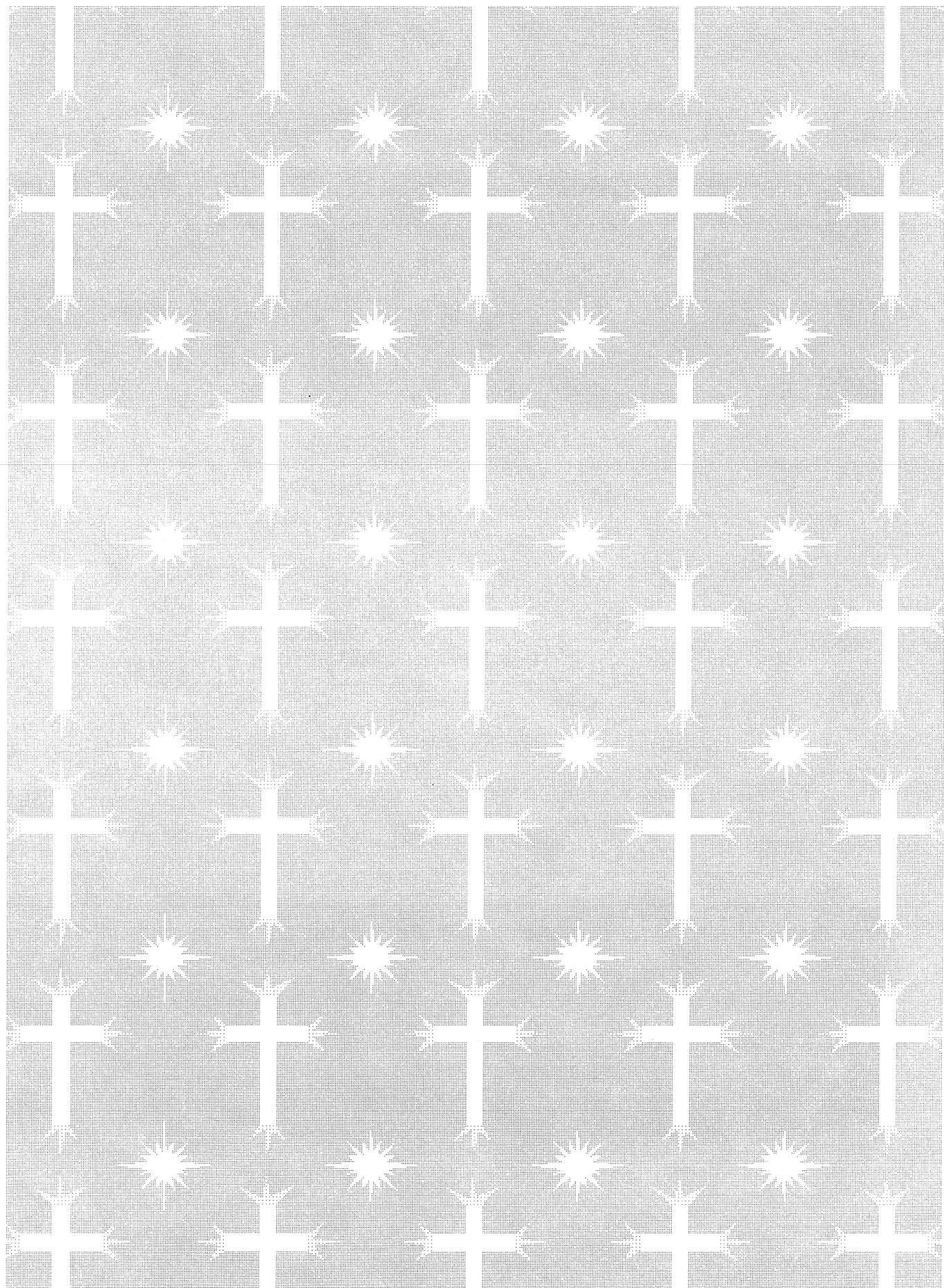




**THE MARKS OF A
GREAT CHURCH**

By

Ron Christian





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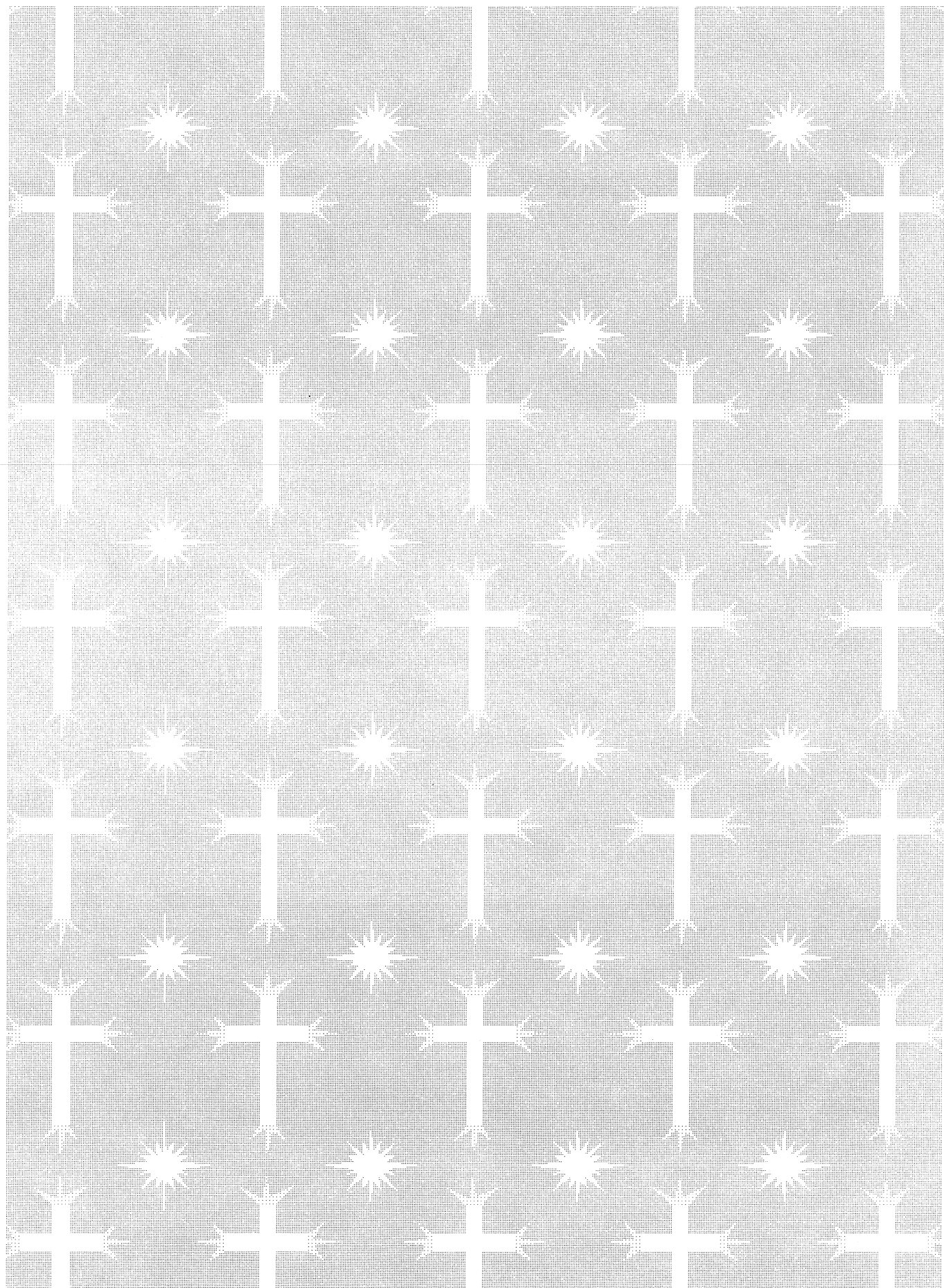


TABLE OF CONTENTS

| <u>CHAPTER</u> | <u>TITLE</u> | <u>PAGE</u> |
|----------------|---|-------------|
| 1 | WHY THE LOCAL CHURCH | 1-1 |
| 2. | KEEPING GOD'S DAY HOLY | 2-1 |
| 3. | LOOKING AT MAN'S FLIMSY EXCUSES | 3-1 |
| 4. | COMMIT YOURSELF TO CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH. | 4-1 |
| 5. | UNITY AMIDST DIVERSITY | 5-1 |
| 6. | LIVING IN THE SCRIPTURES | 6-1 |
| 7. | UNCEASING PRAYER | 7-1 |
| 8. | FULL OF GOOD WORKS | 8-1 |
| 9. | ENCOURAGING DYNAMIC HOME LIFE | 9-1 |
| 10. | SACRIFICIAL GIVING WITH CHEERFULNESS | 10-1 |
| 11. | WHY SHOULD I TITHE | 11-1 |
| 12. | UNDER A CURSE OR UNDER A BLESSING | 12-1 |
| 13. | MEANINGFUL WORSHIP | 13-1 |
| 14. | THE CALL TO TRUE WORSHIP | 14-1 |
| 15. | PEOPLE WITH A VISION | 15-1 |
| 16. | POWER FROM ON HIGH | 16-1 |
| 17. | THE GREATEST TEST OF A GREAT CHURCH | 17-1 |

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

Every sincere Christian should enjoy the fellowship of the Church! The person who is looking for a perfect Church will search in vain. People are imperfect, and therefore every local church is imperfect, for the Church is people, not merely organizations or buildings.

The Bible says, "*Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.*" (Hebrews 10:25, Living Bible) The Christian should desire to be with those who are like himself. In the natural world animals of like kind group together. Birds flock together, fish swim together, bees swarm together, cattle herd together, beavers work together, and ants travel together. Why should not God's highest creatures worship together? God has made us to fellowship, and what better place is there for us to fellowship than at God's House periodically?

In a secular newspaper appeared the following:

"Dear Church Member,

Don't wait until the hearse hauls you to church. If you do, you will go, regardless of the weather. There will be beautiful flowers there, but you won't enjoy them. The priest may say some good things about you, but you won't be able to hear them. There will be beautiful music, but you won't be enjoying it. There will be heartfelt prayers, but they will not touch your heart. There will be friends and relatives there, but you will not worship with them. You will go, no matter how many hypocrites are there. You will go, no matter how much you are needed at home. You won't be concerned about whether to attend Church or not. You'll never get another chance. Aren't you glad to be alive and well and have the choice of whether or not to go to church."

Why fellowship together at God's House? It is common knowledge that joint cooperation is essential in order to accomplish anything great. A campaign is won through joint effort. The campaign of Christ is planned for and carried out by the Church. Each Christian in the Church has the opportunity of helping others. We need the encouragement of God's counsel through one another. May we rejoice in the fellowship of God's people! The Psalmist said, "*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord.*" (Psalms 122:1)

What are the 'Marks of a Great Church'? There are many such marks that distinguish truly great churches today. There is no attempt in this book to be exhaustive in the answer to such an important question, but the several chapters in this short book are an attempt to at least highlight some of the most important 'marks' of a great church. These messages were first shared with friends and members of the First Free Methodist Church at Fort Collins, Colorado. It was my blessed privilege to pastor this local church for over 25 years.

Faithfulness to God and faithfulness to God's Church is something I was taught all throughout my childhood and youth. Although I have a humble ancestry, I am rich with a heritage of godly forefathers who were faithful to Christ and to His Church.

There is much which I value in my heritage, but nothing more than the many lessons I have learned in loyalty and faithfulness. I only pray for God's grace to help me to pass on such heritage to my children.

As a child, I regularly went with my mother to Wednesday night prayer meetings in a little white- framed Free Methodist Church in Fountain, Colorado. My mother rarely missed attending those prayer meetings, even though she was often weary and many times plagued with headaches. She believed in faithfulness and she practiced it throughout my childhood. She was faithful to teach me the Bible and to pray with me daily in my home.

My grandmother, before her, was equally faithful to her Lord and to her Church. It was her godly life, along with that of my mother, that strongly influenced me to become a Christian. My great grandmother, who died in 1950, was a faithful, godly woman, seldom missing the church services held in the same little church where I received my childhood training.

My great grandfather was a humble, but faithful man, I am told. I found his obituary in an old family album. "Joseph E. Benedict was born at Brownsville, Nebraska, May 12, 1857, and departed this life at his home at Fountain, Colorado, October 8, 1928...Early in life he united with the Free Methodist Church and was a very active, faithful member and sacrificed greatly for the work of God. Though for many years a cripple he was always faithful. He would hobble to Church or prayer meeting even when others thought the weather too bad or they were too weary." (written October, 1928)

My great, great grandfather was born in 1821 and died in Fountain, Colorado, in 1909. His pastor, who wrote his obituary, notes, "When the Free Methodist Church was organized in Fountain he and his wife became charter members. He loved the means of grace and often, even in the last months of his life, walked with trembling steps to the house of God". (quote appeared in the Fountain Newspaper, May 1909).

My children are sixth generation Free Methodists, a fact that is important to me, but not nearly as important as the fact that they are learning to be faithful to God and to His Church.

Will you allow weather or weariness or worry to keep you from being faithful? Can you say with the little chorus, "Though no one follow, still I will follow"? Follow whom? Follow the one who declared, "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" (Matthew 16:24, NIV)

"Father, help me to so live every day of my life that it can someday be said of me, 'He was a very active, faithful member and sacrificed greatly for the work of God. He loved the means of grace and often, even in the last months of his life, walked with trembling steps to the house of God."

Affirmation for Life: The best gift I can give my grandchildren is a godly heritage of faithfulness and fidelity to my God and my Church.

We are living at a time in history when we need to reaffirm our confidence in and declare our love for the local church! The Church is most precious to Christ! The Church is the Bride of Christ! Christ loved the Church so much that He died for the Church. (Note Ephesians 5:25-27)

"The Church's one Foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord; She is His new creation by water and the Word; From heaven He came and sought her to be His Holy Bride; With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died." (The Church's One Foundation)

Know the 'Marks of a Great Church' and help make your own local church a greater church because you serve greatly!

- Ron Christian -

Dedicated To:
The Hundreds of Members and Friends
of the
Fort Collins First Free Methodist Church

To whom I served as Pastor from 1967 to 1994. Because of the Christlike Character which was demonstrated in the lives of so many of these precious persons, this local body of believers corporately evidenced "The Marks Of A Great Church."

Acknowledgments

As author of this book, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Shirley Ruiz, who dedicated her great skills, abounding energy, and many hours of her time, in typing the entire manuscript of this book. I feel certain that her committed hands will bring great blessings to many persons.

CHAPTER 1

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

WHY THE LOCAL CHURCH?

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WHY THE LOCAL CHURCH?

OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:19-25

TEXT: *"I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* (Matthew 16:18)

INTRODUCTION: Notes Richard DeHaan, "The person who neglects regular attendance in the house of God may be revealing that he has never really been saved. It is also possible that this failure is a symptom of a low spiritual condition, and surely continued absence from services will deepen his backslidden state. We know that some people live in areas where there are no Bible-preaching churches, and that others cannot attend due to circumstances beyond their control. God will give special grace, and the Holy Spirit will minister to their hearts. The chastening hand of God, however, may manifest itself to those who willfully neglect worship with God's people. It is certain that they will reap a harvest of spiritual loss. Moreover, meeting with other Christians in worship is not only beneficial to oneself, but also to others. You will notice that Hebrews 10:25 says, *'but exhorting (encouraging) one another.'* Your presence will be an encouragement to others. Your absence may disappoint some weak Christian, and help put him on the road to a spiritually cold condition. Then too, a half-empty church does not make for a good service. It does not present much appeal to the stranger who comes in. As a Christian, you have a solemn responsibility to the Lord in this matter of church attendance."

- I. The Bible Commands It
- II. Jesus Practiced Weekly Attendance At The Jewish Synagogue
- III. The Local Church Is A Center Of Worship
- IV. The Local Church Is A Center Of Fellowship
- V. The Local Church Is A Center Of Instruction
- VI. The Local Church Is A Center Of Prayer And Evangelism
- VII. The Local Church Is A Center For Strategy Formulation
- VIII. The Local Church Is A Center Of Influence For Societal Change
- IX. The Local Church Is A Center For Organized Giving
- X. The Local Church Is A Center For Christian Nurture

CONCLUSION: If you do not think the organized local church is important, you have several Scriptural arguments to contend with. Be a part of the local church! With David, declare, *"I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."* (Psalms 23:6b) Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee." (Psalms 84:4)

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

WHY THE LOCAL CHURCH?

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:19-25

TEXT: *"I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* (Matthew 16:18)

INTRODUCTION: There are those who want to do away with the organized Church altogether, arguing that the meaning of 'Church' as Jesus used it is merely a spiritual organism embodying all true Christians, and that there is no place for the organized local church and denomination. Admittedly this is a very radical position, but those who advocate abolishing the organized Church are serious. Others who don't advocate the actual abolition of the organized church, nevertheless do not think the local church is really important. Such an attitude is reflected in a lack of consistency in church attendance.

Are such people who wish to do away with the organized church right in their viewpoint, or are they mistaken? To answer such a question from the Scripture - and the Scriptures are the final source of authority - we must understand the meaning of the word 'Church'. "There are two different words which stand behind the English word 'church'. One of these is kuriakou... We know that it means literally, 'of the Lord' but how did it come into use? In early Christian days, there were no special structures such as cathedrals or sanctuaries or meeting houses for Christians to gather. At first, Christians met this problem by setting apart a regular house for the special purpose of worship, and such a house came to be called 'a house of the Lord.' This was shortened to 'of the Lord', and from this word kuriakou our present word church is thought to originate. The New Testament expression for the English word church is ecclesia. Ecclesia means quite literally 'calling out', and the New Testament writers use this word primarily to mean Christians." (The Mature Church Member; pg. 125)

Thus, we can see that the double meaning behind the word 'church' draws attention to two facts: (1) all true believers are members of the universal, invisible organism of Christ, (2) all true believers, as the 'called out ones' are to meet together regularly to worship God.

Why the local church? That is the question. When considering the meaning of the word 'church', there seems to be ample justification for the existence of the local organization called the church. The local church is the expression - however imperfect - of the universal spiritual Church of Christ. He who believes in the local church has both Scriptural and logical support behind him. "Why the local church?" or put in another way, "Why should Christians meet regularly in a building and have a local organization called 'the church?'"

Notes Richard DeHaan, "The person who neglects regular attendance in the house of God may be revealing that he has never really been saved. It is also possible that this failure is a symptom of a low spiritual condition, and surely continued absence from services will deepen his backslidden

state. We know that some people live in areas where there are no Bible-preaching churches, and that others cannot attend due to circumstances beyond their control. God will give special grace, and the Holy Spirit will minister to their hearts. The chastening hand of God, however, may manifest itself to those who willfully neglect worship with God's people. It is certain that they will reap a harvest of spiritual loss. Moreover, meeting with other Christians in worship is not only beneficial to oneself, but also to others. You will notice that Hebrews 10:25 says, *'but exhorting (encouraging) one another.'* Your presence will be an encouragement to others. Your absence may disappoint some weak Christian, and help put him on the road to a spiritually cold condition. Then, too, a half-empty church does not make for a good service. It does not present much appeal to the stranger who comes in. As a Christian, you have a solemn responsibility to the Lord in this matter of church attendance."

"A minister asked a returned GI to speak in his pulpit. He said, 'Like a mighty army moves the church of God. The trouble is that now millions know exactly how an army moves. Suppose the army accepted the lame excuses that many of you think good enough for not attending the church. Imagine this: Reveille at 7 am - squads on parade ground, Sergeant barks out, 'Count fours!' 'One, two, three', and four is missing. 'Where is Private Smith?' 'Mr. Smith was too sleepy to get up. He said to tell you he would be with you in spirit.' 'That's fine,' says the sergeant. 'Where's Brown?' 'He's playing golf. You know how important recreation is.' 'Sure, sure,' says the sergeant cheerfully. 'Hope he has a good game. Where's Robinson?' 'He is sorry, but he is entertaining guests today. Besides, he was at drill last week.' 'Tell him he is welcome any time he finds it convenient to drop in for drill.' If any GI pulled that stuff he would get twenty days in the brig. Yet, you hear stuff like that every week in church. 'Like a mighty army!' Why, if this church moved like a mighty army, a lot of you folks would be court martialled within an hour." (Shoe-Leather Faith; Rosell; No. 7)

"Let us not neglect our church duties and meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the Day of His coming back is drawing near." (Hebrews 10:25, Living Bible)

I like the following which my wife, Venita Christian, wrote. "The analogy of the Church which I enjoy the most is that of a family. When we become a Child of God we become a member of God's family. We are blessed with many privileges. One of those is that of growing up in the loving, caring atmosphere of the Family.

"As a child the most special time in our day, after a big day of working in the field, was meal time. Our meals were served at regular times, the food was delicious, and the fellowship was great! We were all expected to pull up our chair to the table to be together at meal time. As a Christian, the special time with my brothers and sisters in Christ is at 'meal time'. It is at this time that I am strengthened by the Bread of Life and encouraged by the joy of the fellowship in order that I will be a better worker in the Harvest Field. In our local Family of God the meal is served regularly, several times during the week. Around the Family Table is a chair bearing the name of each of our family members. A meal is served at Sunday Morning Worship, Sunday School, Sunday Evening Celebration, Christian Growth Group, etc. When we fail to 'pull up our chair' when the meal is served, we most likely will become weak spiritually and will eventually become ill. Not only do we suffer, but also do our family members. No one can fill our chair but us. When we are not present

at the `meal', we are missed because we are loved. I think I understand more clearly now, having experienced the sorrow of some family members' chairs not being filled regularly, why my father insisted that we all be present at meal time. Our presence was a sign of health and our presence made the family complete. We needed each other after a long hard day of work. The laughter and the joy over the meal was so satisfying and drew us even closer together. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we need the nourishment served at `meal time', and we need each other. When we are not present at `meal time'; we become weak, our chair is vacant, and other family members are concerned because they love us.

"As one who wants to be present at each meal served to our Church Family, I have noticed that one of the first signs of spiritual illness, is the lack of `pulling up' to the table when the meals are served. Often we feel tired and weak after a day of working in the heat, battling the obstacles of life. The enemy of our souls, the author of spiritual illness, delights in seeing our absence at the table. Sometimes I would tell my mother `I'm too tired to eat.' She would respond with `Come and join us, you'll feel better.' And I did! When you feel weak and tired, I urge you as a family member, to `pull up your chair' to the table. You'll feel better.

"Family members, some day we will be invited to the table where the meal of meals will be served. The Bible tells us *Blessed are those who are invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb* (Revelation 19:9). What a thrill to pull up our chair to the grandest meal of all with Christ and the Family of God! Somehow I believe our response to the regular meals with our Family here on earth will influence whether or not we will be blessed to receive that grand invitation to the Meal of Meals. My prayer daily for all my brothers and sisters in Christ and for myself is that we will have a good hearty appetite for the Bread of Life and that we will want to pull up our chairs to the table when the meal is served! See you at `meal time'".

Are you committed to regular attendance in your local church? A vital relationship with God cannot long be maintained without regular attendance at the public worship services. I have noticed, after working with scores and scores of young believers during the last 25 years, that those young believers who become committed to regular church attendance are the same ones who generally grow into spiritual maturity. The opposite is also generally true: Those young believers (or, for that matter, older believers) who `drop out' of regular church attendance also `drop out' of vital relationship with God. Such persons become luke-warm Christians and sometimes backslide completely. Church attendance alone is not sufficient to maintain a vital relationship with God, but it is almost impossible to enjoy a relationship with God without commitment to consistent church attendance. I have never yet met a mature Christian who does not habitually attend public church services.

Notes C. S. Lewis, "Enemy-occupied territory - that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say, landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage. When you go to Church, you are really listening into the secret wireless from our friends. That is why this enemy is so anxious to prevent us from going. He does it by playing on our conceit and laziness and intellectual snobbery." (The Best of C. S. Lewis, pg. 429, 432, 435)

PROPOSITION: Why the local church? That is the question. When considering the meaning of the word 'church', there seems to be ample justification for the existence of the local organization called the church. The local church is the expression - however imperfect - of the universal spiritual church of Christ. He who believes in the local church has both scriptural and logical support behind him. "Why the local church?" or, put in another way, "Why should Christians meet regularly in a building and have a local organization called the church?"

I. The Bible Commands It

The Israelites were commanded by God to assemble at a certain place for worship and for giving. *"You shall resort to the place which the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to receive his Name that it may dwell there. There you shall come and bring your whole-offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and contributions, your vows and free will offerings, and the first-born of your herds and flocks."* (Deuteronomy 12:4-7, NEB)

The early Christian Church met on the first day of the week (Sunday) for worship. Wrote Paul to the Corinthians: *"Every Sunday each of you is to put aside and keep by him a sum in proportion to his gains, so that there may be no collecting when I come."* (I Corinthians 16:2, NEB)

In Hebrews 10:25 we find explicit command not to neglect church attendance: *"And let us not hold aloof from our church meetings, as some do. Let us do all we can to help one another's faith, and this the more earnestly as we see the final day drawing ever nearer."* (Hebrews 10:25). It is implied that one way to help one another's faith is by faithfully attending Church. Said Jesus, *"Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled."* (Luke 14:23)

Obedience to God's commands (one of which is Hebrews 10:25) is proof of one's love for God. *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:16) *"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."* (John 15:14)

When one considers God's commandment that Christians should never neglect their church meetings (Hebrews 10:25), there should be no reason for making such a statement as this: "When the Spirit moves upon me and tells me to attend Church, then I will attend." God has already commanded Christians to be faithful in church attendance. No special leadership or instruction is needed regarding church attendance.

II. Jesus Practiced Weekly Attendance At The Jewish Synagogue.

There were many Jewish practices which did not appeal to Christ, but nevertheless, Jesus weekly attended the synagogue service. *"And he (Jesus) came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and, as his custom (or habit) was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read."* (Luke 4:16)

"We tend to reduce the important things in life to the level of habit, and it is well that we do. How unmanageable life would become if it were not for the good habits we form. For example, imagine our confusion if each day we decided afresh whether to wash our faces, brush our teeth, comb our hair, or attend to the other numberless details that go into a day's living. By reducing such practices to habit we make sure that the important things are not left out of our living, and we also form life into a meaningful pattern. Certainly, the Christian will put church attendance into the category of those habits that give his life meaning. Nothing good can result from making a new decision whether or not to attend church whenever time for service draws near... Regularity will come only, however, from firm resolution! Discipleship will require discipline at this point." (The Mature Church Member; pg. 117)

The early Church followed the example of Jesus: After Jesus returned to heaven, *"they (Disciples) returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and spent all their time in the temple praising God."* (Luke 24:52, 53, NEB)

III. Local Church Is Center Of Worship

It is a place where many Christians may gather together to offer corporate praise and adoration to God. Wrote the Psalmist: *"I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee."* (Psalms 22:22) On the night of Jesus' birth, there was a *"a heavenly host praising God"* (Luke 2:13). God is pleased when a host of people gather together to laud and magnify His name.

Some don't seem to want to worship with what they consider to be a large congregation, but the Scriptures seem to say that God is pleased when many gather in praise to God. The larger the congregation which praises God, the better. John the Revelator writes of a vision: *"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindred, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."* (Revelation 7:9:10)

IV. Local Church Is Center Of Fellowship

Wrote the Psalmist, *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."* (Psalms 133:1)

The local church provides a place for Christians regularly to gather together to share one another's successes or failures, and to receive mutual encouragement from one another. Jesus said that the Church is like a body, with believers as parts of the body and members one of another.

V. Local Church Is Center Of Instruction

Imagine doing away with all organized public schools, and each parent teaching his own child the many disciplines of study. If the public school is important for training our children in the

knowledge and skills of secular subjects, the local church is equally important as a center of instruction for training not only children but adults in the skill and knowledge of meaningful moral and spiritual living.

