better ways to follow Christ more closely and to serve your fellow men more practically!

As a man thinks, so is he! So think Christ’s thoughts, and you will eventually become Christlike! *“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but be a new and different person with a fresh newness in all you do and think.” (Romans 12:2, Living Bible)*

Keep a stack of good Christian books on your living room ‘coffee table’ – devotional books, biographies of great Christians, and missionary adventures! But always, on the top of your stack of Christian books and magazines, let the Holy Bible be seen! Consume the Bible like a hungry man consumes a steak meal! This is the ‘secret’ to daily renewal!

#### **XII. DEVELOP POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS ‘SETBACKS’, ‘PROBLEMS’ AND ‘TRIALS’.**

**Wrote James, “Dear brothers, is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy, for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow, and don’t try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete.” (James 1: 2-4, Living Bible)**

**Wrote Peter, “Dear friends, don’t be bewildered or surprised when you go through the fiery trials ahead, for this is no strange, unusual thing that is going to happen to you. Instead, be really glad – because these trials will make you partners with Christ in his suffering, and afterwards you will have the wonderful joy of sharing his glory in that coming day when it will be displayed. Be happy if you are cursed and insulted for being a Christian, for when that happens the Spirit of God will come upon you with great glory.” (I Peter 4:12-14, Living Bible)**

**Notes E. Stanley Jones: “Make everything serve. Just as an airplane always rises from an airport not with the wind, but in the face of the wind, so I would make oppositions send me up, not down.”<sup>7</sup>**

**Notes Paul, “We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials for we know that they are good for us – they help us learn to be patient. And patience develops strength of character in us and helps us trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady. Then, when that happens, we are able to hold our heads high no matter what happens and know that all is well.” (Romans 5:3-5a, Living Bible)**

**What is one of the ‘secrets’ of daily renewal? Using all experiences - good or bad – to draw us closer to God and to make us more understanding servants of God’s people! In the midst of great trials, Paul learned to use his trials as ‘steppingstones’ rather than as ‘stumbling blocks’. When life gave him a ‘lemon’, he turned it into ‘lemonade.’ He never ‘wasted’ his troubles on self-pity, but he instead used his trials to make him a more understanding person! A more mature Christian! And he taught his young converts to look at life and life’s hurts through ‘positive lens’. Wrote Paul, “What a wonderful God we have – he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of every mercy, and the one who so wonderfully comforts and strengthens us in our hardships and trials. And why does he do this? So that when others are troubled, needing our sympathy and encouragement, we can pass on to them, this same help and comfort God has given us. You can be sure that the more we undergo sufferings for Christ, the more he will shower us with his comfort and encouragement. We are in deep trouble for bringing you God’s comfort and salvation. But in our trouble God had comforted us and this, too, to help you: to show you from**

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<sup>7</sup> A Song of Ascents; p. 37

*our personal experience how God will tenderly comfort you when you undergo these same sufferings. He will give you the strength to endure.” (II Corinthians 1:3-7, Living Bible)*

**Those who respond or react wrongly to either criticism or to praise will be set back in their Christian lives. Therefore, it is vitally important to know how to handle both criticism and praise. Handle all criticism and praise creatively and humbly.**

**When you are criticized unjustly, give it to God, lest you become bitter or discouraged. When you are praised greatly, give it to God, lest you become puffed up in your spirit and proud in your mind. Accept all criticism, whether it seems ‘constructive’ or ‘destructive’, as an opportunity to grow and to improve. The Book of Proverbs is full of advice regarding the importance of graciously accepting the advice of others who are wiser than ourselves. Someone said, “There are only two people who will tell you the whole truth about yourself – your worst enemy and your best friend!” God can even use our ‘enemies’ to impart truth to us – to ultimately make us better persons!**

**Relish the affirmations which you receive from others. Don’t dispise their honest compliments, but never let those compliments ‘go to your head’. Lay every compliment you receive at the ‘feet of Jesus’, knowing that to Jesus belongs all the ‘glory’. Corrie Ten Boom presented every compliment she received to Jesus, like a fresh bouquet of flowers!**

**Having a positive attitude towards both the praises and the criticisms you receive is vitally important! One bishop testified: “God has given me enough failures in life to keep me humble, and enough successes in life to keep me encouraged!”**

**You can learn to catch the ‘curved balls’ which life throws at you, if you never forget the truth of Romans 8:28 – “*And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans.*” (Living Bible) This verse does not say that all things, in and of themselves, are intrinsically good. We know that there are many inequities and mysteries in life, and we know that, even though God is sovereign, He does not will many things. He does not will the tragedies which innocent people suffer because of the wrong moral choices of wicked people. He does not will evil, but in a moral universe where the exercise of free moral agency is a necessity, God does permit the plots of wicked men. But “though wrong seems often so very strong, God is Ruler yet.” In the end, God will ‘balance the books’. God is a perfect ‘bookkeeper’; eventually all wrong will be punished, and all righteousness will be rewarded. Those righteous persons who suffer needlessly and unjustly now, will be compensated wonderfully hereafter. As in the case of Joseph in the Old Testament, what sinful men meant for evil, God will**