At a church can be found qualified teachers and trained ministers, both of whom spend much time in preparation for teaching and preaching. Carefully prepared Sunday School materials explaining many Biblical truths are available for study, and discussion groups provide opportunity for sharing and gaining new insights of truth.

IV. Local Church Is Center Of Prayer And Evangelism

Said Jesus, "*My house is the house of prayer.*" (Luke 19:46) Jesus made it clear that His House was not to be a center for business transactions or profit-making, but rather a place where people can come to meet with God. It is a place of communing with God.

The local church is further a place where the Gospel is preached and where people can pray to get right with God. The church must be always thought of as a place where the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed and people are urged to repent of their sins and turn to Christ. The Church is a central place where people can gather to hear the message of God as delivered through His anointed messenger.

VII. Local Church Is Center For Strategy Formulation

Jesus gave the Great Commission to all Christians, and Christians who take the Commission seriously will put their heads together to devise better methods to effectively carry out the Commission. The local church ought to be the center where earnest Christians regularly gather to discuss methods that have worked and methods that have failed in the work of outreach in the community (or field of service). The early Church was effective because it saw the importance of both the Base (local congregation of Christians) and the Field (the world of sinners in society that needed to be converted). The early Christians used the Church as a base from which to receive strength, healing, encouragement, and instruction - all for the purpose of equipping them to go into the Field to fight the battle for Truth and to recruit soldiers for Christ from the Enemy Ranks.

VIII. Local Church Is A Center Of Influence For Societal Change

One individual can exert some influence on society but very little, compared to the powerful influence of an organization. The voice of the Church (which is the united voices of scores of people) is louder and stronger than the voice of one single individual. The greater the union in numbers, solidified in an organization, the greater the possibility of bringing about societal change. This is true of a local church, a denomination, or an interdenominational organization. Billy Graham once stated that the National Association of Evangelicals (made up of a membership of many denominations) was finally strong enough and influential enough to be respected in society. There is power (good power) in numbers, when there is little or no power in separate individuals, each trying to work separately.

IX. Local Church Is Center For Organized Giving

Giving through the organized channels of the church is a Scriptural method. For instance, the Corinthian church took up offerings for the poor saints in Jerusalem. This type of thing was common practice among the churches which Paul founded. (I Corinthians 16:1-3)

My few dollars, reflecting my tithes and offerings, cannot do much, but combined with your tithes and offerings, our money together can do significant things for God and our fellowman. For instance, our dollars together can support a foreign missionary, when my dollars alone or your dollars alone could not do this. When many churches together organize a denomination, the combined money from many churches can provide Christian colleges, orphanages, hospitals, etc. The local church provides us the opportunity to make our gifts to God more useful and far more powerful.

X. Local Church Is Center For Christian Nurture

Young Christians can receive more and better instruction through meeting weekly at a common center (Church) than through separate attempts outside the Church. This is not to say that outside efforts should be discontinued (NOT AT ALL! They should be increased!), but it is to say that time can be saved and quality can be maintained by having young Christians meet weekly for training at the local church, as well as the Home Bible Studies. It is not a case of choosing between Home Bible Studies or Nurture in the Local Church. To conserve the fruits of evangelism in the homes, there is need of a common center (local church) where many young Christians can learn and grow together.

The population is increasing so rapidly that it is an impossibility to carry on long-range follow-up for new Christians on a one-to-one basis weekly in the homes. There are not enough dedicated Christians to carry out such a personal ministry for any great length of time. Young Christians who are converted in their homes must eventually be brought together at the local church where a dedicated teacher can give nurture to several Christians at one time. Besides, the young Christian needs all the other benefits that can be derived from meeting with more mature Christians in the larger body of the Church.

Even after considering all of the arguments in favor of the organized local church, there may still be those who instinctively react towards the thought of organization. May such individuals be reminded that organization is essential in any facet of society. No secular business could be carried on without clear-cut organization. The work of God is the greatest business of all, and therefore there must be clear-cut organization. God is not the author of confusion (I Corinthians 14:33). One way to cut down on confusion is to have good organization.

The principle of organization is shown in the universe and in all of God's nature. Joshua organized the Israelites into twelve tribes. The Levites were chosen by God to be the organized religious teachers for the Children of Israel. Jesus divided the Five Thousand into groups of fifty and one hundred. Organization is inherent to life and is a means of accomplishing important things in life. The work of God is of no exception. The most powerful organization on earth is the Church. It is

a God-ordained institution. It is God who builds His Church (Matthew 16:18b), but He uses men as instruments for that growth.

CONCLUSION: If you do not think the organized local church is important, you have several scriptural and logical arguments to contend with. There are at least ten good reasons for believing in and being a part of the local church:

- I. The Bible Commands It
- II. Jesus Practiced Weekly Attendance At the Jewish Synagogue
- III. The Local Church Is A Center Of Worship
- IV. The Local Church Is A Center Of Fellowship
- V. The Local Church Is A Center Of Instruction
- VI. The Local Church Is A Center Of Prayer And Evangelism
- VII. The Local Church Is A Center For Strategy Formulation
- VIII. The Local Church Is A Center Of Influence For Societal Change
- IX. The Local Church Is A Center For Organized Giving
- X. The Local Church Is A Center For Christian Nurture

"I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." (Psalms 23:6b) (Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee." (Psalms 84:4)

**THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH
WHY THE LOCAL CHURCH?**

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The person who neglects regular attendance in the house of God may be revealing that he has never really been saved."
2. According to Richard DeHaan, what does failure regularly to attend public worship services demonstrate, and how can such failure hinder other people?
3. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "If this church moved like a might army, a lot of you folks would be court martialled within hour."
4. According to Hebrews 10:25, what are Christians commanded to do? (Read this verse in several different translations).
5. Why is the analogy of the Church as a 'Big Happy Family' around the 'Table of God' such an appropriate picture?
6. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A vital relationship with God cannot long be maintained without regular attendance at the public worship services."
7. Why is the Enemy of man's soul (Satan) so anxious to prevent believers from attending Church Services?
8. From the Scriptural viewpoint, what is the double meaning of the word 'Church'?
9. According to Deuteronomy 12:4-7, what were the ancient Israelites commanded to do? Upon the first day of the week, what did the early Christians do, according to I Corinthians 16:2?
10. Should Christians attend public Church services only when they 'feel' like attending, or only when they 'feel' a special 'moving of the Holy Spirit' directing them to attend public Church services? Why or why not?
11. What, according to Luke 4:16, was one of Jesus' basic 'habits' in His life? Why is the establishment of 'holy habits' in our personal lives so vitally important?
12. What Scriptural (or logical) support can you give to indicate that God is very pleased when a very large group of people gather together to praise and to magnify the Lord? (Note Revelation 7:9-10).

13. As it relates to Christian fellowship within the local church, tell how 'excessive conformity' and 'excessive individualism' each hinders and eventually destroys wholesome corporate life within a body of believers.
14. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "The miracle of the early Church was that of poor sticks making a grand conflagration."
15. Why is it very difficult, if not impossible, for your own personal 'faith' to be kindled in isolation from the 'faith' of other believers?
16. In terms of time, extent, and degree, how much should a local church be involved in the intellectual and spiritual instruction of both youth and adults?
17. If Jesus intended the local church to be a 'house of prayer' (Luke 19:46), what practical steps should a church take to realize this goal?
18. How can it be said that the local church is a 'center for evangelism' if relatively few 'sinners' are coming to the local church services? Why was the 'Early Church' so effective in its evangelistic efforts?
19. What practical steps can a local church take to exercise greater influence in society, in order that redemptive changes may take place in society's institutions?
20. If a believer is regularly meeting in a small midweek group of believers, do you think it is necessary for him to meet regularly with a large group of fellow believers in a Sunday Morning Worship Service? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 2

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

KEEPING GOD'S DAY HOLY

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

KEEPING GOD'S DAY HOLY

OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 20:8-11

TEXT: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

INTRODUCTION: Notes Charles Allen, "God said more about the fourth commandment than any other. God needed only four words in regard to killing, but He used ninety-four words to tell us to 'remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy'.

The Pharisees had "changed the Sabbath from a day of joy to a day of gloom. This they had done by hedging it about by hundreds of rigid rules." (Clovis Chappell) None of us would want to go back to those legalistic days. However, while there may be some of this type of legalism still lingering, there is much, much more of the opposite response toward the Lord's Day - that of indulgence and complacency and indifference, and pleasure-seeking, and disregard for the sacredness of it. Permissiveness!

"If the Sunday of our fathers was blue, ours seems to be a bit scarlet." (Clovis Chappell)

PROPOSITION: The Lord's Day is to be a day of rest - that is, physical and spiritual re-creation - and also a day of worship at God's House and throughout the entire day. No amount of excuses can destroy this two-fold purpose of the Lord's Day - the 'Christian Sabbath'.

I. Purpose Of The Lord's Day

A. Day of Rest and Re-creation.

1. To The Body.
2. To The Soul.

B. Day of Worship.

II. Excuses People Have Regarding The Sabbath

A. "I need seven days to get all done that I have to do. Six days are not enough time to accomplish my tasks."

B. "Every day means the same to me. Sunday is no more important to me than Monday."

- C. "I have only one day a week off from my job. Surely God wouldn't expect me to take half of my day off to spend in Church."
- D. "I need the entire week-end for myself and my family, to relax and to be with my family, since I don't see them too often during the week."

CONCLUSION: "Men may dig in the ruins of America a thousand years from now to find an answer to the question, 'What was responsible for the fall and destruction of our nation?'" But on the other hand, "men may dig in the ruins of America a thousand years from now, and, perhaps, scientists will be made to wonder what kept America alive and powerful. Someone may suggest, 'America has remained a great nation because the people of our country have been careful to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.' Let us hope so!"

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

KEEPING GOD'S DAY HOLY

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 20:8-11

TEXT: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

INTRODUCTION: "Years ago a Christian was on his way to church on Sunday morning. A man with his wagon and team and load of wood came by. The Christian called out, 'Stop, you are running over it.' Then as he looked under the wagon, he cried again, 'You are running right over it and are killing it.' The driver stopped, got down from the wagon, and looked for the mangled body of a child or at least a dog, but nothing was there. He then said to the Christian, 'What did I run over?' 'Over the fourth commandment', the Christian replied, 'Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.' " (Myron Boyd)

"God said more about the fourth commandment than any other. God needed only four words in regard to killing, but He used ninety-four words to tell us to 'remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.'" (Charles Allen; pg.55; God's Psychiatry)

It is true that none of us would want to go back to the Old Testament days and try to keep the rigid laws regarding the Sabbath that the Jews were required to keep. For instance Exodus 31:14 records God's rigid command: *"Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you; every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people."* When Jesus came, the Old Testament rigidity was destroyed, and the standard of grace was substituted. In fact, Jesus himself did things on the Sabbath that the religious leaders could not approve. Jesus said something that is very important for us to remember, "The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath." In other words, the Sabbath is not meant to make life sad and gloomy but rather happy and more productive. In fact, the Pharisees had invented all kinds of petty rules and interpretations concerning the Old Testament Laws, the result of which was to cramp and to hinder and to destroy, rather than to make happy.

The Pharisees had "changed the sabbath from a day of joy to a day of gloom. This they had done by hedging it about by hundreds of rigid rules. There were more than fifteen hundred ways in which a man might break the sabbath. They were so numerous, in fact, that it took a great scholar to know them all. For instance, one could not kindle a fire on the sabbath. If a man's ox fell into a ditch on the sabbath, he might pull him out; but if the man himself fell in, he had to stay there. If he should take a sip of vinegar for food, that was permissible but if he should take a sip in order to help his aching tooth, he had broken the sabbath. If he was bitten by a flea, he was compelled to permit the little pest to keep on his annoying work. To undertake to catch it was to be guilty of the sin of hunting. In fact, one saint suggested that the proper way to observe the sabbath was to lie in exactly the same position for twenty-four hours. In later years the Puritans fell somewhat into the same error. There is a story of a certain sea captain who returned to his home in Massachusetts after an absence

of two years. His wife met him at the gate, and he kissed her. But it was not lawful to kiss one's wife on the sabbath. Therefore, this wicked captain was put in the stocks for his lack of reverence for this holy day. It was this attitude toward the sabbath that made it for many a day of ugliness and horror." (Chappell; pg.64)

None of us would want to go back to those legalistic days. However, while there may be some of this type of legalism still lingering, there is much, much more of the opposite response toward the Lord's Day - that of indulgence and complacency, and indifference, and pleasure-seeking, and disregard for the sacredness of it. Permissiveness!

"But if the Sunday of our fathers was blue, ours seems to be a bit scarlet...It is the day in which those whose business it is to amuse us have to work the hardest. It is a day when we have some of our biggest athletic contests. It is the day when many, even of our church people, give their most elaborate parties. It is the day for our biggest picnics. It is the day on which we try to get enough exercise to last us an entire week, when we try to get enough sunburn to take a full six days to heal. It is the day when the largest crowds flock to our theaters. It is the day when our roads are most congested by traffic. It is the day that we send the greatest number of wounded to our hospitals. It is the day on which we send the largest number of slaughtered to our morgues. Surely the day is no longer blue, but scarlet." (Chappell; pg.64,65)

PROPOSITION: The Lord's Day is to be a day of rest - that is, physical and spiritual re-creation - and also a Day of Worship at God's House and throughout the entire day. No amount of excuses can destroy this two-fold purpose of the Lord's Day - the Christian Sabbath.

I. Purpose Of The Lord's Day

A. Day of Rest and Re-creation

1. To the body

The body is made to work - ("six days thou shalt work", showing that work is beneficial and included in God's original purpose for man, even before the Fall, for then man was to dress the Garden). However, the body is not made to work without regular periods of rest - rest one day in seven. Machines will break down if they are run indefinitely; there must be time for them to be inactive. How much more true of the human body. It is my understanding that scientists have shown that man needs rest every seventh day. There were "two groups of donkeys at a certain mountain resort. These donkeys were used to take sightseers to the top of a lofty mountain. 'One group', the observer declared, 'looked well kept, but the other was lean and weary, with no seeming interest in life.' Why the difference? One man sent his donkeys up the mountain seven days a week; the other refused to work his more than six days. The difference in their appearance indicated that even a donkey knows that one day in seven should be used as a day of rest." (Chappell; page 69)

A golf course manager said, "Those business executives may not need a day off in seven to rest, but our putting greens do."

2. To the soul

Man is not a mere beast, not even the most intelligent of beasts, but rather an immortal soul. Therefore, the soul of man must be regularly enlightened and inspired and refreshed. God did not intend that man should "slave away at the grinding tasks of earth all of the time and thus deny and starve his spiritual nature slowly to turn into sodden beasts of toil." (Maurer; page 26)

"A group of American explorers went to Africa. They employed some native guides. The first day they rushed, as they did also on the second, third, and every day. On the seventh day they noticed the guides sitting under a tree. 'Come on', they shouted. One of the guides replied, 'We no go today. We rest today to let our souls catch up with our bodies.' For that purpose, God says, Remember the Sabbath'." (Allen; page 56)

Every day is a day in which we should honor and worship God, but the Lord's Day is meant to be a day of unhurried waiting upon God. This can be done in many ways - reading a book of the Bible in one sitting (Did you realize that any book in the New Testament can be read aloud by a slow reader in less than three hours?), gathering around a piano or organ and singing; playing some relaxing, worshipful music; walking among the trees in the woods to adore and commune with God; cheering some shut-ins by visiting them; relaxing with some friends around a dinner table; reading an interesting and inspirational book; spending some time in prayer alone with God; and above all else, spending time worshipping at the House of God.

Disregard for the Lord's Day results in spiritual blindness. "An old miner once explained to a visitor, 'I let my mules spend one day a week outside the mines to keep them from going blind'. And the person who does not spend time away from the daily grind of life goes blind in his soul." (Allen;page 57) "Dostoevski reminds us, 'A man who bows down to nothing can never bear the burden of himself.' Many of our fears, worries, and nervous tensions would be saved if we kept this fourth rule of God." (Ibid;page 58)

Instead of the Lord's Day becoming a day of rest and re-creation of body and soul, it is increasingly becoming a day of hectic activity, and a fast and vain pursuit of pleasure and thrill. People come back on a Sunday night from a long week-end trip - not rested and refreshed and ready to start a fresh new week, but instead they come back so weary and drained that many employers report that their employees have to take all day Monday to recuperate from a hectic week-end!

"The sabbath was made for man, the whole man, and for all men. Therefore, I have no right to use it in such a fashion as to rob either myself or others of its highest usefulness." (Chappell;page 67) I should not cause others to labor on the Lord's Day, if I can help it.

B. Day of Worship

"Just as men build telescopes to gain a clearer view of the stars, so almost since the dawn of civilization, have men built churches and set aside a day to worship, in order to gain a clearer view of God and the high purposes of life. 'Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy', said God." (Allen; page 58)

"The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in nature that is ours." (Wordsworth)

Through worship, we become spiritually renewed and strengthened: "Even the youth shall faint and be weary, and the young man shall utterly fall! But they that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength." What we need, as spiritual creatures, is periodic times of unhurried waiting upon God - meditating, worshipping, waiting, relaxing, trusting, and enjoying the presence of our Creator.

We must meditate every day but God has especially willed that we should gather together once a week in group worship and praise. God has designed the church as a place for spiritual renewal and Christian fellowship. There are those today who are questioning even the importance of the local church. There are those who say that they can worship God at home or in nature just as well as at Church. It is not to be denied that God can be worshiped at home or in the out-of-doors of nature. However, it is to be recognized that there are definite advantages to worshipping God in His Holy Sanctuary.

Do you remember the dedication of the Temple by Solomon? *"When Solomon had finished the house of the Lord and the royal palace and had successfully carried out all that he had planned for the house of the Lord and the palace, the Lord appeared to him by night and said, 'I have heard your prayer and I have chosen this place to be my place of sacrifice....I have chosen and consecrated this house, that my Name may be there for all time and my eyes and my heart be fixed on it for ever.'"* (II Chronicles 7) The local church is an important place that God has chosen to be a place of sacrifice - a place where we regularly present ourselves in loving worship as a living sacrifice to Almighty God. How it must grieve God when we neglect to come to his House regularly to present ourselves and our love to Him!

Why go to church? There are many reasons, all of which directly or indirectly relate to the worship of God. (1) The Bible commands it; (2) Jesus practiced weekly attendance at a worship service, (3) Local church is a center of worship, (4) Local church is a center

of Christian fellowship, (5) Local church is a center of Instruction, (6) Local church is a center of prayer and evangelism, (7) Local church is a center for strategy formulation, (8) Local church is a center of influence for societal change, (9) Local church is a center for organized giving, (10) Local church is a center for Christian nurture.

II. Excuses People Have Regarding The Sabbath

A. "I need seven days to get all done that I have to do. Six days are not enough time to accomplish my tasks." It has been shown over and over that more work can ultimately be accomplished in six working days than in seven! "Gerald Kennedy tells of two parties who stated out across the plains in the pioneer days, going west to California. One was led by a religious man and one was led by an irreligious man. One group stopped all of each Lord's day for worship and rest. The other party was so anxious to reach the gold of California that it would not take time to stop. The men drove every day. The amazing that is thing party which observed the Sabbath arrived first. We have now well established the fact in our own nation that one can do more work in six days, even in five, than in seven. A run-down person is an unproductive person." (Allen;page 56)

B. "Every day means the same to me. Sunday is no more important to me than Monday." "But to treat Sunday in this fashion is to throw it away. 'The Sabbath', said Jesus, 'was made for man'. Unless that statement is plain nonsense, Jesus meant that the sabbath was to be used in a fashion a bit different from other days. It was to be unique. To refuse to treat it so is to reject this precious gift." (Chappell;page 62,63) Remember, it is the Atheists who would like to disregard the Sabbath, and if we piously say that Sunday means no more to us than Monday, we practically are saying that we would be willing, along with the Atheist, to forget and to disregard the Sabbath. It is the Atheists who would not hesitate to make the common worker no different than a common beast of burden - getting as much work out of a man as he could.

C. "I have only one day a week off from my job. Surely God wouldn't expect me to take half of my day off to spend in Church." "On the contrary, Sunday is the only day he does not have; it is the Lord's day. Christ claimed the first day of the week through His resurrection on that day." (Coffman;page 57) Besides, this is all the more reason why a person should be in services - to gain spiritual strength to face the arduous labor of the job on the other six days of the week.

D. "I need the entire week-end for myself and my family, to relax and to be with my family, since I don't see them too often during the week." Such a statement has several fallacies in it. First, it is a statement that is purely selfish, for God wants first loyalty, even before family. In fact, Jesus said that a man who puts his family before God, is not worthy of God. Secondly, such a statement assumes that one can relax better away from God's House, away from God's people, than in the Holy Sanctuary with God's People. Third, such a statement

is born out of pride and self-sufficiency, for if Jesus went to the synagogue "as was his custom" every week, how much more do we need to be in God's House every time we have a chance. Fourth, a man who makes such a statement needs to learn to take out some time each day during the week for his family. He can not possibly expect to gain in two days, what he has lost in five. Fifth, "What an oddity that the man who had only one day of rest (in the past) found it easier to attend worship than the man who has two or three. Millions of people, finding themselves with two days on their hands, have promptly decided to take both for pleasure and leave God out of their lives altogether." (Coffman,page 57)

CONCLUSION: "Men may dig in the ruins of America a thousand years from now to find an answer to the question, 'What was responsible for the fall and destruction of our nation?'" Perhaps a library will have been preserved well. One of its books might be Max Gunther's The Weekender published in 1964. So, men would read about bright faces in the home-bound cars rolling, cheek to cheek, along the highways, and the chatter of Friday afternoon commuter trains. They will read how the crowds of American housewives spill out of beauty parlors, super-markets, and liquor stores to begin an American weekend. With interest they will read on...The men and women who awake on Saturday morning are not the same people they were yesterday. Clothes, moods, feelings, their approach to life, are all different. For those two days, they will have about them a quality distinctly unlike anything they had on Friday or will have again on Monday...We call them weekender. Men will read that Americans in the last half of the twentieth century had sixty-three hours from Friday evening until Monday morning to spend mostly at recreation. They will read that little is said about worshipping God. Bewildered, they may say, 'Can it be that the best fed, best educated, most religious nation in the world destroyed herself?'"

But on the other hand, "men may dig in the ruins of America a thousand years from now, and, perhaps, scientists will be made to wonder what kept America alive and powerful. Someone may suggest, 'America has remained a great nation because the people of our country have been careful to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.' Let us hope so!!!!" (Sermon Builders; October 1970;page 12,37)

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

KEEPING GOD'S DAY HOLY

QUESTIONS

1. Against the background of the very strict Old Testament Laws regarding Sabbath observance, give your interpretation and application of the following words of Jesus, from the New Testament: "The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath."
2. Describe some of the legalistic practices of the Jews during Jesus' time, regarding Sabbath observation. Can you think of any modern-day illustrations that demonstrate the spirit of rigid legalism, regarding observation of the Sabbath (or Lord's Day)?
3. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "If the Sunday of our fathers was blue, ours seems to be a bit scarlet."
4. Put a check beside those statements that reflect the proper use of Sunday.
 - A day of private worship and prayer.
 - A day of corporate worship.
 - A day to perform acts of compassion.
 - A day to visit friends and relatives.
 - A day to study the Bible and read Christian literature.
 - A day to rest and sleep.
 - A day to engage in recreation.
 - A day to renew one's mind and spirit.
 - A day to work and labor.
 - A day to pursue personal pleasures.
 - A day to travel.
5. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is not important for a believer to attend public worship services on Sunday, if that believer watches a religious program on television."
6. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statement: "Consistent attendance of church services is an important evidence of a mature Christian walk."
7. Even though there may be several legitimate ways in which a believer may appropriately observe the Lord's Day (Sunday), what is the basic two-fold purpose of this special day?

8. From your personal reading or observation or experience, what evidence can you cite to indicate that the human body needs to rest one day in every seven days, to avoid physical exhaustion.
9. Give your explanation of the following statement: "We rest on Sunday to let our souls catch up with our bodies."
10. Give illustrations of positive and effective activities that a believer can participate in on the Lord's Day, all of which can re-create and refresh one's body and mind and spirit.
11. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The person who does not spend time away from the daily grind of life goes blind in his soul."
12. Give your interpretation of the following statement by Dostoevski: "A man who lows down to nothing can never bear the burden of himself."
13. Give your comments on the following statements; "The sabbath was made for man, the whole man, and for all men. Therefore, I have no right to use it in such a fashion as to rob either myself or others of its highest usefulness."

A question to ponder: "When Christians buy and sell on Sunday, and when believers (after Sunday Morning Worship Services) 'flock' together to restaurants, are they guilty of robbing others of the highest usefulness of Sunday?"

14. Tell how you would answer the person who declares "I don't need to go to Church to worship formally with a large group of people on a Sunday morning, for I can worship God better alone in the out-of-doors (in the mountains along a quiet lake)!"
15. What purpose (or function) does ther localCHurch have, according to the Lord's stated purpose for the Old Testament Temple? (See II Chronicles 7:11-12)
16. Tell how you would repute each of the following arguments, given by those persons who defend their absence from public worship services:
 - A. "I need seven days to get all done that I have to do. Six days are not enough time to accomplish my tasks."
 - B. "Every day means the same to me. Sunday is no more important to me than Monday."
 - C. "I have only one day a week off from my job. Surely God wouldn't expect me to take half of my day off to spend in Church."

- D. "I need the entire week-end for myself and my family, to relax and to be with my family, since I don't see them too often during the week."

CHAPTER 3

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

LOOKING AT MAN'S FLIMSY EXCUSES!

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH LOOKING AT MAN'S FLIMSY EXCUSES!

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Luke 14:15-24

TEXT: "*But they all began making excuses.*" (Luke 14:18a, Living Bible)

INTRODUCTION: It is clear that the great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24) stands for the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is a society of men who desire to do God's will more than they desire anything else. In mercy, God has extended His invitation to every person to be a member of God's Kingdom - to come to the Banquet of God! But before a person can become a member of God's Kingdom, he must accept God's invitation, putting the priorities of the Kingdom before personal, selfish interests. Each of the excuses in the parable are the same types of excuses that are heard today.

PROPOSITION: Some there are who blatantly and bluntly make excuses for not being Christians, but usually excuses are put in the form of 'reasons why I don't come regularly to church'. Excuses, excuses, excuses - there are many excuses people give for not coming to church. Unfortunately, it is not only recognized unbelievers who make these excuses, but these excuses come often from the lips of professed or nominal Christians.

- I. "I need to relax on Sunday mornings and therefore I don't have time to attend Church services."
- II. "I need to be with my family and relatives on Sunday. If I am enjoying my family rather than attending Church services, God will surely understand."
- III. "I need to work and therefore I can't come to Church services on Sunday."
- IV. "I need to take vacations occasionally and don't have time to worship God in Church on Sundays."
- V. "I am ill and therefore I can't go to Church."
- VI. "I have business pursuits that I am involved in which take me out of town on weekends. Therefore, I can't come to Church."
- VII. "I don't understand what is being said at Church, so I simply study my Bible at home....."
- VII. "I am discouraged because of my circumstances and therefore I don't feel like going to Church."

IX. "I am `trying out' several churches before I settle on attending one church regularly."

CONCLUSION: I have never yet seen a couple make it in the Christian life who does not attend Church regularly. I have evaluated the relationship between a person's regular attendance at church and the consistency of his personal Christian life. There is a direct correlation between consistent attendance at Church and consistent victory in the Christian life.

Go to church regularly! Don't make excuses!

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH LOOKING AT MAN'S FLIMSY EXCUSES!

SCRIPTURE: Luke 14:15-24

TEXT: *"But they all began making excuses."* (Luke 14:18a, Living Bible)

INTRODUCTION: What a discourtesy to be invited to a meal, first to accept it, and then later to reject the invitation on some flimsy excuse. God invites every human being to His banqueting table.

It is clear that the great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24) stands for the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is a society of men who desire to do God's will more than they desire anything else. In mercy, God has extended His invitation to every person to be a member of God's Kingdom, - to come to the Banquet of God! But before a person can become a member of God's Kingdom he must accept God's invitation, putting the priorities of the Kingdom before personal, selfish interest. Each of the excuses in the parable are the same types of excuses that are heard today.

The first man put business interests before kingdom interests. *"I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused."* (Luke 14:18) The second one said, *"I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am on my way to try them out. Please have me excused."* (verse 19) The interests of novelty and pleasure are put before the interests of the Kingdom. The third one said, *"I have married a wife, and, therefore, I cannot come."* Love of maid is put before love of the Master. The good things of life are put before the best things of the Kingdom of God!

PROPOSITION: Some there are who blatantly and bluntly make excuses for not being Christians, but usually excuses are put in the form of 'reasons why I don't come regularly to church'. Excuses, excuses, excuses - there are many excuses people give for not coming to church. Unfortunately, it is not only recognized unbelievers who make these excuses, but these excuses come often from the lips of professed or nominal Christians.

When one considers how important the local church is, why would people make so many excuses for not attending the local church. Perhaps C.S. Lewis gives us the best simple answer. He says, "The Christian view is that this is a good world that has gone wrong, but still retains the memory of what it ought to have been...Enemy-occupied territory - that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage. When you go to Church you are really listening-in to the secret wireless from our friends; that is why the enemy is so anxious to prevent us from going. He does it by playing on our conceit and laziness and intellectual snobbery." (The Best of C.S. Lewis;page 432,435)

The enemy - Satan - hates to see Christians go to Church! Is it any wonder then that Satan offers many excuses to people not to attend church? Even professing Christians, who should know

better, sometimes swallow his excuses! Do any of the following excuses sound familiar to you?

I. "I need to relax on Sunday mornings and therefore I don't have time to attend Church services." No one will deny the need to relax on Sundays, but neither should anyone deny the need consistently to be in God's House worshipping with God's people on Sunday! In March 1956, the Jewish Theological Seminary sponsored a conference on leisure, and from this research conference, the conclusion was reached that the least adequate use of free time is 'Mass Entertainment' such as movies, television, and spectator sports. A surprise to some, the research conference showed that 'Worship and Prayer' are the most helpful activities of free time because "in performing these acts we are engaged in the very formation and recreation of ourselves." Prayer and worship are the most recreating activities known to man, for through prayer and worship a new spiritual energy and vitality are gained which transfers to the physical and mental realm, raising all of life to a higher level of vitality.

We are living in a pleasure-obsessed society - a society that measures the value of an experience by the degree of pleasure it can give. In the 'Parable of the Great Supper' in Luke 14:15-24, the excuse of the one who said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am on my way to try them out," is the same type of excuse that many give today. The interests of novelty are more important than the interests of the Kingdom and of the Church.

Sad it is that the toys of sensual pleasure are more real to us than the delights of spiritual discoveries! The novelty of picking up a moon rock seems to thrill us more than the thrill of picking up the Holy Bible! Low attendance at a party is more disturbing to us than low attendance at worship services! Missing a favorite TV program disturbs us more than missing a good Bible class. The garden not growing disturbs us more than the church not growing! Learning a new recipe excites us more than learning a new verse of Scripture! Fishing for trout is more exciting to us than fishing for the souls of men!

One of the characteristics of the perilous times during the last days of history is a pleasure-obsessed society where people are *"lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God"* (II Timothy 3:4) The one who makes the excuses that he has to relax on Sunday mornings and therefore cannot attend church services is the one who has likely succumbed to the pleasures of a hedonistic society!

II. "I need to be with my family and relatives on Sunday. If I am enjoying my family rather than attending Church services, God will surely understand." The sincere Christian will want to spend much time with his beloved family, but he will not allow time with his biological family to rob him of time with his Church family. It is not either the Church or the family; it is both the family and the Church. Said Jesus, *"If you love your father and mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine."* (Matthew 10:37; Living Bible)

The third man in the parable (Luke 14:15-24) put good interests before the superior

interests of the Kingdom. He said, "*I have married a wife, and, therefore, I cannot come.*" (verse 20) Loyalty to wife and family is commended, but if wife or husband or child becomes the object of one's deepest love, then a man is not worthy of God's Kingdom! Adam walked alone with God before Eve was created. A man must know his God intimately before he can enjoy his family completely. The love of the Master must come before the love of the Maid. Indeed, the love of the maid is enhanced by the love of the Master! "They live best together who live with God; they serve each other best who also serve their fellow men; the atmosphere of a home is most lovely when those who dwell within it never forget that they are also members of the great family and household of God." (Daily Study Bible; Luke; page 201; William Barclay)

III. "I need to work and therefore I can't come to Church services on Sunday." This statement may reflect an honest fact or it may reflect a flimsy excuse! It is true that some can't come consistently to Church services because of work responsibilities on Sunday. Such persons like doctors and nurses must keep the hospitals open and their patients properly cared for - every day of the week including Sundays. But even these persons in the caring and serving professions usually can arrange to be off periodically on Sundays.

Most who work on Sundays don't need to work on Sundays. Most employers would be glad to arrange a schedule in such a way that sincere Christian employees could periodically, if not regularly, be off on Sundays.

Work is a blessing from God, but overwork or work on Sunday is a curse to man! "While work is an unmeasured blessing man is not to work all the time. He needs one day in seven upon which to rest. This is the case whether he works with hand or brain. Man can do more in six days than he can in seven. To disregard this fact is to lower vitality and efficiency. It is to bring on frayed nerves, broken bodies, and premature death."

Work is virtuous but overwork is a sin! God help the 'workaholic' who seldom takes time to worship God in God's House with God's people on God's special day - Sunday!

IV. "I need to take vacations occasionally and don't have time to worship God in Church on Sundays." Remember what was previously said: Prayer and worship are the most recreating activities known to man, for through prayer and worship new spiritual energy and vitality are gained which transfer to the physical and mental realms, raising all of life to a higher level of vitality!

Vacations are important, because variety and change of pace from the routine activities of life give fresh perspective and renewed vitality. But vacation time should be a time of worshipping God in special ways - worshipping God in the out-of-doors during the week and worshipping God on Sunday with fellow believers. It is always appropriate to take a vacation away from our regular jobs, but it is never appropriate to take a vacation away from God!

V. "I am ill and therefore I can't go to Church." This is sometimes a legitimate reason not to attend Church. Indeed, there are invalids who are confined to their sick beds, persons who long to be in church services but who are unable to be in fellowship with God's people because of perpetual illness. God can minister spiritual health to the sickly bodies of these precious invalids.

But many there are who use their sickness as an excuse not to attend God's House. Many illnesses could be cured - healed - within the atmosphere of a caring fellowship of Christians. My mother consistently attended prayer meeting on Wednesday nights for years, in spite of a weary body from working all day and sick headache from overwork and stress. She would testify that often she would feel better after having attended prayer meeting!

VI. "I have business pursuits that I am involved in which take me out of town on weekends. Therefore, I can't come to Church." It is not to be denied that there are some legitimate business pursuits which involve travel. However, when a businessman has to be out of town, away from his own church, on a weekend, he should always attempt to be in a good Church somewhere on Sunday!

Let every business man know that there is no business as important as God's business. God's business is inseparably connected with the Church, so attending church regularly is doing God's business!

Many there are who put their work before their church, who are more interested in making a living than they are in making a life. The ring of the cash register is sweeter to some than the quietness of the sanctuary. The glitter of gold is more important to some than bargaining for the souls of men. Missing a day's work is more disturbing to some than missing a worship service. Getting ahead of the Joneses is more important to some than staying in step with God. Investing in earth's real estate is more important to some than investing in heaven's incorruptible mansions. Earning a college degree is more important to some than earning a degree in faithfulness and service.

Energy and hard work are commendable, but if misdirected can result in being rejected from the Kingdom. Wealth is not to be despised, if it does not result in poverty of the soul. Position in business and work is honorable, if it does not crowd God from the throne room of one's heart. *"And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."* (I John 2:17) It is good advice to set one's affections on things above, not on things on the earth. Invest in eternity as well as in time, invest in people as well as in things, and seek God's glory primarily and your own interests secondarily.

VII. "I don't understand what is being said at Church, so I simply study my Bible at Home." It is highly unlikely that the person who doesn't attend Church regularly studies his Bible consistently in his home.

I recently met a young woman in her middle twenties who told me that she had attended Church so infrequently that when she did come to Church she felt very 'ignorant'. Her feeling of ignorance is understandable, for how can one understand any subject - math, biology, religion - without consistently attending the classes? Most public school students would be 'lost' in a geometry class if they attended class only one time every week or every month!

So, people who seldom attend church sometimes feel 'lost' when they attend a preaching service and hear one of many messages in a Biblical series of messages! Is it any wonder? The Bible admittedly is a challenging Book to understand, demanding serious attention and diligent study.

However, I reassured the young lady who felt she was so 'ignorant' when she came to church, that there was a simple basic 'How To' class for all new believers. Also, I assured her that there was an attempt in teaching and preaching to be simple, clear, interesting, and direct, as well as Biblical in communication. And, I reminded her that, although there were many different levels of maturity represented within a typical congregation, all of which the minister must take into consideration when he preaches, nevertheless the Holy Spirit is the interpreter of truth and is able to apply truth to each person - regardless of the level of maturity. The Holy Spirit is the great interpreter of Scripture. Each believer can receive something from each message that he can apply to his own life - assuming that believer is open and honest!

VIII. "I am discouraged because of my circumstances and therefore I don't feel like going to Church." What a tragic excuse for not attending church! It is true that the minister has a responsibility, not only to disturb the comfortable but to comfort the disturbed on Sunday mornings! The discouraged can find encouragement, the despairing can find hope, the sorrowing can find comfort - at God's House with God's people on Sunday morning! The last place a discouraged person should stay away from is the sanctuary of the Lord on Sunday morning!

Watching a religious TV program on Sunday morning might lend some encouragement to the discouraged, but it can never provide the companionship of fellow believers that the simplest of live worship services can provide!

The church is many things to many people - a teaching center, a worship center, a social center, etc., - but one thing the church should always be is a healing center. Where should the sick go? To a doctor! Where should the spiritually discouraged go? To Church services! There is a balm in 'Gilead', and 'Gilead' (among other places) is the local church!

"Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near." (Hebrews 10:25). The church, as it is meant to be, is a place where people mutually

encourage one another. So, if you are discouraged and in need of healing, go to Church regularly! Church services are never a substitute for daily healing which can be found in the daily quiet times, but it is doubtful that people will find healing in daily quiet times if they are not receiving healing at the regular worship services!

Don't wait until you feel like going to Church. Go anyway and you will find wonderful healing and great encouragement! Action precedes feelings! Act in faith by going to church and you will soon feel the comfort and encouragement which obedience brings!

IX. "I am 'trying out' several churches before I settle on attending one church regularly." These are the legitimate words of a few people whose presence in a new community and whose sincere desire to be in God's will, allow them to search out a 'Church home'. However, the majority who say these words are simply formulating another excuse for not being solidly committed to a particular local church! People who use this excuse don't want to be 'tied down' to any one church; they don't want to be obviously visible in any one fellowship and they reject ecclesiastical authority and personal accountability for their faithfulness in Church attendance. To be in various flocks gives them a sense of 'freedom', but this feeling of freedom is seldom blatantly admitted by professing Christians who resort to the following oft-repeated excuse: "I am trying to find a Church where I feel comfortable and where I can be fed."

Those who resort to such excuses seldom 'land' and 'stay' in any one church for very long. (I know personally of one family who has been in at least seven different churches during the last few years! No church quite suited them! They leave one church only to go to another one that was 'better, and 'more spiritual'!)

People who are waiting to find a 'perfect' church will never find it! The sincere Christian who is coming new into a community does not take long to find a good Church Home, and when he finds it (after a legitimate amount of time involved in 'Church shopping') he 'sticks with' the church of his choice. He stays with it, through 'thick and thin'!

There can be no deep loyalty to God without deep loyalty to God's Church - visibly and locally identifiable!

When one young man was told that he had been missed at Church in recent weeks he answered, "Well, I have been attending rodeos on weekends." He made no apologies for missing church and attending rodeos instead! This young man is a professing Christian and yet he did not seem to feel guilty that he had chosen to attend rodeos (weekend after weekend) instead of choosing to attend Church services consistently!

What is the answer to the lethargy and indifference among so many professing Christians, regarding consistent attendance of church services?

Fundamentally, Christians need to see their need to attend church consistently. It is not hard for a hungry man to be convinced of his need to come to the dinner table to eat a well-prepared meal. Christians who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6) find it rather easy and natural to come to the spiritual table to consume spiritual food (i.e., to come to the church services to be spiritually fed). The Church can be seen as a large table, spread with many different spiritual foods and heavenly delights, with a chair arranged around that table for every one in the Church Family. How sad it is for family members to sit down at the table and notice that half of the chairs around the table remain unoccupied! Where is half of the Church family? The table is spread with plenty of food (the Bible truths); there are enough chairs for all; the Heavenly Host is present to serve the food (the Heavenly Host is the blessed Holy Spirit). But where are half of the family members? It is discovered that they are out 'doing their own thing'! Some are on a pleasure trip, while others are 'sleeping in or at home watching the 'tube'. Some are visiting relatives, while others are working overtime. Some are involved in 'business trips', while others are home 'ill' - strange how people get 'ill' on Sunday but how they always seem to get well by Monday morning. Some are discouraged because of life's difficult circumstances and are staying home to 'lick their wounds'. Some are shopping around at other churches in town, as they have done sporadically for months, still trying to find that 'perfect' preacher and that 'perfect' church service where they 'feel at home' and 'are fed'. Still others are 'playing ball', or hitting a little white ball around a golf course, or sitting on the bank of a mountain lake baiting worms on hooks, 'worshipping God in nature'.

Excuses, excuses, excuses! They are a 'dime a dozen'. "*But they all began making excuses.*" (Luke 14:18; Living Bible)

But what saith the Scriptures? "*Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.*" (Hebrews 10:25)

That is God's command! Disobedience is sin!

CONCLUSION: I have never yet seen a couple make it in the Christian life who does not attend Church regularly. I have evaluated the relationship between a person's regular attendance at church and the consistency of his personal Christian life. There is a direct correlation between consistent attendance at Church and consistent victory in the Christian life.

Go to church regularly! Don't make excuses!

**THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH
LOOKING AT MAN'S FLIMSY EXCUSES!**

Q U E S T I O N S

1. What kind of excuses, as applied to our modern-day situation, are represented by each of the three men in Jesus' parable, as recorded in Luke 14:15-24?
2. According to C.S. Lewis, why is it so important for believers to faithfully attend Church Services?
3. Tell from your own personal experience the extent to which you have found the following statement to `ring with truth': "Prayer and worship are the most re-creating activities known to man, for through prayer and worship a new spiritual energy and vitality are gained which transfers to the physical and mental realms, raising all of life to a higher level of vitality."
4. According to II Timothy 3:4, what is one danger that every Christian must carefully guard against?
5. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A man must know his God intimately before he can enjoy his family completely."
6. From your own personal experience or observation or scientific research, cite evidence that documents the truthfulness of the following statement: "Man can do more in six days than he can in seven. To disregard this fact is to lower vitality and efficiency. It is to bring on frayed nerves, broken bodies, and premature death."
7. Tell how, Scripturally-speaking and logically, you would refute the following argument (excuse): "I have business pursuits that I am involved in which take me out of town on weekends. Therefore, I can't come to Church."
8. Tell how, in a counselling setting, you would seek to encourage a person who says to you, "I don't understand what is being said at Church, so I simply study my Bible at Home."
9. Why, from your perspective, do many persons (professing Christians) tend to `drop out of regular Church attendance' when they are greatly discouraged or deeply disappointed over some event in their personal lives?
10. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "There can be no deep loyalty to God without deep loyalty to God's Church - visibly and locally identifiable!" (Note Hebrews 10:25)
11. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statements: "There is a

direct correlation between consistent attendance at Church and consistent victory in the Christian life. Backsliding is inevitable if a Christian discontinues to attend Church regularly!"

CHAPTER 4

The MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

COMMIT YOURSELF TO CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

**The MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH
COMMIT YOURSELF TO CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH**

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:1-13

TEXT: *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."* (Ephesians 4:3)

INTRODUCTION: There is a strange phenomenon happening within the Christian world today. One might call it the phenomenon of 'the drifting Christian'. Drifting! Drifting in and out of local churches, amidst an already mobile society. There are too many Christian families who are unattached to any Church - families who have drifted out the 'backdoor' of some local church.

One who no longer finds himself attached to the local church ought seriously to ask himself: "Have I truly accepted Jesus?" or "Am I presently in a vital relationship with Christ?"

PROPOSITION: The one who truly commits himself to Christ as Savior, is the same one who delights in making a commitment to the Church.

I. Commitment To Christ And His Cause

What does it mean to accept Jesus?

- A. Commitment to the claims of Jesus.
- B. Commitment to Jesus' redemptive work on the Cross.
- C. Acceptance of the accomplishments of the historical resurrection.
- D. Personal repentance and exercise of saving faith in Christ.

II. Commitment To The Concept Of The Church

- A. All Christians are members of the universal Church which encompasses believers everywhere.
- B. All Christians should, if possible, belong to a particular local (visible) church.

III. Commitment To The Expressions Of The Church

- A. Faithful Church Attendance
- B. Committed Church Membership
- C. Consistent Tithing

IV. Commitment To A Positive Attitude

- A. Positive Attitude Towards Fellow Christians

B. Positive Attitude Towards Your Church

CONCLUSION: Notes Elton Trueblood, "Though the Church, as we observe it, frequently fills us with frustrations, we know, if we are realists, that it provides the only way in which Christians can be faithful to their Lord....The more we ponder, the more we are likely to conclude that the Church will have a future. The Church, of course, may change greatly in its human structure, but the probability is that it will become more important rather than less so. It must become more important because the need for a redemptive fellowship will be increasingly urgent. If men are honest they will recognize the occasional need to be alone, but, if they are also intelligent, they will recognize, at the same time, that what they do alone has far more significance if, at some point in their lives, they experience a deep sharing with other unworthy disciples of the same Lord." (The Future of the Christian; Elton Trueblood; page 18,19,22,23)

The MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH COMMIT YOURSELF TO CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:1-13

TEXT: *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."* (Ephesians 4:3)

INTRODUCTION: There is a strange phenomenon happening within the Christian world today. One might call it the phenomenon of 'the drifting Christian'. Drifting! Drifting in and out of local churches, amidst an already mobile society. Becoming disillusioned with one church, only to leave it, and eventually to enjoy the brief 'courtship' of a new church, only in turn, to leave the 'new' church after the newness wears off.

There are too many Christian families who are unattached to any Church - families who have drifted out the 'backdoor' of some local church. They are accountable to no local church, and no local pastor feels responsible for them.

One who no longer finds himself attracted to the local church ought seriously to ask himself: "Have I truly accepted Jesus?" or "Am I presently in a vital relationship with Christ?"

PROPOSITION: The one who truly commits himself to Christ as Savior, is the same one who delights in making a commitment to the Church.

I. Commitment To Christ And His Cause

The most important commitment you will ever make is your commitment to Christ. Everyone surrenders to someone or to something. Some surrender themselves to the lusts of the flesh and find themselves the servants of their own passions. Some surrender themselves to money and find that materialism is a cruel tyrant, robbing them of love and peace of mind. Some surrender themselves to chance and fate, and find themselves the servants of despair. Some surrender themselves to God, and find themselves to the servants of love.

You cannot serve two masters. You will serve one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and, at the same time, serve another god.

Who you serve here on earth will determine where you will go hereafter. Said Joshua *"Choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!"*

If a man shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul, what shall it profit him?

The whole world cannot satisfy the human hunger for spiritual reality. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it finds repose in Thee." (St. Augustine)

He who commits himself truly to Christ is he who will also commit himself sincerely to Christ's Church. Notes William Barclay, "A conversion is incomplete if it does not leave one integrated into the Church. By this we do not mean any particular part of the Church; what we do mean is that conversion must leave one linked in loving fellowship with his fellow-believers. Conversion is not something between a man and Jesus Christ, with no other person involved. True, it may start in that way, but it cannot end in that way. Conversion is not individualistic. It is in fact the opposite. It joins man to his fellow-men. It may fill him with a self-righteousness which rejoices in its own superiority to those who have no like experience. It may move a man to a Pharisaic self-isolation. There have in fact been not a few so-called conversions as a result of which a man has left the Church to belong to some smaller and holier body. The plain truth is that such a one should very seriously examine himself, if he finds that he regards as his Christian experience separating him from his fellow-men, or his fellow-Christians. (In The Hands of God; William Barclay; page 40,41)

II. Commitment To The Concept Of The Church

He who is strongly committed to Christ will want to be strongly committed to the Church. Why? Because Christ founded the Church!

But what is meant by the word 'Church'? This word has several meanings and connotations. Is it a building, or a congregation, or a denomination? Let us look at two New Testament terms which will help us to understand the meaning of 'Church'.

There is the word 'Kuriakou' which literally means 'of the Lord'. Early Christians set apart a regular house for the special purpose of worship, and such a house came to be called a 'house of the Lord.'" (Bastian's 'The Mature Church Member', page 125) Thus 'Church' refers to the House (or building) where people of the Lord meet.

There is the word 'ecclesia' which means literally 'called out.' Christians who gather together in the name of Christ are a specially 'called out' group of persons, and are the Church. So, secondly, a group of Christians who assembly together, compose the Church.

This same word is used to speak of all true believers everywhere (Acts 9:31). So, thirdly, all true Christians everywhere compose the Church.

The New Testament letters were written to specific Churches, such as the Ephesian Church, the Philippian Church, the Colossian Church, the Roman Church, etc. In these letters are found Paul's admonitions of faithfulness to the fellow Christians within these Churches. We may conclude that Paul considered faithfulness and commitment to a specific group of

believers within a local gathering to be vital and important.

From these insights we may conclude that every Christian should be committed to:

A. The universal Church which encompasses all true believers everywhere. There is no place for a sectarian, exclusive attitude which essentially excludes Christians who differ from your own particular religious forms and structures and background and life-style. All who name the name of Jesus are members of the universal and invisible Body of Christ. They are members of Christ's world-wide Church, as much as you are.

B. The local assembly of Believers who meet within a certain building to corporately worship and teach and pray and fellowship. Commitment to a visible, numbered, specific group of believers is a basic New Testament assumption. Be that group small or big, it is commitment to that particular group which is important.

There seems to be a New Testament sanction to the concept that the degree of one's commitment to Christ will be directly reflected in one's commitment to a local assembly of believers.

Those who believe in the Universal Church, but who do not live out their beliefs within the visible church, are not allowing concrete expression of their faith through a focused channel. Those who are not committed to a particular local congregation of believers are dissipating their influence for Christ, seeking to scatter that influence on everyone and concentrating it on no one.

Those who seek to live for Christ without commitment to a visible limited group of specific believers, are those who are seeking to live for Christ in solitude. However, Christianity is not a solitary religion. Christianity, by nature, involves social relationships. God Himself is a Trinity, and the persons of the Godhead are in social union. The Church is a social institution, instituted of God. The Church is described as a 'Body'. Not a mere human organization, but a living organism which holds the most vital and dependent relationship to Christ, its head; and an interdependent organism, with all body parts dependent upon each other.

The Church is also described as a 'Building', with Christ as the cornerstone, and each individual Christian interlocked, and dependent upon the other 'living stones'.

The Church is a social, interdependent organism. Each member of the Church is to be committed to every other member of the Church.

III. Commitment To The Expressions Of The Church

If one is truly committed to both the universal, invisible church and also to the local, visible gathering of true believers, how should this commitment be manifested and expressed?

A. Faithful Church Attendance

Says Hebrews 10:25: *"Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another, all the more since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming near."* (Today's English Version) The Living Bible states this verse vividly: *"Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near."*

From this we learn that Church attendance should be habitual. Should not every Christian avail himself of the opportunity to attend every Church service?

Think of our own local Church. I believe every Christian should attend Sunday Morning, Sunday Night and Wednesday Evening Services every week, as a minimum. There are several other opportunities besides these basic services, in the regular Church week.

Can the earnest Christian reply: "That involves too much time!?" How much time does a person spending eating food each week? Probably 10-15 hours minimum each week. Should we not spend at least 5 hours weekly in Church services, especially when one considers that he watches television probably a minimum of 10 hours a week!

Some years ago, in Russia, where persecution of Christians was evident, believers walked miles to attend the few Churches, and after walking miles to Church, often had to stand during the services because of overflow crowds. Many Russian Christians attended five Church services weekly!

Notes Elton Trueblood, after, several years ago, he visited Russian Christians and Churches: "The biggest insight which came to us in Russia was the recognition that we were witnessing something akin to early Christianity. Like the early Christians, the people with whom we mingled for two weeks are living their faith in the midst of official opposition. It is a surprise to find strong commitment in a country which makes no secret of its being officially atheist. If we are at all wise, we shall note this phenomenon with care. Above all, we must note what kind of dedication it is which can survive in such a setting. It is not mild religion such as we so often observe in the West. Mild religion would be totally incapable of surviving in contemporary Russia. The only faith that is capable of survival is one which builds a very hot fire. Any other kind would go out, and go out quickly. Here is a valuable

lesson for us. We do not have official opposition, but we are nevertheless surrounded by a mood which may be even harder to bear. For the most part, we have lost the vitality of Christian commitment which marked so many at the beginning of our country. On all sides we have the neo-paganism which dominates the lives of the vast majority of our neighbors. Mild religion will never be able to provide a genuine antidote to the intellectual and cultural situation of our time. Our only hope lies in the effort to nourish the faith which is as important in our lives as is the faith of the Russian Christians today. They have given us a message of major significance." (Catalist Tape Talk; November 1975) This was written, of course, several years before Communism officially fell in Russia and in many other countries. But, nevertheless, the commitment of believers in communist countries - including Russia - during those seventy dreadful years of Communist domination, is an example for believers of all times.

Suppose your child wanted always to take his meals in bed. You would conclude one of two things about your child. Either he is sick or he is spoiled and lazy, wanting someone to wait upon him, rather than him taking the effort to come to the family table to eat a well-prepared meal with the other members of the family.

Suppose your child seldom appeared at the family table to take his meals. You would have to conclude that he has other interests and involvements besides the family, which he considers more important than the family's interests.

Suppose a professing Christian does not want to come to the local Church to feed upon the Bread of life with other members of the Christian family. What must you conclude about a Christian who wants to eat in bed rather than at the well-spread table of the Church? Such a Christian is either sick spiritually or he is spiritually spoiled, wanting someone to spoon-feed him in bed, alone.

Suppose a professing Christian only seldom and irregularly appears at the church family table to take his spiritual meals? You must conclude that such a professing Christian has other interests and involvements besides the Church Family, which he considers more important than the Church family's interests.

"Let us not hold aloof from our church meetings, as some do. Let us do all we can to help one another's faith, and this the more earnestly as we see the final day drawing nearer." (Hebrews 10:25, Phillips)

From this we learn the purpose for habitual church attendance: 'to help one another's faith.' This may be done in a variety of ways, but this is one of the central purpose of all Church meetings. What is the purpose of Sunday School, Worship Service, Sunday Evening Vespers, Wednesday Night prayer service, Young Teen Groups, Senior Teen Groups, Children's Church, Homemakers' Bible Study? The

purpose for involvement in all of these is `to help one another's faith.'

B. Committed Church Membership

Why is Church Membership important?

(1) It is a covenant commitment that reflects a disciplined way of life. Jesus never called us to make converts, but to make disciples. A disciple is one who is committed to a disciplined way of life. The covenant which one takes to become a member of the Church reflects a commitment to God, to one's self, to one's fellowmen, to the Scriptures.