**transform into good. All things – even the bad things – will be worked into a pattern for good to those who love the Lord!**

**THE DIVINE WEAVER**

**My Life is but a weaving  
Between my Lord and me;  
I cannot choose the colours  
He worketh steadily.**

**Ofttimes He weaveth sorrow  
And I in foolish pride,  
Forget that He seeth the upper,  
And I the under side.**

**Not till the loom is silent  
And the shuttles cease to fly,  
Shall God unroll the canvas  
And explain the reason why.**

**The dark threads are as needful  
In the Weaver's skillful hand,  
As the threads of gold and silver  
In the pattern He has planned.**

**Author Unknown**

**If God can transform a 'black Friday' into a 'Good Friday' because of Bright Easter Sunday Morning, what do you think He can do with your 'black Fridays' or your 'blue Mondays' or your 'weary Wednesdays'? God has the power to turn a tragedy into a triumph, and He is able to resurrect your buried dreams and your shattered hopes!**

**What is the Christian answer to the problem of suffering? It is NOT to explain suffering. That is the way of Philosophy, and this way leaves many unanswered questions and many embittered souls. It is NOT to explain away suffering. This is the way of Christian Science, and this produces minds which are 'disillusioned' and bodies which are suffering needlessly.**

**The Christian answer to suffering is not to explain it or to explain it away, but to allow God to redemptively use suffering. It is possible to take broken pieces of**

colored glass and to shape a beautiful colored cathedral window. It is possible for God to take the broken pieces of a man's life - his broken dreams, disappointments, tragedies, losses - and to produce a beautiful life.

**“Christianity teaches that suffering can be USED; that even while a full understanding of origins and purposes eludes our mind, the brave and the bold (by the help of God) can turn the disaster into triumph and force the loss to yield a gain...Tragedy is often fruitful of good. Drowned sailors build lighthouses. Mangled corpses widen roads. Frustration and testing have had a major part in the higher triumphs of our race. In addition, if anybody inquires how Christians came to believe that tragedy could be USED, the short answer is that they learned it at Calvary. In Christ upon the cross they see God meeting sin with love; wresting earth's worst to heaven's best.”<sup>8</sup>**

**God is able to transform tragedy into triumph, to change a Dark Friday into a Good Friday, to make a Death produce Life, to turn a despised Cross into a cherished symbol. Through the fearful death of crucifixion, God cleansed away fear and brought life. *“Forasmuch then as the children (human beings) are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them, who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”* (Hebrews 2: 14, 15)**

**The believer must train himself to ask, when facing problems: “What good does God intend for me to salvage out of this problem and trouble? How is this problem to be used for the development of my character?”**

**Paul used his prison experience in Rome for his good and for God's glory. *“Now, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the Word of God more courageously and fearlessly.”* (Philippians 1:12-14)**

**Be thankful, along with Paul, that God providently watches over you, and can use you to witness, regardless of your circumstances. Paul's imprisonment became Paul's opportunity for unprecedented witnessing to unlikely persons...Roman guards! His prison became his pulpit! His captive audience was Roman soldiers...the ‘cream of the crop’...who were chained to Paul's wrists all day long!**

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<sup>8</sup> William Sangster, Daily Reading, p. 87

**Paul recognized that God providently allowed him to be in Roman custody in order that he might boldly preach the Gospel to Gentile pagans!**

**His preaching in prison resulted in advancing the Gospel (Philippians 1:12) and inspiring timid believers to witness (Philippians 1:13-14)!**

**Be thankful that God can use any of your experiences...good or bad...to advance the cause of Christ and to encourage the lives of other Christians! Be thankful that God can enable you to get the best out of the worst! If Paul's prison experience resulted in Roman pagans being converted, in timid Christians being encouraged, and in the Gospel message being spread, what do you suppose your 'prison' experiences could result in? Look up and be thankful for God's providence during trials!**

**John Bunyan was imprisoned for several years because of his religious beliefs, but he patiently endured, that is, he used his prison experience for the glory of God and for the good of men. He wrote 'Pilgrim's Progress' while he was in prison! This classic has been cherished more than any other book, second only to the Bible.**