(2) It is a covenant commitment that promises faithful involvement with the other members of the fellowship, for the purpose of carrying out clearly-defined purposes. Instability, mobility, unreliability are unfortunate traits that too often characterize people in our general society today. Covenant membership should evidence a solid foundation upon which mutually committed believers can build. Build what? Build facilities. Build programs. Build a united witness. Build a missions outreach. Build a strong budget to support a united ministry. Membership should announce to all that one has a sincere intention to be dependable and stable.

(3) It is a covenant commitment that goes beyond mere fellowship, and which gives one an opportunity to feel a real sense of total belonging to the group. One dear Christian who fellowshiped in a Church for years, but who never took the covenant of membership, finally left the fellowship, saying, "I never felt that I totally belonged to the group, even though I fellowshiped regularly with the group."

C. Consistent Tithing

Free-will giving is the means by which the work of God goes forward. Says God in the Scriptures, "*Bring all the tithes into the Storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house.*" (Malachi 3:10)

Notes one author: "The responsibility to bring all the tithes and offerings to the local church is plainly illustrated in the Old Testament." Says II Chronicles 31:11. "*Then Hezekiah ordered store-rooms to be prepared in the house of the Lord, and this was done; and the people honestly brought in their contributions, the tithe, and their dedicated gifts.*" Says Nehemiah 10:38. "*The Aaronic priest shall be with the Levites when they collect the tithes; and the Levites shall bring up one tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the appropriate rooms in the storehouse.*" The 'Storehouse' is the local church. All tithes are to be brought to the 'Storehouse'.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament teach tithing as the minimum standard of giving. "Indeed, it has been estimated that the aggregate of religious gifts among the Jews in olden times (Old Testament) could not have been less than one-fifth of each man's income, and some very probably involved one-third of it." (Grace of Giving, page 42)

If Old Testament saints, under the Law, gave 1/5 or even occasionally 1/3 of their income to the Lord's work, cannot New Testaments saints, under Grace, be expected to give at least 1/10 of their income to the Lord's work?

IV. COMMITMENT TO A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

One Christian leader, during his seminars, has his students repeat after him: "There are three steps to success: attitude, attitude, attitude!"

A. Positive Attitude Towards Fellow Christians.

(1) "Don't look for perfection in people. You have to get along with yourself in spite of yourself, so make up your mind to get along with others in spite of themselves." (E.S. Jones) God accepts you - 'warts and all' - so accept others with their 'warts' too.

(2) "Look on others, not as they are, but as they can be." "He was patient with and hopeful for the weak and faltering and the sinful. And yet he did not compromise with and accommodate himself to their imperfections and sins.

"It is faith in man, founded on a faith in God, which believes belief out of the unbelieving, faiths faith out of the faithless, and loves love out of the loveless. It produces that which it believes in. Someone asked a minister, pastor of a growing dynamic church, how he accomplished it. He replied: 'I hold a crown a few inches above my people's heads and watch them grow into it.'

"His love produces love, his faith produces faith, his hope produces hope." (Song of Ascents, E.S. Jones, page 39) "Be patient, God Is Not Finished With Me Yet." See fellow believers as persons in the process of "Becoming'.

(3) Don't judge other Christians because they don't exercise the same gifts that you do.

Remember, all Christians are called to love others, but each Christian is given a different set of gifts to express this love. So if someone is expressing his love for others in a different way than you are, don't judge him. If you are given the gift of

soul-winning and someone else is given the gift of teaching, then don't judge the Christian whose gift is teaching because he is not winning souls to Christ every week. If your gift is showing love to others through regular visitation of the sick, don't judge the fellow Christian whose gift is administration if that Christian does not visit the sick as regularly as you do. The New Testament names at least 22 different spiritual gifts which believers have all been given by the Holy Spirit. No one believer has all the gifts. The clusters of gifts vary greatly in each individual believer.

Accept and love your fellow Christians whose expressions of love are different than your expressions of love. Don't judge or criticize your fellow Christians. Said Jesus to Peter, when Peter was questioning John's life, *"What is that to thee? Follow thou me!"*

My responsibility is not to judge or to criticize my fellow Christian who is different in personality, gifts, and call from me, but to accept him lovingly and to cooperate with him cheerfully.

(4) Remember, we are 'organs for one another'. This conception of Paul will keep us from jealousies. If we are "organs for one another," then the other person fills out and complements me where I am weak. If a person can sing better than I can, then I must not be jealous, but recognize him as my organ of singing ability. Perhaps there is something I can do better than the other person - I am his organ in that particular thing. Such an attitude will cause us to be filled, not with jealousy, but with pride in the other person's ability.

B. Positive Attitude Towards Your Church.

(1) Remember, the church is not a building, organization, or programs, but the Church is People. Lovingly serving people is your purpose for living. Good buildings, good organizations, good programs are the means to the end of producing good people. When Jesus talked about building His church, He was talking about building up people. Having a positive attitude towards the Church will first of all mean having a positive attitude toward people in the fellowship. We have already talked about having a positive attitude towards fellow Christians. The objective of all Church Work is to serve people and to honor God.

(2) Plan to serve. Every Christian is called to serve God and his fellowmen through the particular gifts God has given to him. Allow your gifts to be discovered and exercised in the great work of the Church. "Every Christian a worker" is a good motto for the Church. The Scriptures tell us that every Christian is "created to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10). Notes Bishop Bastian, "A Christian who wants to avoid service is like a child who does not want to play or an eagle that does not want to fly. We can imagine such a situation, but in each case we know that something is

seriously wrong." (The Mature Church Member; 136)

(3) "Do the smallest task well". "Do well whatever job you are given, and your talents will grow by use. There are always larger tasks for those who have done the smaller tasks well." (Bastian) No work goes unrewarded. Giving a cup of cold water in the Savior's name does not go unnoticed or unrewarded. Work, not for the applause of men, but for the approval of God. It is not always a case of ability but of availability, not of unusual talents, but of special commitment and doing simple things well.

(4) "Register constructive criticism in the right places. As you pray daily for the work of your congregation and as you give your energies to see its efforts succeed, you will see ways in which it can be improved. Register your suggestions in the right place - to the leaders, like the pastor or directors of the department of Christian education, etc. Resist from the start any impulse to express indiscriminate criticism. From the human standpoint, the morale of a congregation is its most important asset. Criticism made indiscriminately can spread like a prairie fire and can seriously affect church morale. For this reason, keep whatever criticisms you have from becoming negative and be sure to offer them to the right leaders." (Bastian)

(5) Remember that the involved and cooperating Christian is the happy Christian. "Keep before you the lesson of the mule. The mule can't pull while it's kicking, and it can't kick while it's pulling. Get in the harness and pull for all you are worth." (Bastian)

(6) "Remember that you always have the reputation of your church in your hands. Purpose to be a good representative of your church." (Bastian)

CONCLUSION: Christians are called to live, not in isolation, but in fellowship with fellow Christians. Christians who are not perfect, but Christians who are nevertheless sincerely seeking to live in love and in harmony with one another. Wrote Paul, "*Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Try always to be led along together by the Holy Spirit, and so be at peace with one another. We are all parts of one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future.*" (Ephesians 4:2-4, Living Bible)

There are still those who question the value of the local church. "Is the Church really needed in the new age which we are entering?...Keep Christ, many suggest, but set Him free from all of the ecclesiastical trappings which have accumulated during the years that have intervened since He lived on earth. Why not return to the simple teachings of the Galilean, eliminating all boards and commissions and fund drives? Isn't there a real danger that the love of Christ may be forgotten in the multitude of conferences, synods, assemblies, and councils? Why not settle for individual love and kindness, without the bother of councils? Why not settle for individual love and kindness, without the bother of regular worship, sacraments, and preaching? Because we have noted that the strongest opposition which Christ met on earth was that of the religious establishment, they are bound to

wonder whether the same situation does not face Him again today. Perhaps the Church is superfluous, even to Christ Himself...Individual Christianity is a self-contradiction! Unless there is a sense of 'one another' there is no sense of the Living Christ. Though the Church, as we observe it, frequently fills us with frustrations, we know, if we are realists, that it provides the only way in which Christians can be faithful to their Lord. Nothing was accomplished by individual voices crying in the wilderness, but the early fellowship, fallible as it was, produced even the New Testament. It was because of congregations that there was a demand for the writing of the Gospels! Furthermore, most of the Epistles have no meaning except in reference to the fellowships to which they are addressed, and even the last book of the Bible begins with letters to seven existing congregations. The more we ponder, the more we are likely to conclude that the Church will have a future. The Church, of course, may change greatly in its human structure, but the probability is that it will become more important rather than less so. It must become more important because the need for a redemptive fellowship will be increasingly urgent. If men are honest they will recognize the occasional need to be alone, but, if they are also intelligent, they will recognize, at the same time, that what they do alone has far more significance if, at some point in their lives, they experience a deep sharing with other unworthy disciples of the same Lord." (The Future of the Christian; Elton Trueblood; pages 19,19,22,23)

**The MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH
COMMIT YOURSELF TO CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH**

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Give your interpretation of the following statements: "Everyone surrenders to someone or to something. Who you serve here on earth will determine where you will go hereafter."
2. What does it mean to commit oneself to Jesus' redemptive work on the Cross?
3. What does it mean to accept the accomplishments of the historical Resurrection of Jesus?
4. Give your definition of 'Repentance' and 'Saving Faith'.
5. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement by E. Stanley Jones: "'Man is made for conversion', as a duck is made for water, the bird is made for the air, the heart is made for love, the aesthetic nature is made for beauty. When you are converted and find Christ, you find yourself, your Homeland."
6. Is it possible to be truly converted without becoming integrated into the Church? Why or why not?
7. What is meant by the word 'Church'?
8. Why are the metaphors of 'Body' and 'Building' such appropriate metaphors to describe the nature and the characteristics of the Church?
9. If most Christians watch at least 10 hours of television per week, should it be unreasonable to expect believers to be in attendance at their local church at least 5 hours a week? Why or why not? (Note Hebrews 10:25)
10. Give your comments on the following statements: "The only faith that is capable of survival is one which builds a very hot fire. Any other kind would go out, and go out quickly. Mild religion will never be able to provide a genuine antidote to the intellectual and cultural situation of our time." (Note Matthew 16:24-26; Revelation 3:15-16).
11. What must you conclude, in all honesty, about a professing Christian who only seldom and irregularly appears at the church 'family table' (public worship services) to take his spiritual meals?
12. Give several reasons why a covenant commitment to Church Membership is so very important.

13. How does your faith in the potential of another person affect that other person in helping him to realize his greater potential in his life?
14. Illustrate how a group of believers, all of whom are Spirit-filled, will express God's love in various ways, according to their unique 'cluster' of spiritual gifts.
15. What is meant by the statement: "We Christians are 'organs for one another'"?
16. When Jesus talked about 'building His Church', what did He mean?
17. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A Christian who wants to avoid service is like a child who does not want to play or an eagle that does not want to fly."
18. How do you respond or react to the following statements: "It is not always a case of ability, but of availability; not of unusual talents, but of special commitment to do simple things well."
19. In an effort to maintain the unity of believers within a local church, why is it important to "register constructive criticism in the right places"? Do you agree that the morale of a congregation is its most important asset?
20. Tell how the following "lesson of the mule" applies to the life of a local church: "The mule can't pull while it's kicking, and it can't kick while it's pulling."
21. Is the following an overstatement or an accurate statement: "You always have the reputation of your church in your hands"?
22. Why is it so important, within the life of a congregation, to "make allowances for each other's faults"? (Read Ephesians 4:2-4 in several different translations.)
23. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Individual Christianity is a self-contradiction! Unless there is a sense of 'one another' there is no sense of the Living Christ."

CHAPTER 5
THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH
UNITY AMIDST DIVERSITY

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH UNITY AMIDST DIVERSITY

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 4:1-4

TEXT: *"My desire is that you should be in full agreement, loving the same things joined together in soul, your minds set on one thing."* (Philippians 2:2, Barclay)

INTRODUCTION: Philippians was written by Paul to the Church at Philippi and is sometimes called 'The Epistle of Excellent Things'. One subject which Paul deals with is Unity within the Church. His reason for writing about this subject is described by Barclay. "The one danger which threatened the Philippians Church was the danger of disunity. There is a sense in which that is the danger of every healthy Church. It is when people are really in earnest, when their beliefs really matter to them, when they are eager to carry out their own plans and their own schemes, that they are apt to get up against each other. The greater their enthusiasm, the greater the danger that they may collide. It is against that danger that Paul wishes to safeguard his friends." (Philippians, "Daily Study Bible" by William Barclay; pg. 38)

PROPOSITION: There is a vital need for unity in every Christian Church. The Church can only be effective and strong as it is a united, and understanding Church. Two statements can be made: (1) Unity is the Greatest Characteristic of the Church, (2) Unity is the Greatest Power of the Church. Let us see why these statements prove to be true.

I. UNITY IS THE GREATEST CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHURCH.

It is the natural tendency of any other organization than the church to divide into splinter groups, each contending for its own petty standards and opinions. None other organization has stood the test of time better or maintained its original distinctive more clearly than the Church. Throughout the ages it has triumphantly endured persecutions and stood strong against the threats which sought to undo it.

A. What is the secret of the Church's power, persistence, and ability to perpetuate itself throughout the ages? It has remained essentially unchanged because it is a divine institution, formed by the Son of God. The characteristic which best describes the true nature of the Church is unity. Unity, however, is merely the manifestation of the deepest Christian quality - LOVE! Unity presupposes the active exercise of love. Christianity is the religion of love which expresses itself within the corporate setting of the church and which proves itself through the manifold fruits of Christian unity. To understand this greatest characteristic of the Christian Church, we must seek to understand the underlying motivation of unity which is love.

B. What is love? The highest type of love is agape. Let Barclay define it. "Agape the

Christian word really means unconquerable benevolence. It means that no matter what a man may do to us by the way of insult or injury or humiliation we will never seek anything else but his highest good. It is therefore a feeling of the mind as much as it is of the heart; it concerns the will just as much as it does the emotions. It describes the deliberate effort - which we can only make with the help of God - never to seek anything but the best, even for those who seek the worst for us." (Barclay's Galatians, pages 54,55) *"Live in harmony with one another....If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."* (Romans 12:16,18)

If God can enable the Christian to love his enemies, how much more should the Christian be enabled to love his Christian brethren in the Church. It is love for one another, within the context of the Church, that will produce a strong and united Church. The Church is only as great as its people, and if its members are men and women who love, then the Church is a lovely Church.

Is it not reasonable that Christians should love one another and thus form a united Church? After all we Christians serve the same lord, exercise the same faith, enjoy the same fellowship, share the same sufferings, resist the same temptations, march under the same flag, fight the same battle, rejoice in the same victories, run the same race, represent the same cause, sow the same seed, and proclaim the same message. We Christians should love another for we are members of the same family, citizens of the same kingdom, sheep of the same fold, soldiers of the same army, and disciples of the same Master.

One has no right to claim to know God if he does not love his fellowmen, for God is love, and he that would know God must love the same ones that God loves. John wrote, *"If any one says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. It is this command that we have from Him, that he who loves God, loves his brother also."* I John 4:20,23, Barclay

Every time we pray 'Our Father' we should realize that this address to God acknowledges that each of us in a member of a fellowship, a family. John says, *'Everyone who loves the father loves the child.'* (I John 5:1, Barclay) John Wesley said, "No man can have God for his father unless he has the Church for his mother....God knows nothing of a solitary religion....No man ever went to heaven alone; he must either find friends or make them." (Barclay's Ephesians, page 156 and Barclay's Acts, page 119)

The pagans looked at the Christian congregations of the early Christian Church and exclaimed, "Behold, how they love one another." One astonished pagan exclaimed, "They love each other without knowing each other." (Taylor's Goodly Heritage, page 20)

C. If love is the underlying motivation for unity, what practically does love for fellow Christians mean within the context of the Church?

1. Love means Freedom.

Genuine love among all the members of the Church, means that there will be freedom to openly and calmly express personal opinions. Genuine Christians are individualists with a unique way of looking at the Church's needs, problems, and methods. Love-possessed Christians don't have to pamper one another, or treat each other with 'kid gloves'. Love-possessed Christians don't wear their feelings on their shoulders, ready to be knocked off and hurt by the slightest bump. Love-possessed Christians don't take personal offense by someone who merely differs in viewpoint.

Genuine love among all members of the church means that there will be freedom to confess personal faults one to another. It is not a sign of weakness to acknowledge that one is wrong. It is the oil that keeps the machinery of the church running smooth. Misunderstandings can lead to resentment if they are not cleared up through confession. James wrote, "*Confess your faults one to another.*"

2. Love Means Forbearance and Forgiveness.

Paul wrote "*Bear with one another, and , if anyone has a ground of complaint against someone else, forgive each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must forgive each other. On top of all these things, clothe yourselves with love which is the perfect bond; and let the peace of God be the decider of all things within your hearts, for it is that peace you were called, so that you might be united in one body.*" (Colossians 3:13-15, Barclay)

Barclay's comment on these verses is enlightening. "Literally what Paul says is 'Let the peace of God be the umpire in your heart.'" The verb he uses is a verb from the athletic arena; it is the word that is used of the umpire who settled things, with his decision in any matter of dispute. If the peace of Jesus Christ is the umpire in any man's heart, then, when feelings clash, and when we are pulled in two directions at the same time, when Christian charity conflicts in our hearts with unchristian irritation and annoyance, the decision of Christ will keep us in the way of love, and the Church will remain the one body it was meant to be." (Barclay)

3. Love Means Humility.

One man has noted that the chief causes of disunity within a Church are selfish ambition, personal prestige, and concentration of self. (Barclay Philippians, pages 34,40) Humility is a trait that is cultivated in the lives of great men. It must be a quality that every Christian cultivates, if the Church is to be united. To prefer others before ourselves and to acknowledge that we are wrong in our judgment, is necessary if unity is to be maintained in the Church.

The following prayer, seasoned with irony, is appropriate to meditate upon:

"Lord keep me from becoming talkative and possessed with the idea that I must express myself on every subject. Release me from the craving to straighten out everyone's affairs. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be wrong. Make me helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom and experience, it does seem a pity not to use it all --- But thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end. Amen."

(None of These Diseases, page 188)

Unity is the greatest characteristic of the Church. The motivation for unity is love which means freedom, forbearance, forgiveness, and humility.

II. UNITY IS THE GREATEST POWER OF THE CHURCH.

The course of history has been influenced and actually changed by the power of the Church. Wherein lies the power of the Church, first internally, and secondly, externally?

A. The Internal power of the Church is found in the unity within the Church as it is expressed through diversity of gifts. Paul wrote, *"For just as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so, although members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so, although we are many, we are one body in Christ, and we are all members of each other. Since, then, we have different gifts, according to the grace that has been given to us, let us use them in mutual services."* (Barclay's Romans 12:4-6) The diversity in gifts makes a powerful, unified church.

There are queens, drones, and workers among bees and ants, each of which have a specific and different function to fulfill in contributing toward a unified organization. There are different instruments in an orchestra, and each cooperating to produce beautiful harmony. There are different voices within a choir, each contributing to the harmony of the unified choir. So it is in the Church. There are many different gifts, none of which is to be used for self-display, but all of which are to be used to edify and beautify the entire Church.

B. The Church's External power is to be understood in terms of its outreach and witness in the world, as it seeks to accomplish Christ's purpose in the world.

Jesus prayed to His Father for His disciples: *"Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you gave to me, that they may be one, as we are one."* (John 17:11b, Barclay)

Comments Barclay on this passage, "The world cannot be evangelized by

competing Churches. Jesus prayed that His disciples might be as fully one as He and the Father are one; and there is no prayer of Jesus which has been so hindered from being answered by individual Christians and by all the Churches than this prayer."

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." (Barclay's Corinthians, page 209)

To wield influence in an evil world and to tear down the strongholds of Satan, the Church must be strongly united. Soldiers cannot be divided against each other and expect to win the battle.

"Like a mighty army Moves the Church of God;
Brothers we are treading Where the saints have trod;
We are not divided, All one body we;
One in hope and doctrine, One in charity."

There is power in union. Take some common illustrations from the world of man and nature. It does not take much weight to break a small strand of wire. However, when thousands of small strands of wire are united to make huge cables, these cables are able to hold up a swinging bridge like the Royal Gorge Bridge. Strength is found through the union of the small wires.

A drop of water has no power to speak of. However, combine many drops to make a gallon of water and combine many millions of gallons and what results in a surging river which has great power to carry many tons of earth and even to wear away large rocks. Power comes through the union of many small units. Think of the grasshopper. One grasshopper is annoying but can do little damage by itself. Multiply the one grasshopper by thousands and millions and what results is a devastating pest which is able to strip entire fields and completely destroy crops. There is great power in any army of grasshoppers.

The power of the Church rests in its unified front. One person is important and has vast potential, but the Church's greatest success and strength rests in the group, the army of Christ. A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. We are members of God's kingdom and as such must be worthy of that membership.

Paul says the quarreling, divided church is the weak church. Such a church is like a person who attempts to climb a mountain with a broken leg. How slow and almost impossible it is to make any progress. A divided church must have her broken relationships kit in order to be strong and influential.

The quarreling church is unsightly, unbecoming, and unappealing. The

quarreling church is like a rent garment! The Church must be united if it is to be attractive, beautiful, winsome, and effective. The Early Church was a united Church and, as a result, it was a fruitful church.

The Church which is saturated with the Holy Spirit is a united Church. Says Shoemaker, "Another great experience of the Holy Spirit is the way he brings unity and fellowship....this unity above freedom and dissent, above diversity of personalities and function...A quiet inward pressure upon people that lowers the tone of voices, stills the clamor of opinionated convictions and reminds everyone of the Higher Will that should prevail." (The Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification, page 20)

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22, Barclay) The world is seeking something which only the Church has. Are we, the Church, going to disappoint them? Will the world find in the Church peace for its turmoil, joy for its misery, forgiveness for its guilt, hope for its despair, fellowship for its loneliness, love for its rejection, comfort for its sorrow, harmony for its discord? The world has a high standard for the Church, despite the world's seeming indifference to the Church. The world knows if a church is complementary or competitive, saving or striving, compassionate or carnal, united or divided. If love, joy, peace are dominating a church as they should be, there is no room for clans or cliques. The world hears too much of bickering, clamoring, fighting, and quarreling. Let the Church sound forth the harmonious notes of love, peace and unity. Let all discord and disharmony be eliminated, and let only the sweet music of peace and joy be heard. The world needs the Gospel. Let us not fail to live up to the high standard the world expects of us.

CONCLUSION: 'Be of One Mind'. That is what Christians are intended to be. Unity characterizes the Church of Christ as it was intended to be. Love is the underlying motivation for unity. Love will give a congregation freedom - freedom to openly express ones individuality, but freedom also to confess faults to one another. Love will give a congregation forbearance and a spirit of forgiveness, and love will also give a congregation meekness and humility. These characteristics combine to make a strong, united Church.

Unity is the greatest power of the Church. This power of this unity is found in the diversity of gifts, which are to be harmoniously combined to present a unified front in the eyes of a critical world. The Church which is Spirit-filled is a beautiful, winsome, attractive, and influential witness to the world.

The MARKS OF A GREAT Church
UNITY AMIDST DIVERSITY

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Explain and interpret the following statement by William Barclay: "There is a sense in which disunity is the danger of every healthy Church."
2. What is the secret of the Church's power, persistence, and ability to perpetuate itself throughout the ages?
3. If 'Unity' is merely the manifestation of the deepest Christian quality which is Love, then describe the main characteristics of Christian Love (Agape).
4. Why, from both a logical and a Biblical basis, is it 'reasonable' for Christians to love one another thus forming a united Church?
5. On the basis of what authority can the following statement be made: "One has no right to claim to know God if he does not love his fellowman"? (Note I John 4:20-21)
6. Give your interpretation of the following statements by John Wesley: "No man can have God for his father unless he has the Church for his mother. God knows nothing of a solitary religion. No man ever went to heaven alone; he must either find friends or make them."
7. During the times of the early Church, what most amazed the nonbelievers (pagans) about the Christians?
8. If love is the underlying motivation for unity, what practically does love for fellow Christians mean within the context of the Church?
9. Practically speaking, how is Christian 'freedom' expressed and manifested in the fellowship of love-filled believers within a local Church?
10. According to Colossians 3:13-15, who (as what) is the 'Umpire' to settle differences and clashes between Christians, within the context of the local fellowship of believers (church)?
11. What are some of the chief causes of dissenting within a local church?
12. Concretely speaking, how is Christian humility manifested among mature believers within a local church, the result of which is the maintenance of unity and peace among Christian of different temperaments.
13. How does the diversity of God-given spiritual gifts contribute to the building of a powerful

and united church? (Note Romans 12:4-6; I Corinthians 12:12-31) Illustrate from the 'world of men' and from their 'world of nature' how diversity contributors to unity.

14. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements by William Barclay: "The world cannot be evangelized by competing churches. Jesus prayed that His disciples might be as fully one as He and the Father are one; and there is no prayer of Jesus which has been so hindered from being answered by individual Christians and by all the Churches than this prayer."
15. Do you agree (with Dick Sheppard) that the greatest "handicap the Church has is the unsatisfactory lives of professing Christians"?
16. As it seeks to influence society with its institutions, and as it seeks to witness to sinners with their defenses, why can it be said that the Church's greatest strength is in its 'United Front'?
17. When there are disagreements and differences among strong-willed believers within a local church, how specifically does the Holy Spirit work in the lives of sincere believers to bring about unity amidst diversity and reconciliation amidst division?
18. Share Scriptural support that documents the truth of the following statement: "If love, joy, and peace are dominating a church as they should be, there is no room for clans or cliques." (Note I Corinthians 3:1-9; Galatians 5:22-6:6)

CHAPTER 6
THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH
LIVING IN THE SCRIPTURES

The MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH LIVING IN THE SCRIPTURES

OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: II Timothy 3:14-17

INTRODUCTION: There is a special kind of famine in our world today. It is true that perhaps as many as one-fourth of the world's population today go to bed hungry every night. That is tragic indeed, but there is another famine in our world which is far worse. There is a famine throughout the land today - "not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord." (Amos 8:11)

Can you imagine a worse famine than this? A spiritual famine because people are not hearing the Word of God? Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every 'Word' which proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

People all over the world are starving for the Word of God. It says in Amos 8:12, "*Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.*"

PROPOSITION: One of the marks of a truly great church is Biblical knowledge and Biblical practice. All believers in the Church must be building their lives daily on the Word of God, allowing the Bible to do its saving and sanctifying functions in their lives.

- I. THE WORD OF God IS A STRONG FOUNDATION IN THE MIDST OF AN AGE OF GREAT DIFFICULTIES AND MORAL STRESS (II Timothy 3:14-15a).
- II. THE WORD OF GOD EXERCISES A STRONG FUNCTION IN ITS SAVING AND SANCTIFYING PURPOSES (II Timothy 3:15b-17).
 - A. The Saving Function Of The Word.
 - B. The Sanctifying Function Of The Word.

CONCLUSION: A great Church is one that is built on the foundation of the Word of God, and a Church whose people are daily allowing the Word of God to exercise its saving and sanctifying functions in their lives.

Will you today dedicate yourself to a daily and diligent study of the Word of God? Will you receive the message with great eagerness and will you examine the Scriptures every day? Will you evaluate every thing you do and every thought you have against the standard of the pure Word of God?

A Church which is dedicated to these high and lofty purposes is a Church which is on its way to great growth in Christ!

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH LIVING IN THE SCRIPTURES

INTRODUCTION: There is a special kind of famine in our world today. It is true that perhaps as many as one-fourth of the world's population today go to bed hungry every night. That is tragic indeed, but there is another famine in our world which is far worse. There is a famine throughout the land today - "not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord." (Amos 8:11)

Can you imagine a worse famine than this? A spiritual famine because people are not hearing the Word of God? Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every 'Word' which proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

People all over the world are starving for the Word of God. There seems never to be quite enough Bibles to distribute to those in other lands where there is such a scarcity of Bibles. The Gideon organization and others like it, are constantly trying to find more money to print more Bibles, and this in spite of the fact that tens of millions of Bibles have already been distributed. It says in Amos 8:12, *"Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it."*

When we have so many Bibles in our homes and when we use those Bibles so little, what would people who have no Bible say to us? Do we have any excuse for Biblical illiteracy, for spiritual starvation?

PROPOSITION: One of the marks of a truly great church is Biblical knowledge and Biblical practice. All believers in the Church must be building their lives daily on the Word of God, allowing the Bible to do its saving and sanctifying functions in their lives.

I. THE WORD OF GOD IS A STRONG FOUNDATION IN THE MIDST OF AN AGE OF GREAT DIFFICULTIES AND MORAL STRESS.

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." (II Timothy 3:14-15a)

Note the context of the letter of II Timothy and apply it to the modern day.

1. Time of false teaching, controversies - 2:14,16,23; 3:8 (in our day false teachings are also rampant).
2. Time of moral disintegration - 3:1-5

3. Time of apostasy - 1:15; 2:17; 4:10,16 (Denial of the faith is always a possibility - 2:12b, 13, 18b)
4. Time of persecution - Paul in prison - 1:8,16; Paul is suffering - 1:12; 2:9;4:14. Paul must endure - 2:10,12. Paul is ready to be martyred - 4:6-8

The truth, against which the evil forces were pitting their strength, must be guarded by Timothy - 1:14; Timothy is encouraged in his sufferings for the Lord - 1:8; 2:3.

All believers will suffer persecution - 3:12-13.

The Word of God, properly taught, is the source of strength during times of great stress and difficulty --2:15.

Are you building your life on the Foundation of the Word of God? All other foundations will crumble. The Word is the answer - II Timothy 3:14,15

When should one begin to build his life on the foundation of the Word of God? When he is a very small child - even at the time of infancy! (II Timothy 3:15)

Parents are to teach their children the Word at all times and from the time their children are very young.

Jewish education of children gives us a good example to follow. Says the Talmud, "If we do not keep our children to religion, when they are young, we shall certainly not be able to do so in later years." (Educational Ideals In The Ancient World; Barclay; page 12)

Notes Barclay, "It has always to be remembered that Jewish education was entirely religious education. There was no text-book except the Scriptures; all primary education was preparation for reading the Law; and all higher education was the reading and the study of it." (Ibid; page 13).

"However high the Jewish ideal of the school, the fact remains that to the Jew the real center of education is the home. To the Jew education is not education in any kind of academic or technical knowledge; it is education in holiness." (Page 14)

"So then the responsibility for educating the child is laid fairly and squarely on the parents, and that was true in the days when there were schools, just as much as in the days before schools came into being." (Page 15)

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one..... Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give ou today are to be

upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

A great church is one which patterns itself after the patterns of religious education as found in the days of the Old and New Testaments. A Great church is one in which all of its families are daily studying the Word of God in their homes. Suggestions for today:

- a. Read Sunday School papers together,
- b. Listen to Gospel songs together (learn scripture songs in the home by recordings),
- c. Read and memorize Bible verses together,
- d. Read Bible story books together,
- e. Role play Bible characters together,
- f. Play Bible games together,
- g. Listen to the Bible cassettes together or when alone.

In a society that is constantly changing in its fads, fashions, and ideas, we must, like Timothy, continue in the teachings and practices of the ancient Word of God. The applications of the Word may change from time to time and from age to age, but the essential teachings of the Word regarding God, Man, Sin, and Jesus Christ never change throughout the changing centuries.

What we LEARN from the Bible through constant study of it eventually becomes the vert driving forces of our lives! Mental knowledge of the Word becomes life's convictions and drives! To be shaped by the authoritative Word of God from early childhood is to become a man who is approved by God, "*Workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of truth.*" (II Timothy 2:15). *Such a man, mighty in the Word of Truth, is not "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, but their craftiness in deceitful wiles."* (Ephesians 4:14) Such a man gives priority to teaching and preaching the Word, just as Timothy gave his attention to preaching and teaching. "*Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.*" (I Timothy 4:16)

A great Church is filled with believers who are earnestly contending for the truth of the Scriptures (Jude 3), in the midst of false teachings, in the midst of indifference or outright persecution.

"As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians for they received the message

with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. Acts 17:10-12.

One mark of a great Church is the receptivity with which its people receive the Gospel message and the diligence with which they seek daily to apply its truths to their lives.

II. THE WORD OF GOD EXERCISES A STRONG FUNCTION IN ITS SAVING AND SANCTIFYING PURPOSES.

".....and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." II Timothy 3:15b-17

A. The Saving Function Of The Word.

The Word of God makes people "wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ." (Verse 15b) The Word not only is a strong foundation for life, but the Word exercises a strong function in life - namely, to bring people to salvation. Building one's life on the strong foundation of the Word results in the Word exercising a strong function in life - "salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

Knowing the Word propositionally results in being changed by the Word personally. One cannot be exposed to the teachings of the Bible over a long period of time without being transformed in his personal life - transformed in his thinking, in his actions, in his relationships!

Knowing about God becomes knowledge of God! Information becomes inspiration. Intellectual apprehension becomes moral transformation! A study of Jesus Christ becomes a commitment to Jesus Christ! You cannot long study the Word of God without being transformed by the Word of God.

Do you wish to have your life changed, your home revived, your heart comforted, your goals refined, your motives purified, your mind enlightened, your will strengthened? Then saturate yourself in the Word of God. Seek the Lord with an open mind. Study the Word diligently. The Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus! (Verse 15b)

Even outright agnostics or atheists who honestly read the Bible will find themselves on their knees, confessing their sins and confessing Jesus as Lord of life. "Lew Wallace was a very famous general and literary genius. He and his dear friend Ingersoll covenanted

together that they would write a book that would forever destroy the myth of Christianity. They resented the seeming bondage under which the religious people were kept who worshipped Jesus. Mr. Wallace tells the story of how for two years he had studied in the leading libraries of Europe and America seeking information which would enable him to write a book which would destroy Christianity. While writing the second chapter of his book he suddenly found himself on his knees crying out to Jesus saying, 'My Lord and my God.' The evidence for the deity of Christ was overwhelmingly conclusive. He could no longer deny that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. The One Whom he had determined to expose as a fraud, had captured him. Later Lew Wallace wrote probably the greatest novel concerning the events of Christ that has ever been written, Ben Hur." (Uniqueness of Jesus; page 7, Bill Bright)

One mark of a great Church is the constant exposure of its people to the transforming teachings of the Word of God. The Word of God exercises a strong function in making people "wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ." A great Church is a Church full of people who are allowing the Bible's teachings to transform their entire lives, daily and progressively.

Salvation is the purpose of the Bible. Salvation is an experience of being saved from sin in the past, and it is also a process of daily being saved from sin in the every-day present. A Church whose people are daily exposing themselves to the Bible - in reading, in study, in meditation and memorization - is a church that is being saved. Such a church is a Biblical Church, and thus a great Church! It is a church that is allowing the Bible to exercise its strong function of making people wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. (Verse 15)

B. The Sanctifying Function Of The Word

The function of the Scripture is not only salvation in the narrower sense of the term, i.e. salvation from sin, but the function of Scriptures includes much more. Its function is powerful because it is not a mere word of men, but it is the very Word of God. "All Scripture is God-breathed," i.e. its author is none less than God Himself.

The function of the Word is outlined in verse 16: It is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." These four words describe what might be called the sanctifying purpose of the Word of God. The Bible functions as God's instrument of sanctification in the lives of all believers. Sanctification, as used here, may be considered the process of cleansing and perfecting the mind and the spirit of God's children.

1. The Scriptures exercise the strong function of teaching. Every believer, in the sanctifying process of God, must be constantly changing to become conformed to the mind of Christ. "Have this mind in you which you have in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5) "Be transformed by the renewing of your

mind" (Romans 12:2) How do Christians get the mind of Christ? By daily studying the mind of Christ as revealed in the Gospels. The more you study the Gospels, the more your thoughts will become the thoughts of Christ. There is no shortcut to knowing the mind of Christ, other than serious study of the Gospels.

2. The Scriptures exercise the strong function of rebuking. "It is not meant that the Scriptures are valuable for finding fault; what is meant is that they are valuable for convincing a man of the error of his ways and for pointing him on the right path." (Barclay's Timothy, page 200)

The Bible clearly rebukes the sinner who is on the broad way which leads to destruction and eternal perdition. The Bible calls men to repentance and points all persons to the strait way which leads to eternal life.

But the Bible also rebukes believers when they stray away from the path of life. There are many sidetracks and tangents and pitfalls and snares on life's road. When a believer starts to stray from the center of the road, and begins to follow a path that leads him away from the road of life, the Bible exercises a strong function of rebuke and warning. There is a way that seems right unto man, but the end thereof is the way of death! The Bible points us in the right direction - the direction of Christ. There is only one way that is the way of Christ, and when we tend to become allured by other voices, other than the voice of Christ, the Bible rebukes us. *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me."* (John 10:27)

Giving heed to the Bible and to our God-sensitized conscience enables us to keep ourselves in the center of God's will, never swerving to the 'left' or to the 'right', neither to the way of moral legalism nor to the way of moral license. Obeying the Word keeps our faith intact. Disobeying the warnings of the Word results in shipwreck of our faith. "This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophetic utterances which pointed to you, that inspired by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith, among them Hymenaeus and Alexander." (I Timothy 1:18,19)

3. Continuing to consider the strong sanctifying function of the Word of God, II Timothy 3:16 says that the Scriptures also exercise the function of correcting.

"The real meaning of this is that all theories, all theologies, all ethics, are to be tested against the Bible. If they contradict the teaching of the Bible, they

are to be refused." (Barclay's Timothy; page 201)

A great church is a church that ventures in deep thought and that explores new ideas. It is not afraid to read, to inquire, to explore, to search. But, a great Church is a church that always examines ideas and teachings against the objective standard of the Bible. Any idea that cannot stand the exposure of the Word of God must be scraped.

4. Fourthly, in considering the sanctifying function of the Word of God, Paul tells Timothy that the Scriptures also train a man in righteousness until he is equipped for every good work. The sanctifying function of the Word of God in the life of a believer is a very fruitful function. The purpose of studying the Word is not only to understand the mind of Christ intellectually. It is not only to avoid the pitfalls of life and to stay clear of all false teaching. It is not only to Christianize our own actions and thoughts. The concluding purpose of the Word of God is to equip God's children for service, "for every good work." This is to say, that the sanctifying function of God's Word is a practical function - to equip God's people to be better servants in a world of needy persons. "The study of the Scriptures must never be selfish, never simply for the good of a man's own soul. Any conversion which makes a man think of nothing but the fact that he has been saved is no true conversion. He must study the Scriptures to make himself useful to God and to his fellow-man. No man is saved unless he is on fire to save his fellow-men." (Barclay's Timothy; page 202)

CONCLUSION: What are the marks of a great Church? A great Church is one that is built on the foundation of the Word of God, and a Church whose people are daily allowing the Word of God to exercise its saving and sanctifying functions in their lives.

Will you today dedicate yourself to a daily and diligent study of the Word of God? Will you receive the message with great eagerness and will you examine the Scriptures every day? Will you evaluate every thing you do and every thought you have against the standard of the pure Word of God?

A Church which is dedicated to these high and lofty purposes is a Church which is on its way to great growth in Christ!

**The MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH
LIVING IN THE SCRIPTURES**

Q U E S T I O N S

1. According to Amos 8:11-12, what is one of the worse kinds of famine imaginable, in our world today?
2. How would you describe the world in general and the conditions in the Church specifically, at the time when Paul wrote the Book of II Timothy?
3. What encouragement does Paul offer Timothy during such perilous times? (II Timothy 1:8; 2:3; 2:15)
4. Give your response to the following statement which is found in the ancient Jewish Talmud, regarding the education of children: "If we do not keep our children to religion, when they are young, we shall certainly not be able to do so in later years."

A question to Ponder: How likely is it that Christian parents will be able to "keep their children to religion (Christianity) if such parents allow their children to be educated 30 - 40 hours per week in a secular-oriented public school where rarely the Bible is read or studied or discussed?

5. Based upon contemplation of the following statement, answer the subsequent questions:

"However high the Jewish ideal of the school, the fact remains that to the Jew the real center of education is the home. To the Jew education is not education in any kind of academic or technical knowledge; it is education in holiness." (Barclay)

- (a) What practical advice can you offer a conscientious Christian parent who wishes to make his home "the real center of education"?
 - (b) As a Christian parent, have you seriously considered the positive options of either 'Home Schooling' or 'Christian Day Schooling' for your children?
 - (c) To avoid 'secularism' in education with a mere academic and technical orientation - how can you as a Christian parent give your children a better "education in holiness."?
6. Share methods and activities that you, as a Christian parent, have either practiced or that you intend to implement in your home, which shall enable your children to become "lovers of God and lovers of God's Word".

7. What great benefits are derived from a consistent study of God's Word, according to II Timothy 2:15 and I Timothy 4:16?
8. Why, following the example of the Berean believers (Acts 17:10-12), is it important for modern-day believers to examine the Scriptures every day to see if what they are being taught is true? What is the difference between being 'gullible' and being 'teachable'?
9. What is the difference between knowing the Word propositionally and knowing the Word personally? Is it possible for one to be exposed to the teachings of the Bible over a long period of time without one being transformed in his personal life - in his thinking, in his actions, and in his relationships? Why or why not? How does knowledge about God become knowledge of God, information become inspiration, intellectual apprehension become moral transformation, mental consent become volitional commitment? (Note John 14:25-26; 16:7-15)
10. What personal and spiritual results can be anticipated in the life of an agnostic or an atheist who sincerely reads and studies the Bible with an open and honest mind?
11. Is it possible for one's life to be transformed without his mind being renewed? Why or why not? (Note Romans 12:2 and Philippians 2:5)
12. What function does the Bible have in training one's conscience and in correcting one's 'daily walk'? (I Timothy 1:18,19)
13. Why is it important for a believer to test all of his theories and theologies and ethics against the clear teachings of the Bible? (II Timothy 3:16)
14. Share, practically-speaking, how God's Word has helped to equip you better to be a servant in a world of needy persons. (II Timothy 3:16-17)
15. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements by William Barclay:

"The study of the Scriptures must never be selfish, never simply for the good of a man's own soul. Any conversion which makes a man think of nothing but the fact that he has been saved is no true conversion. He must study the Scriptures to make himself useful to God and to his fellow-men. No man is saved unless he is on fire to save his fellow-men."

CHAPTER 7

The MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

UNCEASING PRAYER

The MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH UNCEASING PRAYER

OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: James 5:16-18

INTRODUCTION: Someone said, "More is wrought through prayer than this world dreams of!" The Bible calls us to prayer - to pray always, to pray diligently, to pray with faith, to pray for all men. There are scores of verses that commend and command prayer. Here are some: I Thessalonians 5:17 - "*Pray continually*". Luke 18:1 - "*Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*" I Timothy 2:8 - "*I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.*" James 5:13 - "*Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.*" Ephesians 6:18 - "*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*"

PROPOSITION: There is great power in prayer. We must note the (1) Power of Unceasing Prayer, (2) Practice of Unceasing Prayer, (3) Promotion of Unceasing Prayer.

I. POWER OF UNCEASING PRAYER.

II. PRACTICE OF UNCEASING PRAYER.

- A. To pray continually assumes that you have regular times of conscious praying - called by some the devotional hour or the "Quiet Time".
- B. To pray continually assumes that you have not only regular blocks of time to pray each day, but that you practice "flash praying" throughout the day.
- C. Praying constantly also means allowing the Holy Spirit to take control of your subconscious mind, in order that He may cleanse your instincts and desires and affections.

III. PROMOTION OF UNCEASING PRAYER.

CONCLUSION: Prayer leads to Revival, and when Revival comes, there is a greater concentration on prayer than ever before. Prayer is both the Cause and the Effect of Revival.

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INTRODUCTION: Someone said, "More is wrought through prayer than this world dreams of!" The Bible calls us to prayer - to pray always, to pray diligently, to pray with faith, to pray for all men. There are scores of verses that commend and command prayer. Here are some: I Thessalonians 5:17 - "*Pray continually*". Luke 18:1 - "*Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*" I Timothy 2:8 - "*I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.*" James 5:13 - "*Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.*" Ephesians 6:18 - "*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*"

PROPOSITION: Note (1) Power of Unceasing Prayer, (2) Practice of Unceasing Prayer, (3) Promotion of Unceasing Prayer.

I. POWER OF UNCEASING PRAYER. Say 'Yes' to 'prayer' even though it may seem unreasonable to you. The world thinks prayer is a waste of breath, an exercise in wishful thinking, that prayer is useless, that human effort and organization are what 'make things move'. It is too easy for believers to say, along with the fishermen, "Master, we've worked hard (i.e., prayed) all night and haven't caught (i.e., received) anything." Many Christians there are who are plagued with doubt, when it comes to believing in the effectiveness of praying.

But believers who are tempted to doubt, must say 'No' to their doubts and 'Yes' to Jesus' command to pray. Said Jesus, "*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks find; and to him who knock; the door will be opened.*" (Matthew 7:7-8)

Saying 'Yes' to 'prayer' brings the abundance of God's powerful transformations. Some have 'fished' (prayed) hard and long with no results - empty nets (unanswered prayers). However, Jesus promises that if we 'fish' (pray) in the way He commands, results will be forthcoming eventually - nets full of 'fish' (i.e., answered prayers resulting in powerful transformations).

Great revivals throughout history have always been preceded by earnest and extended prayer. It was so before the great 1970 Asbury Revival. Several student prayer groups on that campus at Wilmore, Kentucky, had been regularly meeting for prayer, seeking God for great change. The day before the revival broke out during a routine chapel service, one student told Hal Phillips (who was a student on that campus at the time) that the next day revival was going to happen during chapel. Her prediction came true, for the next day in chapel, hundreds of students went forward to pray. It seemed that all of 'heaven broke loose',

for from that beginning chapel service, joy overflowed as thousands upon thousands of students and adults were renewed on scores of American campuses. The revival spread to several other countries as well!

"Or on the day in August of 1806 when there was quite a thunderstorm. Samuel Mills, whose custom it was to spend Wednesday and Saturday afternoons in prayer with other students on the banks of the Hoosac River in a valley near Williams College in Massachusetts, sought refuge under a haystack, of all places. Waiting out the storm, the students gave themselves to prayer for foreign missions. Mills directed the discussion and prayer to their own missionary obligation. He exhorted his companions with the words that later became a watchword for them, 'We can do this if we will.' And it was from that haystack prayer meeting that the foreign missionary movement of the churches of the United States had an initial main impulse, according to Kenneth Scott Latourette, the foremost historian of the church's worldwide expansion." (50 Day Adventure Book)

Remember: Saying 'Yes' to 'prayer' brings the abundance of God's powerful transformation to society in general and to persons in specific!

II. PRACTICE OF UNCEASING PRAYER.

What does it mean to pray continually? "The essence of it is to have heart and mind filled with the consciousness of God's presence, and to have the habit of referring everything to Him, in the moment when we are doing it, or when it meets us." (McClaren; Expositions of Scriptures; Volume 15; page 231)

A. To pray continually assumes that you have regular times of conscious praying - called by some the devotional hour or the "Quiet Time".

"But why pray every day? Because the Spirit-filled person can lose his relationship even as one can lose a human friendship - by avoiding his friend. Friendship with God is lost by ignoring Him. The subtle problem is just this: Friendship is lost a day at a time, and because it is lost no faster than that, we can slowly but surely be blinded to our loss of God. Therefore, prayer must be daily." (Alive To God Through Prayer; page 23)

B. To pray continually assumes that you have not only regular blocks of time to pray each day, but that you practice "flash praying" throughout the day.

"Flash prayers" are those quick, silent prayers throughout the day, petitioning God to help you during a difficult time, or asking God to give you wisdom as you counsel another, or quickly crying out to God during a hard trial or a subtle temptation. Praying constantly includes praying for others while you are working or driving or shopping or walking or jogging. It means learning to turn to God in praise

and adoration and thanksgiving all throughout the day - blanketing your daily life with prayer. There are many small "chinks" of time during each day that could be easily wasted. But the man who is learning to pray constantly is the man who is using these otherwise wasted times to pray - while you are showering or putting up your hair (if you are a woman) or waiting for a traffic light to turn green, or waiting for someone to meet you for an appointment in a restaurant, or a thousand other times. Fill the "blank" times with prayer. If you have a job that involves a lot of driving, spend some of your driving time talking to God - praising Him for His goodness and interceding for lost friends and loved ones!

C. Praying constantly also means allowing the Holy Spirit to take control of your subconscious mind, in order that He may cleanse your instincts and desires and drives and affections.

Keeping your subconscious mind surrendered to the Holy Spirit allows the Spirit to implant new and fresh ideas into your mind - ideas that will influence your attitudes and your desires and your decisions. Because the Spirit has control of your subconscious mind, the Lord can implant ideas in your mind even while you are sleeping. For what is prayer? Prayer is not only verbal and conscious communication with God, but prayer is also nonverbal and subconscious communion with God. Prayer is listening as much as it is talking, and prayer is passive receptivity as much as it is active initiation and request-making. So, prayer involves both the extended and short periods of conscious communication with God, and also prayer involves the continual passive and subconscious surrender of our minds to the Holy Spirit. Thus, whether we are on our knees or working in the shops, or whether we are awake or asleep - we can be praying without ceasing!

III. PROMOTION OF UNCEASING PRAYER.

1. Start a personal 'Quiet Time' alone with God (start praying while you are waking early in the morning and pray while you are falling asleep).
2. Start having "Family Devotions" daily with your family.
3. Practice praying silently about every concern that comes to your mind, as you go about your daily routine work ('Flash praying').
4. Begin using the Bible as a guide to effective praying, use the Bible's prayers - like the Psalms - to pray (personalize them).
5. Find a prayer partner, and regularly 'meet' together, if possible in person, but at least regularly on the phone (sharing a prayer together on the phone regularly - at least once a week). "If two of you shall agree as touching any matter, it shall be granted to you").
6. Be a part of the Church's 'Prayer Chain' and participate enthusiastically.
7. Share openly and regularly your prayer concerns in the fellowship of a small group.
8. Write out your prayers in a Prayer Journal.

9. Read the prayers that other men have written - like those of Peter Marshall.
10. Regularly visit in the homes of fellow Christians, for the purpose of praying together informally.

CONCLUSION: Prayer leads to Revival, and when Revival comes, there is a greater concentration on prayer than ever before. Prayer is both the Cause and the Effect of Revival.

God's work is best promoted and advanced through unceasing prayer. A famous modern-day example of this is the "Asbury Revival" of 1970. Following are some excerpts from the book - "ONE DIVINE MOMENT" - which describes that wonderful revival - a nationwide revival that happened because of the promotion of prayer on an obscure Christian College Campus in Kentucky!

"All moments in history are not the same. Some loom large like Mount Everest, towering high above what surrounds them. For decades and centuries afterward men point back to these moments as decisive in human destiny. Usually these are times when men take some new and bold action. But there are moments when God decisively acts to reveal Himself and His purposes. In such a time the moment not only teems with present significance, but it can fill the future with new meaning and radiance.

While many students across America were burning down buildings and rioting in the streets, students in this college community were strangely drawn to their knees to pray. It was as if the campus had been suddenly invaded by another Power. Classes were forgotten. Academic work came to a standstill. In a way awesome to behold, God had taken over the campus. Caught up in the wonder of it, a thousand students remained for days in the college auditorium - not to demand more freedom or to protest the establishment, but to confess their sins and to sing the praises of their Saviour!

"It included getting up a half hour earlier than usual each morning for prayer, Bible study and to plan specific ministries during the day. Many of these persons had entered into more meaningful experiences with God, and their witness was having an effect upon others in the college. In addition, various groups - large and small - had been meeting at different times to pray for spiritual awaking.

"High peaks in attendance would come in the evening hours when the main sanctuary was crowded. Even at 2:30 a.m. there might still be 300 people in the chapel at prayer. Their numbers would dwindle to less than a hundred before sunrise. Then after breakfast the building would begin to fill again.

"Occasionally the pattern of witnessing was interrupted by special seasons of prayer in response to the many requests coming in. Telegrams, letters and phone calls contained urgent appeals for prayer from all over the United States and Canada."

The MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH UNCEASING PRAYER

QUESTIONS

1. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following popular statement: "More is wrought through prayer than this world dreams of."
2. Tell what 'the world' thinks of prayer in contrast to what earnest believers believe about prayer.
3. Why are some Christians plagued with doubts, when it comes to believing in the effectiveness of praying? When Christians are tempted to abandon the practice of praying, because no 'answers' seem to be forthcoming as a result of praying, what should Christians do instead? (Note I Thessalonians 5:17; I Timothy 2:8; Luke 18:1; James 5:13; Ephesians 6:18; Matthew 7:7-8)
4. Can you share specific examples of the activation of God's power in bringing personal or group transformation, as a result of earnest praying?
5. Share from your personal life how you have learned to keep your heart and mind sensitive to God's presence, and tell how you are learning to develop the 'habit' of referring all of your daily challenges and problems quickly to God as soon as you become aware of them. What techniques have you developed to better enable you to "practice the presence of God" in your daily life?
6. If the Christian life can be described as an intimate relationship with God, why do you think it is important for a believer to pray every day?
7. Why is it important to practice "flash praying" throughout one's day?
8. Why is it so important for Christians to surrender their subconscious mind to the Holy Spirit?
9. Do you believe it is possible for the Holy Spirit to implant ideas in your mind even while you are sleeping? Why or why not?
10. Cite Scriptural references to document the truth of the following statement: "Prayer is listening as much as it is talking, and prayer is passive receptivity as much as it is active initiation and request-making."
11. Share how you conduct your daily 'Quiet Time'.
12. What have you done to bring greater variety and meaning to your "Family Devotions"?

13. Have you ever `personalized' the Bible's prayers (like John 17 or Ephesians 1:15-23) in your own personal prayer life?
14. What significance is there in having a `Prayer Partner' with whom you regularly share personal and family needs?
15. What benefits have you personally gained through your active participation in your local church's "Prayer Chain"?
16. What benefits could be derived by occasionally writing out your prayers in a "Prayer Journal" or "Daily Diary"?
17. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God's work is best promoted and advanced through unceasing prayer."
18. Share your personal responses (or reactions) to the following statements: "Prayer leads to Revival, and when Revival comes, there is a greater concentration on Prayer than ever before. Prayer is both the Cause and Effect of Revival."

CHAPTER 8

The MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

FULL OF GOOD WORKS

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH FULL OF GOOD WORKS

OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:3-8

INTRODUCTION: The Christian is a man with a heavenly vision, but the true Christian is also a man with an earthly concern. He whose head is in heaven ought to have his hands and his feet most actively at work on earth. He who is most alive to spiritual visions ought to be most responsive to human needs. He who is most responsive to God's grace is the same one who is most active in performing practical good works.

PROPOSITION: Christians are to be 'full of good works' for a life which concentrates on doing good to all persons is a life that evidences a vital relationship with Christ.

I. The Motivation For Good Works

- A. God's grace equips us to do good works.
- B. God's work equips us to do good works
- C. God's gifts equip us to do good works

II. The Meaning Of Good Works

Here are some guidelines for evaluating a work which claims to be a good work:

- A. Did God initiate it?
- B. Is it redemptive?
- C. Does it exist for God's glory?
- D. Does it exalt Jesus?

III. The Importance Of Good Works

- A. Without Good Works, life is unbalance.
- B. Good Works are the worthy results of a genuine repentance.
- C. Good Works are the result of a genuine saving faith.
- D. Good Works are a witness to an unbelieving world.
- E. Good Works are the result of a response of obedience to the Master.
- F. Good Works is the natural evidence of a life committed to love.
- G. One's eternal salvation is inseparably connected with Good Works.
- H. The Works of believers, performed in life, will be judged in eternity.