**'Patience' (Hupomone) refuses to give up even when circumstances are hard and obstacles are great. Thomas Edison was never discouraged. He had endurance that was amazing. It is reported that when about 10,000 experiments with a storage battery failed to produce results, a friend tried to console him. "Why, I have not failed", Edison said. "I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." "When Beethoven was threatened with deafness, that most terrible of troubles for a musician, he said: 'I will take life by the throat'. That is hupomone. George Matheson, who was stricken in blindness and disappointed in love, wrote a prayer in which he pleads that he might accept God's will, 'not with dumb resignation, but with holy joy; not only with absence of murmur, but with a song of praise.' Only hupomone can enable a man to do that."<sup>9</sup>**

**Someone once said to a gallant soul who was undergoing a great sorrow: 'Sorrow fairly colors life, doesn't it?' Back came the reply: 'Yes, and I propose to choose the color'. That is hupomone.**

**When William Booth, the great founder of the Salvation Army was told by his son that he would lose his eye sight, William Booth was first sober and quiet, and then said to his son, "Are you telling me that I shall soon be blind and will never see your face again"? "That is what the doctors are saying", replied his son. Replied William Booth, "I have served God for many years with my eyesight. I shall now**

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<sup>9</sup> Daily Study Bible, Romans, William Barclay, p. 73-74

**serve God without my eyesight.” This is hupomone...patience, fortitude, perseverance!**

**“Hupomone is not the spirit which lies down and lets the floods go over it; it is the spirit which meets things breast forward and overcomes them.”<sup>10</sup>**

**“Hupomone (perseverance and patience) is not a passive endurance, but it is a creative use of bad experiences to serve the higher purpose of good. Hupomone refuses to allow circumstances to master the soul; instead, it uses and masters the circumstances”.<sup>11</sup>**

**Think of the most beautiful and lovely and tenderhearted people you have known. Have they not usually been persons who have gone through difficult trials, tests, and sorrows, and who have emerged victoriously? Have they not been the persons who, as a result of life’s trials, have become understanding, gentle, stable, caring?**

**Problems and suffering, successfully met, can perfect character. Great spiritual vision of God is oftentimes the product of great sorrow. Someone said, “The vision of God can be seen more clearly through a tear”. Trouble, sorrow, and suffering can cause one to depend more fully on God’s power. God’s strength is made perfect through human weakness. God’s power is only available to the one who knows that he is weak and powerless.**

**In the world of nature, pearls are the product of pain. A pearl “is a symbol of stress; it is a healed wound; it is the enduring token of a tiny creature’s struggle to preserve its life...if there had been no wound there could have been no pearl.”<sup>12</sup> Beautiful character may be the product of suffering.**

**“There is something unheeding and harsh in a man who has known nothing of pain...Suffering, in a disciple, can often be wrested to service. It is Christlike work to soothe and sympathize, and only those who have drunk the cup of sorrow are fully equipped to do it.”<sup>13</sup> Suffering can develop the tender heart. (II Corinthians 1:3-5) Someone said that when certain sorrowing people needed a comforter that they would go to a certain woman who was known for her gentle eyes. Those gentle eyes came from a gentle heart, made tender through much sorrow.**

**One of the most important ‘secrets’ to experiencing personal renewal is to develop positive attitudes towards ‘setbacks’ and ‘problems’ and ‘trials’. We must never forget that God specializes in things that are thought to be impossible, and that God**

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<sup>10</sup> Daily Study Bible; Romans; William Barclay, p. 74

<sup>11</sup> William Barclay

<sup>12</sup> Sangster’s Daily Readings, p. 94

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 48

**can use anything we face to benefit us and to produce growth within us! Always remember: God loves to bring surprises, not only to 90 year-old Sarah's, 100 year-old Abrahams, but to you as well! Knowing this fact will keep you on you tiptoe with joy and anticipation! Be constantly expecting miracles, and eventually you will be the recipient of one! This is the 'secret' of daily renewal!**

## **CONCLUSION:**

**“12 ‘secrets’ to personal renewal” – ‘secrets’ that God wants everyone to know about!**

- I. Keep Free of Bitterness.**
- II. Keep Yourself Free From the Competitive ‘Rat Race’.**
- III. Maintain Biblical Goals of Evangelism and Discipleship.**
- IV. Keep the Home Fires Burning Brightly.**
- V. Keep Laughter Alive In Your Life.**
- VI. Keep a ‘Clear Conscience’.**
- VII. Keep Diversion and Variety in Your Life.**
- VIII. Keep Yourself Physically Fit and Healthy.**
- IX. Pray Much About Everything and Worry About Nothing.**
- X. Be a Part of a Small Support Group on A Weekly Basis.**
- XI. Read Positive Books That Will Encourage You and Inspire You To Holy Living.**
- XII. Develop Positive Attitudes Towards ‘Setbacks’, ‘Problems’ and ‘Trials’.**

**Following these steps will always bring renewal to your body, mind and spirit.**

**BE RENEWED!**