IV. Hindrances To Good Works

- A. Over-reaction by Conservative Christians to the social gospel of Liberal Christians.
- B. Separatist attitudes of Christians who rightly separate themselves from the world's spirit but who, at the same time, wrongly separate themselves from the world's needs.
- C. Eschatological Fatalism which believes that the world will inevitably get worse and worse before Jesus returns, therefore, don't try to do anything to directly improve society's institutions.
- D. "Everyone's responsibility is nobody's responsibility."
- E. "I am only one person, what can I do?"

CONCLUSION: Faith in God and in His power is no substitute for hard work. Unless the Lord builds the Church, those who labor, labor in vain - true. But it is also true that unless believers labor to build the church, the church will not be built, regardless of the infinite power of God. It is the coupling of the believer's earnest labors and the Holy Spirit's mighty power that works miracles of church growth!

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH FULL OF GOOD WORKS

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:3-8

INTRODUCTION: How important are 'Good Works'? Perhaps there has been more 'heated debates' on the subject of 'Good Works' than any other subject.

Throughout Church history, there has been much controversy surrounding the nature and the need of Good Works. Extremes in viewpoint have brought many into strong conflict.

On one hand, there has been the 'legalist' who believes that one's performance of good works is all-important and the basis for meriting God's favor and earning one's 'passport' to heaven. Many, if not all, of the 'cults' believe that one must 'earn' his salvation through so-called 'Good Works'.

On the other hand, there has been the 'antinomian' who believes that God's grace alone saves a person without any accompanying response or responsibility on the part of man. To such a persons, 'Good Works' have no part at all in man's ultimate salvation.

The 'legalist' says, "All works, no grace!" The 'antinomian' says "All grace, no works!" Who is right, the 'legalist' or the 'antinomian'? Neither is right! Faith and Good Works! Ephesians 2:8-10 gives us this relationship: God's grace initiates, Man's faith responds, Good Works result! "For by grace are ye saved, through faith, for good works!"

Wrote Paul, *"I want you to give special emphasis to these matters, so that those who believe in God may be concerned with giving their time to doing good works."* (Titus 3:8, Today's English Version)

John Wesley, a man whose life was full of good works, strongly exhorted believers to focus on good works:

"Do all the good you can,
In all the ways you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can."

Someone wrote, "Strive always to be like a good watch - open face, busy hands, pure gold, well regulated, and full of good works." (Shoe Leather Faith; No. 124)

In her study of the early Methodists, Dr. Alice Tenney observes: "Perfect Loves operates in two directions: vertically, toward God, horizontally toward man. Early Methodists really loved man. They did not sign a check for Community Chest Drives: they went into dirty garrets and nursed sick old women. Even noblemen did that sort of thing, denying themselves luxuries in order to do it. It

got right down among the needy, the evil, even the criminals, and showed what real friendship and compassion are. People still need friends more than clothing. More than money they need the News that inner resources are theirs for the asking. The usual social worker knows nothing about this. A twenty dollar a week contribution leaves the hungry essentially as hungry as before, for the heart is still starving. If Love could be allowed to work in the world today among the Great Hungry here and overseas, as it was released by the Methodist Revival, the ground work for world change would be laid." (Living In Two Worlds; pg.112,113)

The Christian is a man with a heavenly vision, but the true Christian is also a man with an earthly concern. In fact, the man who is most living for heaven ought to be most living for his fellowman. "That is why the moral earnestness of revival converts had much to do with the abolition of slavery, the temperance movement, a growing concern for child welfare, medical aid for the sick, education for all, women's suffrage, the reclamation of the socially lost such as the prostitute and the criminal, and the giving of the gospel to those where its truth had never gone." (One Divine Moment; pg.107)

He whose head is in heaven ought to have his hands and his feet most actively at work on earth. A Christian is a man who is living in two worlds. He who is most alive to spiritual visions ought to be most responsive to human needs. For the man with the heavenly vision is seeing Reality from a broader and more realistic perspective. Being alive to the spiritual ought to automatically include all of the material. He who is most responsive to God's grace is the same one who is most active in performing practical good works.

Said one to John Wesley, during Wesley's search for spiritual reality: "Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven? Remember that you cannot serve Him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them: the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion." No social isolation, but social involvement with hurting people

PROPOSITION:

Christians are to be 'full of good works', for a life which concentrates on doing good to all persons is a life that evidences a vital relationship with Christ.

If the Bible exhorts us to be full of good works, then we must seek to understand (1) The Motivation for Good Works, (2) The Meaning of Good Works, (3) The Importance of Good Works, (4) The Hinderance to Good Works.

I. The Motivation For Good Works.

What motivates us to do good works? Are we motivated to do good works so that we might earn our salvation, or to appease God's wrath, or to demonstrate our own inherent goodness? All such motivations are both futile and wicked! "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this

not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:9; NIV) "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags." (Isaiah 64:6a)

God is the Source of all true motivation for Good Works!

A. God's Grace Equips Us To Do Good Works.

"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." (II Corinthians 9:8)

B. God's Word Equips Us To Do Good Works.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (II Timothy 3:16,17)

C. God's Gifts Equip Us To Do Good Works.

"Now God gives us many kinds of special abilities, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service to God, but it is the same Lord we are serving. There are many ways in which God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work in and through all of us who are his. The Holy Spirit displays God's power through each of us as a means of helping the entire church." (I Corinthians 12:4-7; Living Bible)

II. The Meaning Of Good Works.

"We now come to the quality of good works. What is a good work? Here are some guidelines for evaluating a work which claims to be a good work.

A. It must have been initiated by the Lord. God best anoints, confirms, and consummates what he has initiated. He is hesitant indeed to bless with divine glory that which was begun with human hands.

B. It must be redemptive in nature. God never supports a cause which does not fit properly into his overall plan of redemption. If it is not redemptive in quality, it doesn't deserve divine endowments.

C. It must exist to God's glory, not man's. If those involved in the plan have something to gain thereby, except the glory of God, that work may not be a good work. God will not share his glory with another - neither his praise with graven images.

D. It must have as its purpose to exalt Jesus Christ in everything. That which God is eager to bless is the platform upon which Christ will be exalted and from which Christ will be preached.

God is committed to every good work, but it must be understood that every work which claims to be good cannot go through all these gates. They might walk through one or two, or even three, but that is not enough. Ask these four questions of any work: Did God initiate it? Is it redemptive? Does it exist for God's glory? Does it exalt Jesus? If you can readily answer 'yes' to all questions, then you may be assured that it is a good work indeed!" (God's Miraculous Plan of Economy; Jack Taylor, page 82)

III. The Importance Of Good Works.

A. Without Good Works, life is unbalanced. Sensitive Christians are not "Either--Or" persons, but "Both-And".

EMOTIONS > HEART > UPWARD IN PRAYER > WORSHIP > FAITH
(Spirit gives assurance to heart.)

INTELLECT > HEAD > INWARD IN THINKING > STUDY > INQUIRY
(Spirit gives answers to the mind.)

WILL > HAND > OUTWARD IN SERVICE > WITNESSING > WORKS
(Spirit gives power to the will.)

Notes Barclay: "In the well proportioned life there must be both prayer and effort. Again it is tempting to divide men into two classes - the saints who spend life secluded on their knees in constant devotion, and the toilers who labor in the dust and the heat of the day. But it will not do. It is said that Martin Luther was close friends with another monk. The other monk was as fully persuaded of the necessity of the Reformation as Luther was. So they made an arrangement. Luther would go down into the world and fight the battle there; the other monk would remain in his cell praying all the time for the success of Luther's labors. But one night the monk had a dream. In it he saw a single reaper engaged on the impossible task of reaping an immense field unaided and alone. The lonely reaper turned his head and the monk saw his face, and it was the face of Martin Luther; and he knew that he must leave his cell and leave his prayers and go to help. It is, of course, true that there are some who, because of age or bodily weakness, can do nothing other than pray; and their prayers are indeed a strength and a support. But if any normal person thinks that prayer can be a substitute for effort, then his prayers are merely a way of escape. Prayer and effort must go hand in hand." (Barclay's James; page 91)

B. Good Works are the worthy results of a genuine repentance.

"First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove

their repentance by their deeds." Acts 26:20

C. Good Works are the result of a genuine saving faith.

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepare in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10.

"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. 1 Corinthians 15:58.

In the same way, faith by itself, is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. James 2:17,18,24.

The proper results of an emotional and intellectual response to God's love is a strong volitional commitment to God's will. Jesus Christ gave Himself to us "to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds." (Titus 2:14, RSV)

Said Wesley: "Works do not give life to faith, but faith begets works, and then is perfected by them." Notes Bishop Marston concerning Wesley's understanding of the proper relationship between faith and works: "Wesley made much of the social direction of the Christian religion, insisting that good works must be the fruit of a living faith and a condition of one's continuing in saving relationship to God, but he protested forcefully against the teaching that works can yield merit for one's salvation." (From Age to Age; page 108)

Summarizes William Barclay: "The fact is that no man can be saved by works; but equally no man can be saved without producing works." (Barclay's James; page 87)

"We are not saved By deeds; we are saved FOR deeds; these are the twin truths of the Christian life." (Barclay)

"No man will ever be moved to action without faith; and no man's faith is real until it moves him to action." (Ibid; page 92)

Good Works do not save us, but good works are pleasing to God for they are expressions of love, loyalty, and obedience to God.

D. Good Works are a witness to an unbelieving world. "The verbal witness to Jesus Christ, whether spontaneous or carefully organized, goes poorly unless in the congregation there is an overflow of good works. It goes no better where good works have become a substitute for verbal witness. But where good works are supplemental to the spoken witness, the world

gets a multidimensional message and the work of the Lord prospers." (Belonging; page 82)

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

E. Good Works are the result of a response of obedience to the Master.

"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir.' but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted? 'The first,' they answered. Jesus said, 'I will tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.'" Matthew 21:28-31.

F. Good Works is the natural evidence of a life committed to love.

It is possible to serve another without loving the one you are serving (example of slavery), but it is not possible to love one without seeking to serve that one in some way.

If we truly love the Master, we will seek to do those things which bring pleasure to the Master. What brings pleasure to our Master? *"There is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than one ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."* (Luke 15:7) Winning sinners to Christ brings great joy to the Master! Jesus said, *"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."* (Matthew 9:37,38)

Service is the natural outworking of love. A heart that is filled with love results in life that is filled with good deeds. A loving heart is what moves the hands to action. Service that is motivated by love is service that is done in an uncalculating way, service that is done without watching the clock and without keeping track of the cost.

G. One's eternal salvation is inseparably connected with Good Works. Eternal life is gained, not just by believing, but also by doing. Intellectual faith alone is not sufficient for salvation. There must be a heart and life commitment to Christ, evidenced by a life of good works. *"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder."* (James 2:19, NIV)

A life of compassion is the evidence that one is truly a believer.

"Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not invite me in. I needed clothes and you did not clothe me. I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me. They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison and did not help you?" He will reply, "I tell you the truth whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matthew 25:41-46) The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. (Revelations 20:13)

This is not to say that good works, independent of faith, can save one's soul, for good works apart from saving faith are useless. *"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)*

H. The Works of believers, performed in life, will be judged in eternity.

Some people falsely reason that if they are saved by grace alone, then they can relax their own efforts in the Christian life. Such thinking is dangerous, however. II Corinthians 5:10 says that *"We (Christians) must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."*

"What purpose, then, will the final judgement serve in the case of such believers? In the words of Paul, it will be "the judgement seat of Christ", and the term indicates something of its purpose for believers. On that occasion, the Savior will measure the quality of the life His followers have lived. Though their salvation is by faith, authentic faith reflects itself in works, and those works must be judged." (The Mature Church Member, Bastian,99)

The quality of each believer's works will be tested in eternity and rewards for one's works will be given, according to one's faithfulness. (Note I Corinthians 3:10-15)

One's capacity to enjoy heaven will be largely determined by the degree of one's faithfulness in labor for the Lord on earth. Notes Marston, "Man is called not merely to save his soul and insure an eternal destiny in Heaven, but to devote his energies, his talents, all his resources in laying the foundation of his eternity....We acquire here spiritual wrinkles that

eternity itself can never iron out. And thus the Christians philosophy gives significance to this life, for the work we begin here will be consummated there. This life then becomes important! More than a dressing room for eternity, it is a laboratory of the Eternal." (From Chaos to Character;page 164)

IV. HINDRANCES TO GOOD WORKS

A Christian should be a man both with an heavenly vision and earthly concern, a man who is concerned both in personal salvation and in social redemption. Many who are very concerned about heaven seem to be very complacent about earthly suffering. Why is this so? Several reasons may be given for this perversion.

- A. Evangelical Christianity has overly reacted to so-called Liberal Christianity which has preached a social gospel with minimum concern about the hereafter. In reacting against the social utopias which the Liberals have sought to build upon earth through human reformation and human progress, Evangelicals have sought to re-emphasize regeneration and the spiritual Kingdom of God, with a consequent de-emphasis upon social problems.
- B. Evangelicals have emphasized the importance of escaping "The corruption that is in the world through lust," (2 Peter 1:4) and thus, well-meaning Christians have separated themselves from everything that might pollute their pure and spotless lives. Does not the Scripture say "*Come out from among them and be ye separate and I will receive you, saith the Lord*"? (2 Corinthians 6:17) *Such a Christian has forgotten, that while he is not to be "of" the world he is to be "in" the world* (John 17:15). In other words, a Christian is to separate himself from the world of sinful practices, but he is not to remove himself from the world of sinful men. Jesus was a man of heavenly vision, but he was also a friend of publicans, harlots, and sinners of all kinds. The Christian must be both a man of heavenly vision and a man of earthly concern.
- C. There are well-meaning Christians who have been taught that one of the "signs of the last times" is widespread lawlessness, social disorder, and intensified evil. Such Christians somehow feel that this is an inevitability, and that therefore, Christians can do nothing to bring about peace and order and a semblance of righteousness to society. Thus, any motivation for social reform is undercut, and Christians tend to "run to the hills" to escape "the destruction of Sodom." If society "in the last times" is inevitably going to "go to the dogs", why exert so much effort in trying to redeem society? Why perform "good works" if the world is under God's judgment and will be destroyed anyway?

Let us be clear about some things. We must flee fornication and must keep ourselves "*unspotted from the world*" James 1:27. We are not to be "of" the world, but we are to be "in" the world. It is possible to minister to the world's needs without partaking of the world's spirit. Further, we are to minister to needs without partaking of the world's spirit. Further, we are to realize that there will never be total redemption of society before the Prince of Peace takes over the rule of this world.

However, in acknowledging these guidelines, the Christian must not fall into an Eschatological fatalism which essentially says, "The world is predicted to get worse and worse before Jesus returns, so don't fight this inevitability. Save your energy for better things--like the cultivation of your own soul. Wait until Jesus comes back again. Then the world will enjoy universal peace, and the evil human systems will be cleansed of their evil."

This fatalistic attitude toward the world is destructive of redemptive action in society which has such widespread suffering. Christians are called to "occupy till Jesus comes," and this means aggressive and loving involvement in human institutions and systems.

D. Another Hinderance In Dealing With Social Sickness Is The Fact Of Collective Irresponsibility.

You have heard of the old adage, "Everyone's job is nobody's job." We can also rephrase this: "Everyone's guilt is nobody's guilt," or "Everyone's responsibility is nobody's responsibility."

"If a group of people can be made to share the responsibility for what would be a sin if an individual did it, the load of guilt rapidly lifts from the shoulders of all concerned. Others may accuse, but the guilt shared by many evaporates for the individual. Time passes. Memories fade. Perhaps there is a record, somewhere; but who reads it?" (Whatever Became of Sin? Menninger;page 95).

"It is this lack of the sense of corporate responsibility that is laying its destroying hand upon China. I was in a city the streets of which were unspeakably filthy. A Chinese gentleman told me that the encyclopedia said that this city was the dirtiest city in the world. I turned to this Chinese friend and said to him, 'I don't understand this; these shops and stores are beautifully clean, Chinese gentlemen in them dressed in silk, but these narrow streets are unspeakably dirty.'

“‘It is easy to understand,’ he replied, ‘for the shops and stores belong to these men, but the streets don’t belong to anybody.’ So they all wallowed in corporate filth because of a lack of corporate responsibility. To say, ‘It is not on my body,’ turned out to mean that the results of it were on everybody’s body.’”

- E. Another hindrance to Good Works is the feeling of futility which many feel, as expressed in the following statement: "I am only one person, and therefore I can't do much!" In the face of overwhelming institutional evil, with all of its complexity, a person feels very insignificant.

Recognize that Christians may exercise a powerful influence on society even though they may be a minority in numbers.

Notes Billy Graham, "Joan of Arc was only one woman, but she saved France. The whole city of Florence was transformed under the preaching of one Roman Catholic priest by the name of Savonarola. Martin Luther was one man, but he nailed some theses on the church door at Wittenberg and altered the course of European history. One (modern-day) man, Aleksander Solzhenitzen, with nothing but a pen in hand, stood up against the entire Soviet empire. They didn't know what to do with him. He didn't stand with a gun, he stood with moral courage. The whole world admired him." (Decision, January 1976).

Wrote Edward Hale, "I am only one but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do." Said someone, "Do what you can, where you are, with what you have." (Shoelather Faith, No. 418)

Thus, there are at least 5 factors that hinder in effective involvement in social suffering! (1) Over-reaction by Conservative Christians to the social gospel of Liberal Christians; (2) Separatist attitudes of Christians who rightly separate themselves from the world's spirit but who, at the same time, wrongly separate themselves from the world's needs, (3) Eschatological Fatalism which believes that the world will inevitably get worse and worse before Jesus returns, so why try to do anything to directly improve society's institutions, (4) "Everyone's responsibility is nobody's responsibility," resulting in corporate irresponsibility. (5) "I am only one person, what can I do?"

CONCLUSION:

"Evangelical Christians tend to have a lot of religion in their hearts, a good bit in their heads, but not much in their feet. And Christianity that doesn't walk around in shoes isn't worth much. It has to walk in shoes, all kinds of shoes - sandals, boots, high heels, and suedes. It has to walk. The role of the pastor is to teach people how to get their Christianity to walk right. If we only teach them how to think Christianity and how to feel it, but not how to walk it, we are failing," (Love,

What is the answer to success within the Church? Every believer working hard, as if everything depended upon his faithfulness in labors, and then every believer trusting God as if everything depended alone upon God! There is no magical or mystical secret to success in God's Kingdom. Faith in God and in His power is no substitute for hard work. Unless the Lord builds the Church, those who labor, labor in vain - true. But it is also true that unless believers labor to build the church, the church will not be built, regardless of the infinite power of God. It is the coupling of the believer's earnest labors and the Holy Spirit's mighty power that works miracles of church growth!

"A Chinaman brought a number of his friends to the mission. When he was asked how he succeeded in getting so many to come, he replied, 'I got on my knees and talkee, talkee, talkee. Then I got up and walkee, walkee, walkee.' Pray, and then go to work. Prayer without work, is vain. Praying without working, like working without praying, is dead, being alone. Let us all 'talkee and walkee'." (ShoeLeather Faith;No. 540)

The MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH
FULL OF GOOD WORKS

QUESTIONS

PART I.

1. Regarding the controversy surrounding the nature and the need of Good Works, what are the two great extremes in viewpoint that have brought many into conflict?
2. Give examples, both from the past and the present, of social changes that have been accomplished in society as a direct result of genuine spiritual revival.
3. Briefly stated, what is the relationship between God's Grace, Man's Faith, and Good Works? (Ephesians 2:8-10)
4. What four guidelines can be used for evaluating a work which claims to be a "good work"?
5. Give your comments and insights on the following chart.

EMOTIONS >>> HEART >>> UPWARD IN PRAYER >>> WORSHIP >>> FAITH
(The Spirit gives answers to the mind.)

INTELLECT >>> HEAD >>> INWARD IN THINKING >>> STUDY >>> INQUIRY
(The Spirit gives answers to the mind.)

WILL >>> HAND >>> OUTWARD IN SERVICE >>> WITNESSING >>> WORKS
(The Spirit gives power to the will)

6. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statements:
"Sensitive Christians are not 'either-or' persons, but 'both-and' persons. It is both doctrine and ethics. It is both creed and life. It both inner experience and outer conduct. It is both individual salvation and social action. It is both devotion and service."
7. If "liberal" Christianity has emphasized the "social gospel" in its preaching, what has "evangelical" Christianity primarily emphasized in its preaching?

8. To what extent should sincere Christians separate themselves from the presence of sinful men? (Read 2 Peter 1:4; 2 Corinthians 6:17; James 1:27; I Corinthians 15:33; John 17:15-16; Matthew 5:13-16; Matthew 9:10-11 and 11:19; Acts 1:8)

Which of the previously-mentioned portions of Scripture encourage "separation" from the world, and which of the Scripture,,encourage "involvement" with sinners in the world?

9. If society "in the last times" is inevitably going to "go to the dogs", why should believers exert so much effort in trying to redeem society? Why perform "good works" if the world is under God's judgment and will be destroyed anyway?
10. How would you define and describe "Eschatological Fatalism"?
11. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Christians are called to 'occupy till Jesus comes'. and this means aggressive and loving involvement in human institutions and systems."
12. Give your interpretation and comments on the following statement: "If a group of people can be made to share the responsibility for what would be a sin if an individual did it, the load of guilt rapidly lifts from the shoulders of all concerned and the guilt shared by many evaporates for the individual."
13. Give your response to the following statement: "I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do."
14. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "Evangelical Christians tend to have a lot of religion In their hearts, a good bit in their heads, but not much in their feet. And Christianity that doesn't walk around in shoes isn't worth much."
15. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Every believer should work hard, as if everything depended upon his faithfulness in labors, and then trust God as if everything depended upon God alone."

Part II

Put a "T" or "F" by each statement to indicate the "Truthfulness" or the "Falseness" of the statements,

as evaluated from a Biblical understanding of reality.

- ___A. A Christian is one who is concerned with spiritual reality but has little concern for the problems of earth.
- ___B. He whose head is in heaven ought to have his hands and his feet most actively at work on earth.
- ___C. The performance of Good Works helps merit one's salvation and helps appease God's wrath.
- ___D. Those who believe in God should be concerned with giving their time to doing good works.
- ___E. A person is "saved" by faith in Christ alone, and God Works have no affect upon one's personal salvation.
- ___F. He who has been most receptive to God's grace is the same one who most abounds in good works.
- ___G. He who is most knowledgeable of the Holy Scriptures is he who is most diligent in the performance of good works.
- ___H. God equips His children with many "spiritual gifts" for the purpose of helping the entire church.
- ___I. A balanced Christian is one who thinks right - truth; who feels right - compassion; who acts right - good deeds.
- ___J. We are not saved By good works, but we are saved For good works.
- ___K. If any normal person thinks prayer can be a substitute for effort, his prayers are merely a way of escape.
- ___L. Faith without works is dead and works without faith are useless.
- ___M. It is possible to serve without loving, but it is not possible to love without serving others.
- ___N. One's eternal salvation is inseparably connected with good works, for eternal life is gained, not just by believing, but also by doing.

- ___O. Because Christians are saved by grace alone, they can relax their own efforts in the Christian life and not worry about doing "good deeds".
- ___P. The quality of each believer's works will be tested in eternity and rewards for one's works will be given according to one's faithfulness on earth.
- ___Q. One's capacity to enjoy heaven will be largely determined by the degree of one's faithfulness in labor for the Lord on earth.
- ___R. Because widespread lawlessness and intensified evil are prophesied in the Bible and are "signs of the last times", it is a useless waste of a believer's time to become involved in combating "institutional evil" in our corrupt society.
- ___S. Bible-oriented believers are not supposed to be involved in this world's moral and social issues, for such believers know that there will never be total redemption of society until the "Prince of Peace" takes over the rule of this world.
- ___T. Unless believers labor to build the church, the church will not be built, regardless of the infinite power of God.
- ___U. Unless the Lord builds the church, those who labor, labor in vain. Therefore, Christians should simply "Sit back and relax" and let God build His own Church.

CHAPTER 9

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

ENCOURAGING DYNAMIC HOME LIFE

**THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH
ENCOURAGING DYNAMIC HOME LIFE**

OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 5:21 - 6:4

INTRODUCTION: Notes Elton Trueblood, "The enemies of the gospel would not be disturbed by full churches if only they could eliminate Christianity from the homes." (The Yoke of Christ; page 185) The nation, the Church, and society in general are only as strong as the homes are strong!

PROPOSITION: One mark of a truly great Church is that it is committed to serving the homes of its members and strengthening the fabric of the home in such a way that the purposes of the Home are fully realized, and the purity of the Home is accomplished and maintained, and the power of the Home as a witness is greatly felt in general society.

OUTLINE:

- I. PURPOSE OF THE HOME
 - A. Worship Center
 - B. Learning Center
 - C. Health Center
 - D. Training Center

- II. PURITY IN THE HOME

- III. POWER FROM THE HOME
 - A. Godly Modelling of Biblically-defined Family Relationships
 - B. Godly Training For Future Godly Leadership

CONCLUSION: One mark of a truly great Church is commitment to the development of distinctively Christian Homes. An important goal of a local church is to help homes to realize the purpose for which God created Homes, to guide in the 'Christianization' of their homes (cleansing the home of all moral defilement), and to motivate the homes to exercise a powerful witness in the general society by modelling various family roles and by training godly children to become future godly leaders.

Let's become a great church by developing great homes!

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH ENCOURAGING DYNAMIC HOME LIFE

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 5:21 - 6:4

INTRODUCTION: Notes Elton Trueblood, "The enemies of the gospel would not be disturbed by full churches if only they could eliminate Christianity from the homes." (The Yoke of Christ; page 185) The nation, the Church, and society in general are only as strong as the homes are strong!

As the home goes, so goes the Church! The nation, the church, and society in general are only as strong as the homes are strong! The strength of a nation is not measured by the might of its military forces and armaments, or by the wealth of its economic life, but by the spiritual dynamic of its homes! When the majority of a nation's homes disintegrate, it is only a matter of time in which the nation too will fall! To strengthen the nation, we must strengthen the home.

But the primary motivation for strengthening the home is not that we might have a greater nation, but that we might have millions of small units that each reflect the glory of the Kingdom of God! Kingdom glory is best reflected in the interpersonal relationships and activities of a distinctively Christian Home!

PROPOSITION: One mark of a truly great Church is that it is committed to serving the homes of its members and strengthening the fabric of the home in such a way that the purposes of the Home are fully realized, and the purity of the Home is accomplished and maintained, and the power of the Home as a witness is greatly felt in general society.

Not competing with the Home or subtly tearing down the Home, but serving the Home - this is a mark of a truly great church!

The Church can serve the Home in many ways - in the way it schedules its services and meetings, so that the family is not fragmented through an overly-scheduled church calendar; in the kind of personnel it hires and the kind of volunteers it enlists, the goal of whom is to "turn the hearts of the children to their parents", not away from their parents in the type and the quality of curriculum it teaches, all of which must be committed to Biblical standards and a holy lifestyle which in turn will nurture a strong home life; in the building of facilities that provide a family fellowship center, a recreational play area, and adequate educational rooms in the establishment of a strong Christian Day School for kindergarten through high school, the positive impact of which, educationally and socially and spiritually, can hardly be measured in terms of benefitting the family.

Matters of time schedules, hired and volunteer personnel, Biblical curriculum, family-oriented facilities, and high quality programs like a Christian Day School - these are matters where the local church can truly manifest its servant-role to the Family!

The Church ought always to encourage the development of distinctive Christian Homes! This is without doubt one of the greatest goals of the local church!

Encouragement from the Church can take at least three forms, as it relates to the Home: (1) Communicating the Purpose of the Homes, (2) Guiding in the Purifying of the Homes, (3) Upholding the Power from the Homes.

I. PURPOSE OF THE HOME

A. Worship Center

1. Attitudes

(a) Reverence for God's Presence (God is the unseen guest at every table and the silent listener to every conversation." "There is an all-seeing Eye watching you." Teach all members of family to be sensitive to God's constant presence in the home.)

(b) Respect for God's Word (Bible) (There are absolutes by which all in the home seek to guide their lives - the 10 Commandments).

2. Activities

(a) Communication of God's expectations to all family members - "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

- Act justly (treat all family members fairly, without showing favoritism)

- Love Mercy (quick forgiveness to family members who offend)

- Walk Humbly with your God (give God the glory for all personal accomplishments, by all family members)

(b) Concentration on God's Word with all Family Members (suggestions) -

(1) Wisdom Notebook (study in Proverbs)

(2) Family together memorizes at least one verse per week (review once a day, as an entire family)

(3) Read a Children's Bible Story Book daily with small children (or 'Living Bible' with older children)

- (4) Father read the Bible out loud to the family members for 15-20 minutes each day (while children are drawing and mother is sewing).
- (5) Meaningful times before meals (selecting a 'Promise' from a 'Promise Box' of verses; singing a song of praise before eating; keeping an empty chair at the table, symbolizing Jesus' place at the table, making every meal a 'sacrament' in our lives for spiritual strength-just as bread is assimilated into our physical bodies to be transformed into physical muscles)

B. LEARNING CENTER

1. Attitudes

- (a) Man's Dominion over the Earth (Genesis 1:28) (Basis for Confidence)
- (b) Man's Submission to the Lord (Psalms 24:1) (Basis for Humility)
- (c) God's Available Gift of Wisdom to Man (Proverbs 1:20-23; Colossians 2:3) (Basis for Wisdom)

2. Actions

- (a) Make every experience in the home a basis for a learning experience. Point out the moral implications and applications and illustrations, as much as possible.
- (b) Organize family projects that are Biblically-based and practically-beneficial, and learn together as a family through involvement in projects. Challenge creativity and versatility and productivity. Learn through participation.
- (c) Cultivate in the lives of your children a desire to read the Bible, Christian classics, biographies of great Christians. Cultivate a taste for good music within your home. Replace any object of destruction (like Rock Music and indecent magazines) with items that reinforce wisdom and godly character. Hang Scripture plaques and Christ-honoring pictures on your walls. Replace godless banners with wholesome banners, in the bedrooms of your children.
- (d) Read only those books and magazines which espouse a Christian world viewpoint, and encourage your children to

develop projects of practical compassion in the church and community.

- (e) Consider the great advantage of Home Schooling or Christian Day Schooling for your children. Parents are responsible for their children's education, and the local church (with its Christian Day School) can provide great support to the parents in accomplishing the goal of a distinctively integrated Christian education.

C. Health Center

1. Attitudes

- (a) The body is created by God and is not the product of evolution. Man is different in kind, not just in degree, from the animals of the earth. God breathed into man, and man became a living soul. The body 'houses' the eternal soul and spirit of man.
- (b) Man is not the owner of his own body, but merely the steward of his body. Jesus is the Lord of the Body, for Jesus died on the cross to redeem the body as well as the soul.
- (c) The body is to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, and therefore the body is to be treated with great respect.
- (d) While the body is to be respected, it is not to be worshipped, for the physical body must someday die but the spirit is eternal.

2. Activities

- (a) Proper Diet (nutritious food, low in fat, and low in cholesterol, salt, and sugar; raw fruits and vegetables and lots of water is the best diet)
- (b) Proper Rest and Sleep (Some health authorities say that teenagers need more sleep than even children, for teens are developing so quickly) Earlier to bed, and earlier to rise in the morning is a goal worth striving for.
- (c) Proper Exercise (vigorous physical exercise is vital to health conditioning, mental alertness, and even spiritual vitality)
- (d) Avoidance of all harmful habits such as alcohol, smoking, drugs, etc., because of one's love for Christ.

D. Training Center

1. Attitudes

- (a) God has gifted everyone with certain abilities, and these abilities are to be discovered and developed by every family member.
- (b) Every gift is to be used to glorify God and to benefit others, not to be used to exalt self.

2. Activities

- (a) Develop practical skills in the lives of your children.
- (b) Model hospitality skills in your home.
 - (1) Serving Christians equals serving Christ (Matthew 25:35-36)
 - (2) Give yourself to hospitality (Romans 12:13).
 - (3) Use hospitality gladly (I Peter 4:9).
 - (4) Encourage children and teens to use their spiritual gifts and abilities in service within the local church (example of my own personal involvement as a Sunday School teacher of younger children and teacher of CYC club and door-to-door literature distribution and VBS leadership of children in a small church and even preaching, all during my teen years (high school).
 - (5) Train children in general stewardship principles, and especially in the area of financial management and financial stewardship (the 'simple life style' and consistency in the giving of tithes and offerings to the local church).

II. PURITY IN THE HOME

If we all understand the Biblically-defined Purpose of the Home, then we will have a standard by which to evaluate the quality of our own homes. It is possible to be saved in a moment of time, but usually it takes considerable time to 'Christianize' our homes. If Christ is truly the "Head of our homes, the unseen Guest at every table, and the silent Listener to every conversation", then we all need to scrutinize our own homes to see if we have anything in our homes which displeases our Lord or which discredits our testimony, or which desensitizes us to spiritual reality and truth.

Have you 'Christianized' your home? That is, have you purified your home from all objects, magazines, books, pictures, or music that defame the name of Jesus? We must rid ourselves and our households of all moral filth! When true revival comes to our homes, we will sanctify our homes for the Lord. Our homes will be a fit place for Christ to dwell! This happened in the time of Paul, during his missionary travels. Note what happened when revival came to one city. "Many of those who

believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power." (Acts 19:18-20)

Do you have anything in your home which, in the name of Jesus, needs to be burned? Alcohol, drugs, tobacco, godless recordings, pornographic magazines, non-Christian books (novels), occultic objects, questionable games, lustful posters, worldly videos or cassettes? Are you willing to confess your evil deeds and bring your incantation books (or recordings or books, etc.) and burn them in a public bonfire? (Acts 19:18-20)

The Bible has much to say about purifying our lives - 'Christianizing our Homes'. "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." (II Chronicles 7:14)

"Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false." (Psalms 24:3-4) "Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." (James 4:8)

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." (Matthew 5:8)

"The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." (I Timothy 1:5)

"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart." (I Peter 1:22)

"Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!" (Isaiah 1:16)

"Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." (2 Corinthians 7:1)

"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." (2 Corinthians 6:17)

III. POWER FROM THE HOME

When a couple knows and follows the Biblical guidelines for the Home, both in terms of distinctive purposes for the Home and in terms of Biblically-required practices, then that couple can be used by God to exercise a powerful influence in the world.

In what ways does a Christian Family exercise a powerful influence in society today?

A. Godly Modelling of Biblically-defined Family Relations (Ephesians 5:22 - 6:4)

The Bible clearly profiles the kinds of roles that husbands and wives and children are to fulfill within the family structure.

1. The Wife's Role - Submission To Her Husband

"Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord: for the husband is the head of the wife." (Ephesians 5:22-23a)

Although God loves both Man and Woman equally, and women are just as important as men, the Bible does teach that the wife is lovingly to submit to her husband. The man is to lead, to guide, and to make final decisions, whereas the woman is to follow, to respect her husband, and cheerfully to submit unto her husband's leadership.

Against the background of the Women's Liberation Movement, Ephesians 5:33b (as rendered in the Amplified Bible) seems outlandish to the secular-minded modern woman: "Let the wife see that she respects and reverences her husband - that she notices him, regards him, honors him, prefers him, venerates and esteems him; and that she defers to him, praises him, and loves and admires him exceedingly."

2. The Husband's Role - Sacrificial Love of His Wife

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for the Church." (Ephesians 5:25)

Just as Christ gave Himself for the Church, so a man must be willing to lay down his physical life for his wife. One of the Early Church Fathers, Chrysostom, exhorted husbands: "Wouldst thou that thy wife shouldst obey thee as the Church doth Christ? Have care thyself for her as Christ for the Church. And if it be needful that thou shouldst give thy life for her or be cut to pieces a thousand times, or endure anything whatever, refuse it not...He (Christ) brought the Church to His feet by His great care, nor by threats nor fear nor any such thing; so do thou conduct thyself towards thy wife." (Quoted in Barclay's Ephesians; Page 206)

A man who truly loves his wife, will have as much concern for her feelings, welfare, and achievements as he does for his own. "He must regard

her, not as a kind of permanent servant, but as the one person whom it is his duty to cherish." (Barclay) A man must possess an unbreakable love for his wife! "He no more thinks of separating from her than he would think of tearing his own body apart." (Barclay)

3. The Child's Role - Obedience To His Parents

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is just and right. Honor (esteem and value as precious) your father and your mother; this is the first commandment with a promise; That all may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." (Ephesians 6:1-3)

No rebellion, no disrespect, quick obedience, and loving honor of parents. *"Young man, obey your father and your mother. Tie their instructions around your finger so you won't forget. Take to heart all of their advice. Every day and all night long their counsel will lead you and save you from harm when you wake up in the morning, let their instructions guide you into the new day. For their advice is a beam of light directed into the dark corners of your mind to warn you of danger and to give you a good life. Their counsel will keep you far away from prostitutes with all their flatteries."* (Proverbs 6:20-24, Living Bible)

4. The Parents' Role - Loving Discipline

"Fathers, do not irritate and provoke your children to anger - do not exasperate them to resentment - but rear them (tenderly) in the training and discipline and the counsel and admonition of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4, Amplified)

"Father, do not provoke or irritate or fret your children - do not be hard on them or harass them; lest they become discouraged and sullen and morose and feel inferior and frustrated; do not break their spirit." (Colossians 3:21, Amplified)

B. Godly Training For Future Godly Leadership

Why is the Christian Home so potentially powerful in our society today? As we have already noted, because Godly modelling of Biblically-defined family relationships is offered for our world to carefully observe. Also, because the Christian Home is the place where God intends for children to be trained in the ways of godliness! To raise up godly children is the greatest goal of parents. Have you, as a parent, dedicated your children to God's service? Have you ever 'begged' God to

call your children to the mission field? Have you surrendered all your so-called 'rights', as parents, to your loving Heavenly Father, allowing God to have full 'right of way' in the lives of your children? Are you cultivating Christlike traits in the lives of your children - the kind of traits that would make your children someday great parents, great spiritual leaders, and great prayer warriors?

Never underestimate the influence that you wield in the lives of your precious children! Commit your children to God every morning! As Abraham of old, put your children upon the 'altar of sacrifice'. Remember, God knows what is 'best' for your children. God knows whom they should marry, what profession or job they should pursue, where they should live, etc. As a parent, it is not your job to make all the decisions for your children, but it is your job to train them in the ways of Christ, giving them a Christian World Viewpoint - a context - from which to make godly decisions and to evaluate ideas.

How you shape and mold your child today, will largely determine what your child will turn out to be tomorrow!

"The mother of George Washington taught her son the Biblical ideals of political and social morality which Washington kept before the nation throughout his life. Family prayers were held twice a day with regular readings from the scriptures." (Shoeleather Faith; not. 434)

"The mother of England's famous William E. Gladstone led her son to faith in God when he was nine. He chose as his life motto: 'In practice, the great thing is that the life of God may be the supreme habit of my soul.' He also wrote, 'All I think, all I write, all I am is based on the Divinity of Jesus Christ, the central hope of our poor wayward race.'" (Ibid)

'Mother of Dwight L. Moody struggled against poverty in a New England farm. A widow with many problems, she taught her son the importance of eternal values. At 17 Moody accepted Christ and a few years later dedicated his life for service.'" (Ibid)

CONCLUSION: One mark of a truly great Church is commitment to the development of distinctively Christian Homes. An important goal of a local church is to help homes to realize the purpose for which God created Homes, to guide in the 'Christianization' of their homes (cleansing the home of all moral defilement), and to motivate the homes to exercise a powerful witness in the general society by modelling various family roles and by training godly children to become future godly leaders.

Let's become a great church by developing great homes.

**THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH
ENCOURAGING DYNAMIC HOME LIFE**

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The enemies of the gospel would not be disturbed by full churches if only they could eliminate Christianity from the homes."
2. Do you believe the following statement is an exaggeration or an accurately-stated truth? "The nations, the church, and society in general are only as strong as the homes are strong!"
3. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The primary motivation for strengthening the home is not that we might have a greater nation, but that we might have millions of small units that each reflect the glory of the Kingdom of God!" In what specific ways does the Christian home reflect the "glory of the Kingdom of God"?
4. Please show specific ways in which the church can concretely "serve" the home in terms of time schedules, personnel, curriculum, facilities and programs.
5. Share (from your own personal life) how you as a parent have made your home a "worship center" to teach your children reverence for God and for God's Word.
6. As a "learning center", share specifically how your home has become a place where your children have gained knowledge of God's Word, wisdom regarding God's Ways, and skills for practical application.
7. If the Christian home should be considered a "health center", what attitudes regarding the human body should be taught to our children, and what "health rules" should be enforced in our homes?
8. Why should the home be considered the greatest "training center" for developing our children and what should be the "agenda" and "curriculum" in the home for such training? (Please answer this question in terms of "practical skills", "hospitality skills" and "practical compassion projects".)
9. Practically speaking, what does it mean to purify or "Christianize" your home? (Read Acts 19:18-20) Do you have anything in your home which, in the name of Jesus, needs to be burned?
10. Regarding the cleansing of your home from all "moral pollution", read the following

Scriptures and give a brief comment on each Scripture as it relates to the "Christianization" of one's home:

- (1) II Chronicles 7:14
- (2) Psalms 24:3-4
- (3) James 4:8
- (4) Matthew 5:8
- (5) I Timothy 1:5
- (6) I Peter 1:22
- (7) Isaiah 1:16
- (8) II Corinthians 6:17-7:1

11. In terms of godly modelling of Biblically-defined family relationships (Ephesians 5:22-6:6), share ways in which a Christian family can exercise a powerful influence in the world today.

12. Answer the following questions in light of this basic premise - "Raising up godly children is the greatest goal of parents."

- (1) "Have you, as a parent, dedicated your children to God's service?"
- (2) Have you ever "begged" God to call your children to the mission field?"
- (3) Have you surrendered all your so-called "rights" as parents to your loving Heavenly Father, allowing God to have full "right-of-way" in the lives of your children?
- (4) Are you cultivating Christlike traits in the lives of your children - the kind of traits that would make your children some day great parents, great spiritual leaders, and great prayer warriors?

CHAPTER 10

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

SACRIFICIAL GIVING WITH CHEERFULNESS

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH SACRIFICIAL GIVING WITH CHEERFULNESS

OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: II Corinthians 8:1-15

INTRODUCTION: What is your motivation for living? What are the driving forces of your life? Show me what a man loves in life and I will show you the man! Your desires, affections, and motivations guide your life and determine your life. The Book of Proverbs says, "Above all else, guard your affections. For they influence everything else in your life." (4:23)

What motivates you to commit your life to God? What motivates you to commit yourself to a life of generosity? When a man's motivations are right, the entire man is right! It is the man's heart that determines the quality of the man! Out of the heart (motivations) proceed good actions, and out of the heart proceed evil actions.

PROPOSITION: Paul points to three facts in an attempt to motivate these Corinthians to liberality and generosity. These are the same motivations for you and for me - motivations for a life of loving service and generous giving.

OUTLINE:

- I. Example Of Jesus Christ
 - II. Examples Of Others
 - III. Example Of Own Good Past Record
-
- A. Sacrificial Giving That Is God-Directed Saves Us From A Life of Greed and Materialism.
 - B. Sacrificial Giving That Is God-Directed Develops a Capacity For Great Fruitfulness.
 - C. Sacrificial Giving That Is God-Directed Develops a Capacity For Joyfulness.

CONCLUSION: Make the following prayer (written by Norman Vincent Peale) your own personal expression of commitment and thanksgiving to God:

"Our Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have taught us that we gain blessings by giving, that we receive by letting go. We ask You to bless everyone with a realization that as he opens his purse he will bring upon himself a filling up of more than his purse - his heart and mind and his whole life. Just think what is offered us!"

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH SACRIFICIAL GIVING WITH CHEERFULNESS

SCRIPTURE: II Corinthians 8:1-15

TEXT: "God loveth a cheerful giver." (II Corinthians 9:7b)

INTRODUCTION: What is your motivation for living? What are the driving forces of your life? Show me what a man loves in life and I will show you the man! Your desires, affections, and motivations guide your life and determine your life. The Book of Proverbs says, *"Above all else, guard your affections. For they influence everything else in your life."* (4:23)

What motivates you to commit your life to God? What motivates you to commit yourself to a life of generosity? When a man's motivations are right, the entire man is right! It is the man's heart that determines the quality of the man! Out of the heart (motivations) proceed good actions, and out of the heart proceed evil actions.

It is the heart and motivations which are all important. In our Scripture reading today, Paul is seeking to motivate his Corinthian friends to be liberal and generous. Paul appeals to the Corinthians to sense their debt to God, and to seek to express their gratitude to God by helping the poor Jerusalem church.

PROPOSITION:

Paul points to three facts in an attempt to motivate these Corinthians to liberality and generosity. The greatest motivation for a life of generosity and loving sacrifice is THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS CHRIST. Another motivation for giving is THE EXAMPLE OF OTHERS. The third motivation for a life of generosity is THE EXAMPLE OF THEIR PAST GOOD RECORD. These are the same motivations for you and me - motivations for a life of loving service and generous giving. Let us glance at these three motivations for commitment and generosity.

I. Example Of Jesus Christ

In speaking on the subject of sacrificial giving, Paul pointed the Corinthians to the supreme example of giving - Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in verse 9: *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. You know that for your sakes, though He was rich, He became poor, that you, by His poverty, might become rich."* God sacrificed His dearest gift in order to save mankind, and let His Son be smashed to a cross. *"He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterwards; and now he sits in the place of honor by the throne of God."* Hebrews 12:2.

"Just think of Him as rich in power, yet humbly submitting to human weakness; rich in glory, yet willing laying aside that glory for the likeness of men; rich in wisdom, yet mysteriously surrendering the independence of His mind in order to become subject to His

Father's judgment; rich in resource yet having no room at His birth, no home in His life, and no grave at His death." (The Grace of Giving; page 52)

"Here is divine giving at its highest and deepest. At its highest level we are lifted to the great concept of the unmerited favor of God in sending His Son from heaven's glory down to earth's gloom. At its deepest level we are introduced to the unutterable poverty to which our Lord descended. Paul is so careful about this that he used a Greek word which means 'pauperism'. In other words, the Lord Jesus became a pauper on this earth that we might be introduced to all the richness of His grace. Now, says Paul, whenever we give, remember that we are only reflecting the self-giving of God, and this should fill us with unspeakable thanksgiving to our Lord." (Ibid;pg. 92,93)

Out of the ivory Palaces
Into a world of woe;
Only His Great Eternal Love,
Made My Savior Go."

The purpose of Christ's coming was entirely selfless and redemptive. He came to save a rebel race.

"In the days of the American Revolutionary War there lived at Ephrate, Pennsylvania, a Baptist pastor by the name of Peter Miller who enjoyed the friendship of General Washington. There also dwelt in that town one Michael Wittman, an evil-minded man who did all in his power to abuse and oppose this pastor. One day Michael Wittman was involved in treason and was arrested and sentenced to death. The old preacher started out on foot and walked the whole seventy miles to Philadelphia to plead for this man's life. He was admitted into Washington's presence and at once begged for the life of the traitor. 'No, Peter,' said Washington, 'I cannot grant you the life of your friend.' 'My friend!' exclaimed the preacher, 'he is the bitterest enemy I have.' 'What?' cried Washington, 'you have walked seventy miles to save the life of an enemy? That puts the matter in a different light. I will grant the pardon.' And he did. And Peter Miller took Michael Wittman from the very shadow of death, back to his own home in Ephrate - no longer as an enemy, but as a friend.

"This is what Jesus did for you and me in His self-giving. He had no other interests than His Father's glory and our salvation and enrichment." (The Grace of Giving: page 53).

If Christ has given His all to save us, should not we give Him our all, in order to save our fellowman and to advance the Church of Christ? There is no cool calculation in true giving, but a warm, spontaneous overflow of love in true giving. The essence of Christianity is love and love is basically unselfish. When a Christian feeds the hungry, clothes the destitute, accepts the stranger, visits the sick, and visits the imprisoned, the Christian is truly honoring Christ. Jesus said, "*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*" (Matthew 25:40)

So the first motivation to commitment and to generosity is the example of Jesus' sacrificial love.

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small,
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all.”

“What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul?”

“What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of life
To lay aside His crown for my soul?”

It is the nature of God to give! God's nature of self-giving is written into the constitution of the physical world. God made all of nature to give itself away.

"God made the sun - it gives.
God made the moon - it gives.
God made the stars - they give.
God made the air - it gives.
God made the clouds - they give.
God made the earth - it gives.
God made the sea - it gives.
God made the trees - they give.
God made the flowers - they give.
God made the fowls - they give.
God made the beasts - they give.
God made man - he.....?"

(Selected, taken from Ibid;pg. 120)

When God has given His all and when nature gives continuously, is it not proper for man to be committed to a life of giving and generosity????

II. EXAMPLE OF OTHERS

The next appeal for giving is made on the basis of the good example of others. Paul points to the sacrificial giving of the churches of Macedonia as a fine example which the Corinthians would do well to follow.

Writes Paul (verses 1-5): *"Now I want to tell you what God in his grace has done for the churches in Macedonia. Though they have been going through much trouble and hard times, they have mixed their wonderful joy with their deep poverty, and the result has been an overflow of giving to others. They gave not only what they could afford, but far more; and I can testify that they did it because they wanted to, and not because of nagging on my part. They begged us to take the money so they could share in the joy of helping the Christians in Jerusalem. Best of all, they went beyond our highest hopes, for their first action was to dedicate themselves to the Lord and to us, for whatever directions God might give to them through us."* (Living Bible)

Paul rejoiced that the Macedonian Churches not only gave money to the Lord, but that they actually gave themselves to the Lord. True giving is not primarily the giving of a certain percentage of our money, but rather the giving of ourselves to the Lord which is visibly represented by the giving of money.

Why did Jesus approve of the small offering of the widow and disapprove of the larger offering of the rich? Said Jesus, *"Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury; For all they (the rich) did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."* (Mark 12:43)

Richard Wurmbrand was imprisoned by the Nazis and Communists for fourteen years because of his faith in Christ. This imprisoned minister underwent unspeakable torture for Christ, and yet he remained faithful to Christ and sought to serve Christ even amidst his sufferings. Rev. Wurmbrand tells of one vivid experience. "When we were given one slice of bread a week and a dirty soup every day, we decided we would faithfully 'tithe' even then. Every tenth week we took the slice of bread and gave it to weaker brethren as our 'tithe' to the Master." (Tortured For Christ; pg.25) When these prisoners were giving away their bread to fellow prisoners, they were really giving away themselves.

Dr. Roy L. Laurin tells of a Christian businessman who was traveling in Korea. One day he saw in the field by the side of the road a young man pulling a rude plow, while an old man held the handles. The businessman was amused and took a snapshot of the scene. 'That is a curious picture! I suppose these people are very poor,' he said to the missionary, who was interpreter and guide to the party. 'Yes,' was the quiet reply, 'those two men happen to be Christians. When their church was being built, they were eager to give something toward it; but they had no money. So they decided to sell their one and only ox and gave the proceeds to the church. This spring they are pulling the plow themselves.' The businessman was silent for some moments. Then he said, 'That must have been a real sacrifice.' 'They did not call it that,' said the missionary, 'they rather thought it was fortunate that they had an ox to sell.' Needless to say, the businessman was silent. When he reached home, however, he took the picture to his pastor and told him all about it. Then he added, 'I want to double my giving to the church, and do some plow work. Up until now I have never given God anything

that involved real sacrifice." (Ibid; pg. 48,49)

What an unusual example of giving. The noble example of others should motivate us to give more to the Lord. It should motivate us to give more to help the needy and to build the Kingdom and the Church of Christ.

Dr. Forrest Bush, shared how God spoke to him several years ago while his church was undertaking a \$100,000 building project. That was a lot of money in those days. He said that he earnestly wanted to grow numerically and spiritually in his church where he was pastoring at the time. As he was riding in his car one day, the Lord asked him if he was willing to give 40% of his income to the local church to help make possible the building of that expansion. He told the Lord that he was willing, and then he shared with his wife and she was immediately willing as well. The pledge they made was for three years! Can you imagine! 40% of his income. When others realized what he was giving, they too began to give sacrificially. Needless to say, God honored that faith and the project was accomplished.

"It is said that when the British Government sought to reward General Gordon for his brilliant service in China, he declined all money and titles but accepted a gold medal inscribed with the record of his thirty-three engagements. It was his most prized possession. But after his death the medal could not be found. Eventually it was learned that he had sent it to Manchester during a severe famine, directing that it should be melted down and used to buy food for the poor. Under the date of its sending were these words in his diary: 'The last earthly thing I had in this world that I valued I have given to the Lord Jesus Christ.'" (The Grace of Giving;pg.51)

Notes Barclay, "The danger of riches is that they tend to make a man forget that he loses what he keeps, and he gains what he gives away." (Barclay, Matthew, Vol. 2;pg.241)

Do you remember Jim Elliott, the missionary to South America who was martyred by savage Indians? Found in his diary are these wise words: 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.'

III. Example Of Own Good Past Record

As was earlier mentioned, one of the projects nearest to Paul's heart was the gathering of the collection for the Church of Jerusalem. This Jerusalem Church was the "Mother Church" of all the churches, but she was poor and needed support from the newly organized Gentile Churches. Paul appeals to the other churches to exercise their generosity by coming to the aid of the Jerusalem Church at this time of great need.

Paul asks the Corinthian Church to help in this project and appeals to the people of

the church on the basis of their past good record. Writes Paul, "*But just as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, and in all earnestness and in love which went out from you to come to rest in us - I urge you to excel also in this act of generosity.*" (II Corinthians 8:7, Barclay)

"Because you have excelled in every other area of Christian endeavor, surely you will excel in this important area - generosity," says Paul.

This is a good motivation for our giving to the work of the Lord in this Church - our own good past record of giving.

Free-will giving is the means by which the work of God goes forward. Says God in the Scriptures, "*Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house.*" (Malachi 3:10) The "Storehouse" is the local church. All tithes are to be brought into the "Storehouse".

A. Sacrificial Giving That Is God-Directed Saves Us From A Life of Greed and Materialism.

The materialist is living for the world of time only. He forgets what Jesus said: "*Life does not consist in the abundance of things which a man possesses.*" He is laying up treasures on this earth, but he fails to realize that the wealth of this life is temporary and very uncertain. Wealth can be lost overnight!

I have a talented nephew who has had a struggle to be at one and the same time a successful businessman and an earnest Christian. Material wealth has been a big temptation to him. Several years ago, he wrote me the following letter (which demonstrates the struggles that even Christians have in the area of materialism).

"In my life the process goes on. My faith is in frequent conflict with my obsession to participate in the consumption of this world's fruit. I often feel like a child in a candy store. I wander past the fields of sweet delights, gazing at the vast assortment of choices. All the while in mind the echoes of my mother's words warn me against the consequences of over-consumption. Yet, the warnings go mostly unheeded, and I continue to confidently, if not somewhat guilt-tinged, select items which I feel sure will satisfy my desires ('surely this one will be the last...Oh, just one more'). It's only when the toothache attacks, or the stomach revolts that I consciously pursue my mothers care, knowing that her caring arms and infinite wisdom will sooth my injuries. Her loving character will forgive my errant ways and soon

everything will be alright again. In chagrined humility I wish I could follow her will, knowing full well that if I don't give in to her will and wisdom completely, I will soon make the same mistakes again. Oh, the tribulations of being an undisciplined child!"

"Fortunately my life is not always this way. I do feel growth frequently. I truly believe God has a plan for me, and even now his works are taking place. I long for greater understanding of his will here on Earth. It's as though I smell the scent of a flower and am trying anxiously to find it. I've only seen glimpses of it, but the fragrance is so strong and satisfying that I must continue to pursue. When I possess it (and I will), I will share its beauty with the world. I will promote it vigorously with the pleasure of knowing that it is truly right for those receiving it. In my heart I know that flower is worth pursuing even though the search is trying."

As believers, let us never despise money and let us always legitimately enjoy some of the good things which money can give to us, but let us never become enamored with wealth and material possessions. Let's keep a light hold on material things. Let's be the master of money and use it for the glory of God and for the good of others. Don't let money put a 'stranglehold' on your life. One way to avoid the 'stranglehold of materialism' is to involve yourself in generous giving.

The following prayer, seasoned with irony, shows the great folly of materialism which seeks to put its, putting its stranglehold on our lives:

"O Lord, I thy sinful Creature, who am born again to a lively Hope of Glory in Christ Jesus, beg of thee, to grant me a thousand times more Riches than I need, that I may be able to gratify Myself and Family in the Delights of Eating and Drinking, State and Grandeur; grant that as the little Span of Life wears out, I may still abound more and more in Wealth, and that I any see and perceive all the best and surest Ways of growing Richer than any of my Neighbors: this I humbly and fervently Beg."

Jesus said, *"Don't store up treasures here on earth where they can erode away or may be stolen. Store them in heaven where they will never lose their value, and are safe from thieves. If your profits are in heaven your heart will be there too."* (Matthew 6:19-21, Living Bible)

Wrote Paul, *"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts*

on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." (Colossians 3:1-4)

B. Sacrificial Giving That Is God-Directed Develops a Capacity For Great Fruitfulness.

The giving person is the fruitful person. The more one gives, the more one develops a capacity to give. It's like everything else in life. The one who most uses his muscles is the one who becomes the strongest. The one who practices the piano the most is usually the one who finds piano most enjoyable...The one who is most generous with his money is the one who finds most joy in giving.

Says the Bible, *"He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."* (II Corinthians 9:6)

Do you want your life to count for God? Do you want to be creative, productive, and useful to God on this earth?

There are two kinds of sowing and two kinds of reaping. There is a carnal sowing which results in a carnal reaping: *"He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."* (Galatians 6:8) "A carnal Christian sows to his flesh by spending his resources to gratify his own personal desires." (The Grace of Giving; Olford;pg. 82)

There is a spiritual sowing which results in a spiritual reaping. He who sows love, sacrifice, stewardship, and service, reaps a Christ-honoring harvest both in time and in eternity.

"There is a whole body of Scripture which reveals that we can add to our spiritual capital by a continuing enrichment through the ministry of giving. In fact there is no area of Christian experience which deepens the capacity for more of the gifts of God than that of sacrificial giving. Introduce me to a niggardly Christian and I will show you a person whose Christian life is shriveled up. On the other hand, lead me to a believer who knows the joy of sacrificial giving and I will point out a person whose life is one of fruitful enrichment." (Ibid;pg. 83) "Make no mistake about it, when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ to render an account of our stewardship, we will wish that we had given more, since it is inescapably true that 'what we spend, we lose; what we keep will be left to others; what we give away will remain forever ours.'" (Ibid;pg.93)

C. Sacrificial Giving That Is God-Directed Develops a Capacity For Joyfulness.

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." (II Corinthians 9:7)

It is still true that miserly people are miserable people, and generous people are joyous people.

God loves cheerful givers, and "the word 'cheerful' here can be rendered 'hilarious', suggesting a spirit of real enjoyment which sweeps away all human restraints. The Lord Jesus summed up this enrichment of joyfulness in giving when He said, *'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'* (Acts 20:35)." (Ibid;85) Frances Havergal wrote those familiar words which we often sing:

"Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold."

This author did what she wrote about. This personal testimony is found in her writings;

"'Take my silver and my gold' now means shipping off all my ornaments - including a jewel cabinet which is really fit for a countess - to the Church Missionary Society....I don't think I need tell you I never packed a box with such pleasure"! What an example of hilarious giving! The more we give, the more joy we find in giving!

CONCLUSION: Make the following prayer (written by Norman Vincent Peale) your own personal expression of commitment and thanksgiving to God:

"Our Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have taught us that we gain blessings by giving, that we receive by letting go. We ask You to bless everyone with a realization that as he opens his purse he will bring upon himself a filling up of more than his purse - his heart and mind and his whole life. Just think what is offered us! For this we give Thee thanks, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH
SACRIFICIAL GIVING WITH CHEERFULNESS

Q U E S T I O N S

1. According to Proverbs 4:23, how important are affections in the lives of persons?
2. As related in II Corinthians 8:9, how would you describe the 'poverty' of Jesus and the 'riches' of Man?
3. Is it possible to be a true Christian without being a self-giving person? Why or why not?
4. Give your comments on the following statements: "The more Godlike one becomes, the more self-giving will one be, for just as the moon reflects the light of the sun, so the true believer reflects the nature of God through a life of generosity and sacrificial giving."
5. Illustrate the truthfulness of the following statement: "God's nature of self-giving is written into the constitution of the physical world."
6. Tell to what extent you agree with the following statement: "True giving is not primarily the giving of a certain percentage of our money, but rather the giving of ourselves to the Lord which is visibly represented by the giving of money."
7. In seeking to motivate the Corinthian Church to complete their 'Love Project', why did Paul focus the attention of the Corinthian believers on the Macedonian Churches? (Note II Corinthians 8:1-5)
8. Why did Jesus approve of the small offering of the widow and disapprove of the larger offering of the rich? (Mark 12:43)
9. Share examples from your own life or from the lives of others, when changes in lifestyle took place in order to exercise sacrificial giving to a special work (or project) of God.
10. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The danger of riches is that they tend to make a man forget that he loses what he keeps, and he gains what he gives away." (Note Matthew 19:18-26; Matthew 16:24-26; Luke 12:13-21; I Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19; Proverbs 11:28)
11. Tell with what degree of impact the following statement (by martyred missionary Jim Elliott) has on you: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."
12. Why is affirmation, rather than criticism, a stronger motivation for positive action in the life of a believer or in the life of a congregation? (Note II Corinthians 8:7)

13. How would you describe and define a "materialist"?
14. How can believers avoid the "stronghold of materialism"? (Note Matthew 6:19-21; Colossians 3:1-4)
15. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A carnal Christian sows to his flesh by spending his resources to gratify his own personal desires." (Note II Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 6:8)
16. Tell with what degree of conviction you believe in the truth of the following statement: "There is no area of Christian experience which deepens the capacity for more of the gifts of God than that of sacrificial giving."
17. Give your comments on the following statement: "What we spend, we lose; what we keep will be left to others; what we give away will remain forever ours."
18. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is still true that miserly people are miserable people, and generous people are joyous people."

CHAPTER 11

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

WHY SHOULD I TITHE?

MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH WHY SHOULD I TITHE?

OUTLINE

SUBJECT: WHY SHOULD I TITHE?

SCRIPTURE: I Corinthians 16:1-2; II Corinthians 9:6-15

TEXT: *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."* (Malachi 3:10)

INTRODUCTION: Today I would simply like to give you my personal testimony, regarding an important area of the Christian life - tithing.

PROPOSITION: May I share with you the insights which I have come to cherish personally - insights and convictions which have profoundly changed my own life? I believe tithing to be one of the most thrilling involvements of my personal and family life. Allow me to give you three reasons why I tithe.

I. BECAUSE THE NATURE OF REALITY DEMANDS IT.

- A. God Is A Giving God.
- B. Nature Functions According To The Law of Surrender.
- C. Man Functions Happily Only When He Surrenders.

II. BECAUSE THE CHURCH COMMENDS IT.

III. BECAUSE THE BIBLE TEACHES TITHING.

- A. Giving Should Be Periodic ("upon first day of week" - Sunday)
- B. Giving Should Be Personal ("every one of you")
- C. Giving Should Be Planned ("put aside and keep by him a sum")
- D. Giving Should Be Proportionate ("in proportion to his gains")
- E. Giving Should Be Preventive ("so that there may be no collecting when I come")

CONCLUSION: Remember what Jim Elliot, the young martyred missionary, said: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

The lasting question that each of us must continually ask is this: "How much of God's property shall I hold for personal use?"

MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH WHY SHOULD I TITHE?

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1. BECAUSE THE NATURE OF REALITY DEMANDS IT.

A. God Is A Giving God. How do I know that God is a giving God? Because I firmly believe that the best revelation humans have of God is seen in the words and works of Jesus. Because Jesus was self-giving while on earth, I believe that God has always been and will always be self-giving.

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." (II Corinthians 8:9)

1. In His Incarnation "Just think of Him as rich in power, yet humbly submitting to human weakness; rich in glory, yet willingly laying aside that effulgence for the likeness of men; rich in wisdom, yet mysterious by surrendering the independent use of His mind in order to become subject to His Father's judgment; rich in resources, yet having no room at His birth, no home in His life, and no grave at His death. (The Grace of Giving; Olford: pg. 52)

2. In His Death. God was self-giving in Jesus' Incarnation; God was self-giving in Jesus' death. Jesus is called the 'Lamb of God', slain from the foundation of the world. *Jesus is called "the Lamb who is at the heart of the throne of God."* (Revelations 7:17, NEB)

Notes E.S. Jones: ‘For this ‘Lamb’ slain is not there at the cross once in history. This ‘cross’ is a continuing fact at the very heart of the universe: *‘the Lamb who is at the heart of the throne’* (Revelations 7:17). That answers the most important question that can be raised about life and the universe: What is at the heart of life and the universe? What is its final essence, its final character?

“The Christian faith says that ‘the Lamb is at the heart of the throne.’ Suffering, self-giving love is not marginal, occasionally seen, but it is at the very ‘heart’ of final power. God is love and works by love, and by nothing else than love.” (Song of Ascents; page 22,23)

3. In Bestoyal of Daily Blessings. There is a song which says: “He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.” The Lord is full of mercy and goodness - to all men. He sends the rain to both the just and the unjust. All temporal and spiritual blessings are from the hand of a good God. What more could He give than to me He hath given? Heaven could never be enriched with the “Company of the Redeemed” if Jesus had not given Himself to the death of the cross. Believers can never enrich the church or their personal lives without sacrificial stewardship.

B. Nature Functions According To The Law of Surrender. There are many examples in nature that point to “the law of mutual aid.” For instance, the oldest living thing upon earth, the giant Sequoia tree, has survived because the trees live in clumps and their roots intertwine.

“The five levels of life illustrate the principle of self-surrender to the higher kingdom: The mineral kingdom, the vegetable kingdom, the animal kingdom, the kingdom of man, the kingdom of God.” (E.S. Jones; Victory Thru Surrender; pg. 75) Each of the first four kingdoms is made to surrender to the next higher kingdom.

C. Man Functions Happily Only When He Surrenders. To illustrate this, think of the three stages of life: dependence - the childhood stage; independence - the adolescent stage; the interdependence - the mature stage. “In the stage of interdependence we sovereignly take our independence and surrender it to a higher entity, the individual to the home, the citizen to the state, nation, world, to the kingdom of God. In each case we surrender sovereignty and find a higher fellowship, in the home, the nation, the world, in the kingdom. To the degree that we do surrender, we become mature.” (Ibid; 79)

The man who surrenders fully to God is the truly happy man. “If you don’t surrender to God, you have to surrender to emptiness, to despair, to a life of unhappiness.... When you surrender to God you surrender to that for which you are made, you surrender to your destiny, you fulfill yourself.” (Ibid, 82)

Is it not reasonable to expect that when a person makes a full surrender to God, he will become a self-giving person, patterned after God’s character? Self-giving includes many areas of life, the least not being tithing. If God is a generous God, and if nature surrenders itself generously to man, then, is it not reasonable for man to find his happiness through self-

giving and generosity?

Because man is created in the image of God, we may reason that the more godlike one is, the more generous one is.

“On a dark street in New York, a beggar once stopped O’Henry, the short-story writer and asked him for money. A moment later the beggar came running back to O’Henry and said, ‘You made a mistake, this is a twenty-dollar gold piece.’

“‘I know it is’, replied O’Henry, ‘but it is all I have.’” (Rosell; No. 242)

Says the Scripture, “*Happiness lies more in giving than in receiving.*” (Acts 20:35) Notes Tom Rees, “Miserly people are miserable people, and generous people are joyous people.” (The Grace of Giving; pg. 23)

Asks Bruce Baxter: “Do we give according to our means, or according to our meanness?”

The story is told that John D. Rockefeller, Sr., the multi-millionaire, grew very ill and very miserable in his greedy and miserly accumulation of wealth. One night he saw himself for what he was - a grasping and greedy man. He vowed that he would use his wealth to bless others, and he awoke the next morning to begin a plan of giving away millions of dollars to foundations and charities. As a result of surrendering his greed, he regained his health and became a happy man.

But you say, “I’m not rich like Rockefeller was. If I had millions, I too would give it away!” But remember: “It’s not what we have that matters; it’s what we do with what we have.”

Have we given our best to God, or only what is convenient to God?

“The story is told of an occasion when Queen Mary was walking in the vicinity of Balmoral, Scotland on a dark and cloudy day. She strolled rather far, and as the rain came down she stopped at a cottage for the loan of an umbrella. The woman did not recognize the queen, so decided to give the stranger an old umbrella with a broken rib. The next morning a man in gold braid appeared at the cottage door. ‘The Queen asked me to thank you for lending her the umbrella,’ he explained. The woman in the cottage was dumbfounded, and with tears flowing down her cheeks said, ‘What an opportunity I missed! Why did I not give the Queen the best umbrella I had?’” (Grace of Giving; pg. 70,71 by Olford)

Are you giving the King of Heaven your best - in talents, in time and also in money?

The happiest people I know are the uncalculating, generous-hearted people, who feel

that it is a privilege to give to others and to God.

“The most magnificent miracle of life is this: The more you give and do, the more you have and are. “If is possible to give and still to have; it is possible to retain and still to lose.” If you want to be rich, give; if you want to be poor, grasp! If you want abundance, scatter; if you want to be needy, hoard!” (Grace of Giving; pg. 89) “A man there was, and some did count him mad; The more he gave away, the more he had.”- Selected (Ibid.89) *“One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper, he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed. (Proverbs 11:24-25)*

“The story is told of a farmer who was known for his generous giving, and whose friends could not understand how he could give so much away and yet remain so prosperous. One day a spokesman for his friend said, ‘We cannot understand you. You give far more than the rest of us and yet you always seem to have more to give.’ ‘Oh, that is easy to explain,’ the farmer said, ‘I keep shoveling into God’s bin and God keeps shoveling into mine, but God has the bigger shovel!’” (Grace of Giving!”” 65,66)

Those who give most are usually those who complain least about financial problems. God is no man’s debtor. One cannot outgive God!

The first reason why I tithe is because the nature of reality demands it. Reality reveals that God is a giving God. Reality reveals that nature functions according to the Law of Surrender, Reality reveals that man functions happily and harmoniously only when he is generous.

II. BECAUSE THE CHURCH COMMENDS IT

Free-will giving is the means by which the work of God goes forward. The Church is to be a House of Prayer, not a House of merchandise.

Says God in the Scriptures, *“Bring all the tithes into the Storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house.”* Malichii 3:10

Notes one noted author: “The responsibility to bring all the tithes and offerings to the local church is plainly illustrated in the Old Testament (II Chronicles 31:11; Nehemiah 10:38-39; Deuteronomy 14:22-29), and definitely taught in the New Testament.”

The local church will have no financial problems if everyone in the Church is giving tithes and offerings regularly. Can you imagine running a Church without money?

Writes Paducah Clarion:

“We have discovered a way to do our work and carry on without asking the members for cash contributions. Will you co-operate?” Here is the plan:

Each member will bring a CANDLE to the evening service, so we can disconnect the electricity.

Each member will take his turn PLAYING THE PIANO. This way we will not need a pianist and music director. That is, if you will also direct the choirs and the congregational singing and arrange for regular rehearsals.

Each member will come to church equipped with BROOM AND DUST CLOTH to keep his part of the building presentable. In this way a paid janitor will no longer be needed.

Those who wish to use water should BRING THEIR OWN BOTTLE

Please, of course, plan to provide your own HYMN BOOK, and your own music in the choir.

And you should be prepared to bring the necessary MATERIALS AND TOOLS to help remodel and repair the building. Here we can save some real money.

Be prepared to spend TIME IN THE CHURCH OFFICE. If you desire a copy of the bulletin, bring your own supplies for printing the same, and call by the church to pick up your copy. This would eliminate the expense of office help and equipment.

It is understood, naturally, that each member will take his turn PREACHING, leading the services, CONDUCTING FUNERALS, PERFORMING MARRIAGES, calling on members and prospects, visiting the sick and in general guide the administration of the church. This would save the church the necessity of a pastor.

And, yes, one must arrange his affairs so that he can spend at least one year as a MISSIONARY ON SOME FOREIGN FIELD. This would take away the need of missionary offerings.

Thus we can be known as the ‘Church that needs no money.’ ‘The church that does not pass the plate or appeal for funds.’ And how noticeable our members will be as the men and women, boys and girls, walk joyfully to church with broom and dust mop, sheet music, sermon manuscripts, candles, water pails and other such sacred baggage!

Isn't this a great idea? A new day is dawning for the church that needs no

money. Would you wish it this way? If not, give God 10% of your income and we can make arrangements for all of this, and we shall continue to run our church in the old fashioned scriptural way where members bring their tithe, for the ongoing of the church.” (Taken from ‘Shoeleather Faith’ by Marv Rosell; No. 2720

“A certain Christian once said to a friend. ‘Our Church costs too much. They are always asking for money! Her friend replied in this fashion: ‘Sometime ago a little boy was born in our home. He cost us a lot of money from the very beginning: he had a big appetite, he needed clothes, medicine, toys and even a puppy. Then he went to school, and that cost a lot more; later he went to college, then he began dating, and that cost a small fortune! But in his senior year at college he died, and since the funeral he hasn’t cost us a penny. Now which situation do you think we would rather have. After a significant pause the friend continued, ‘As long as this church lives it will cost. When it dies for want of support it won’t cost us anything. A living church has the most vital message for all the world today, therefore I am going to give and pray with everything I have to keep our church alive!’” (Quoted from ‘Grace of Giving;43)

The second reason then for my tithing practice is because the church commends tithing. I must hasten to say, however, that I do not tithe as an attempt to gain God’s favor or to merit salvation or heaven. I am saved by grace alone, but faith is dead unless it is expressed openly and concretely by works of love.

After having tithed, I have done no great thing. I have only done the expected and normal thing for my Master, as an expression of love and gratitude. *“Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would you say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”*(Luke 17:7-10)

How blasphemous to think that we are somehow meriting or earning God’s favor and attention by giving a token payment of money.

“Were the whole realm of Nature Mine. That were a present far too small, Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my life, my soul, my all.”

III. BECAUSE THE BIBLE TEACHES TITHING

Both the Old and New Testament teaches tithing as the minimum standard of giving. “Indeed, it has been estimated that the aggregate of religious gifts among the Jews in olden times (Old Testament) could not have been less than one-fifth of each man’s income, and some very probably involved one-third of it.” (Grace of Giving; page 42) If Old Testament

Saints, living under the Law of Moses, gave 1/5 or even occasionally 1/3 of their income to the Lord's work, cannot New Testament saints, under Grace, be expected to give at least 1/10 of their income to the Lord's work?

From the many Biblical passages on giving, take I Corinthians 16:1-2: *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."*

A. Giving Should Be Periodic ("Upon first day of week" - Sunday)

Giving should be regular - every week if at all possible, or at least once a month. "You say you don't believe in systematic giving? Did you ever try eating spasmodically; every once in a while? Or did you ever have a landlord to whom you paid your rent upon occasion; when you were touched by some unusual emotion? Or have you tried appearing on your job only when you felt like it? Funny, isn't it? Or, is it?" (Sermon Builder; Jan. 1972;pg.13)

B. Giving Should be Personal (every one of you")

This means children who earn \$2.00 a month, or adults who earn \$2,000 a month. Everyone! My few dollars, reflecting my tithes and offerings, cannot do much, but combined with your tithes and offerings, our money together can do significant things for God and for our fellowman.

C. Giving Should Be Planned ("put aside and keep by him a sum")

Giving should be planned in advance. "It should not be on the basis of sudden impulse as the ushers are coming down the aisle...With the stabilization of income in modern times, many Christians do not have to decide by the week what they will give. They can providently plan by the month." (The Mature Church Member, Bastian; pg.90)

"The only way to really be sure that one fulfills his responsibility is to make his check to the church first. This has the advantage of acknowledging the Lordship of Christ as primary, and also avoids the temptation of paying bills with money that is really His." (Sermon Builder; July 1971;pg.14)

D. Giving Should Be Proportionate ("in proportion to his gains")

Notes Donald Bastian: "It is safe to say that proportionate giving should begin with a tithe since nowhere in the Bible is less than a tithe suggested.....All money is a trust from

God, and when the Christian steward begins to prosper so that he has more than the essentials of life, he must ask himself what the principle of proportionate giving will mean to him now.... Sober words, indeed, were spoken by the one who said, ‘When a man begins to prosper, either the Lord gets a steward or the Devil gets a soul.’” (The Mature Church Member;91)

Here is E. Stanley Jones’ revolutionary comment on proportionate giving, a comment that has deeply affected my thinking. “While you are lifting your economic level to the level of need, give a tithe of what you earn. After you have reached that level, give everything you earn.” (Abundant Living; pg.302)

At this point, I must ask you: “Do you live by percentage giving (10% only), or do you live by proportionate giving?”

E. Giving Should Be Preventive (“So that there may be no collecting when I come.”)

Periodic, personal, planned, proportionate giving avoids emergencies in a church. Such Biblical-type giving (as I have outlined) prevents high blood pressure from anxiety, wondering if the bills are going to be paid; prevents missionaries from being forced to come off the fields; prevents the church property from suffering deterioration when maintenance is stalled for lack of funds; prevents the church from resorting to sub-christian ways of raising money through sales, suppers, socials, etc; and prevents ministers from being forced to part-time employment outside the church.

CONCLUSION:

Why Should I Tithe?

1. Because The Nature Of Reality Demands It.
2. Because The Church Commends It.
3. Because The Bible Teaches It.

Remember what Jim Elliot, the young martyred missionary, said: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Some Christians ask themselves this question: “How much of my money should I give to the Church?” But this is the wrong question to ask ones self, for this question assumes that one is the proper owner of all his money. The fact is, the earnest, wholehearted follower of Jesus knows that God is the owner of all his money (as well as owner of everything else). The sensitive and knowledgeable Christian knows that he is only the steward, or manager, of all the money which he has. Therefore, the proper question that all committed believers must

ask is thisL “How much of God’s Money shall I hold for my personal and family use?”

**MARK OF A GREAT CHURCH
WHY SHOULD I TITHE**

Q U E S T I O N S

1. What does Jesus' Incarnation and Sacrificial death teach us about the nature of Reality?
2. What does Revelation 7:17 reveal that is at the very heart of life and the universe?
3. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God is love and works by love, and by nothing else than love."
4. Give your personal response to the following statement: "Heaven could never be enriched with the 'Company of the Redeemed' if Jesus had not given Himself to the death of the Cross. Believers can never enrich the Church or their personal lives without sacrificial stewardship."
5. Can you give any examples from Nature that point to "the law of mutual aids"?
6. Share from Nature how the "principle of self-surrender" is vividly demonstrated.
7. From your personal life and from your observation of life in general, demonstrate the truth of the following statement: "To the degree that we do surrender, we become mature."
8. If a person refuses to surrender himself to God, to what or to whom must he surrender himself?
9. Is it not reasonable to expect that when a person makes a full surrender to God, he will become a self-giving person, patterned after God's character? If God is a generous God, and if nature surrenders itself generously to man, then, is it not reasonable for man to find his happiness through self-giving and generosity?
10. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Because man is created in the image of God, we may reason that the more godlike one is, the more generous one is."
11. From your personal life and observations, document the truth of the following statement: "Miserly people are miserable people, and generous people are joyous people."
12. Give your reaction to the following statements: "The most magnificent miracle of life is this: The more you give and do, the more you have and are. If you want to be rich, give; if you want to be poor, grasp! If you want abundance, scatter; if you want to be needy, hoard!" (Read Proverbs 11:24-25)
13. According to Luke 17:7-10, what attitude should characterize the person who practices

Tithing?

14. If Old Testament saints, under the Law, gave 1/5 or even occasionally 1/3 of their income to the Lord's work, cannot New Testament saints, under Grace, be expected to give at least 1/10 of their income to the Lord's work?
15. According to I Corinthians 16:1-2, what principles should be kept in mind when one seeks to practice financial stewardship?
16. Why is it so important and significant for a believer to write his tithing check first?
17. What is the difference between strict percentage giving and proportionate giving?
18. Is there anywhere in the Bible where believers gave less than 1/10 of their income to the Lord and His Work?
19. Tell why you think many Christian people would tend to reject the following statement as a reflection of fanaticism or radicalism: "While you are lifting your economic level to the level of need, give a tithe of what you earn. After you have reached that level, give everything you earn." If believers practiced this advice, do you believe that the allurements of our modern-day materialistic society would have less of a pull on believers?
20. What sorts of emergencies or problems would likely be solved in many local churches, if every believer practiced the principles regarding giving, as outlined in I Corinthians 16:1-2?

CHAPTER 12

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

UNDER A CURSE OR UNDER A BLESSING?

MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH UNDER A CURSE OR UNDER A BLESSING?

OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: Malachi 3:8-12

TEXT: *"Will a man rob God?" (Malachi 3:8a)*

INTRODUCTION:

God is not afraid to reward his faithful and obedient children. God is a giver. Man is a receiver, but man can't receive if he closes the channels through which God gives His blessings. God can only give to the person whose hand is open to God and to others. God is unable to give to the man with the closed hand.

PROPOSITION:

Tithing is commanded in the Old Testament and commended in the New Testament. God promised a great blessing to the tither and a terrible curse to the one who does not acknowledge God and therefore does not tithe.

But, in spite of the clear Bible teaching on tithing, there are yet many objections given when tithing is mentioned. Let's look at some of those objections and seek to give a Biblical answer to those objections.

- I. If I Have Bills To Pay, I Should Pay Them Before I Tithe.
- II. When God Prospers Me, Then I Will Tithe.
- III. I Am Only One Person, So What Good Is My Tithe Anyway?
- IV. I Can't Afford To Tithe, What I Make Verily Covers My Basic Expenses.
- V. I Don't Believe A Christian, Living Under Grace, Needs To Tithe Like Those In The Old Testament Times.
- VI. I Don't Believe The Tithe Should All Be Paid To The Local Church, Since There Are Other Charitable Organization Which Need Some Of My Tithe.
- VII. I Tithe On The Money That Is Left, After All My Bills Are Paid.
- VIII. Some People Tithe Simply To Avoid Paying Income Tax.

IX. I Do Not Need To Tithe If I Give My talents And My Service To The Church.

CONCLUSION:

“Rev. Leo Guffnett was visiting one of his members who was dying with cancer. She had a small check that she received regularly, and often when her pastor called she insisted on giving him her tithe to place in the collection plate. As Mr. Guffnett tells it:

‘One day when I came to see her she could hardly speak audibly. Her lips were moving and her son kept saying, “I am sorry, Mother, but I can’t understand you.” Finally he said, “Mother, is it your tithe? Do you want me to give the tithe from your last check to Brother Guffnett?” She smiled and nodded peacefully. The boy swallowed hard as he went into the next room and returned with her tithe. By the time he had reached her bedside she had slipped across the borderline of worlds. She had gone to be where her treasures were.’

What better place to make one’s investments.” (You Can Be A Joyful Giver; pg. 79)

MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH **Under A Curse Or Under A Blessing?**

SCRIPTURE: Malachi 3:8-12

TEXT: *"Will a man rob God?" (Malachi 3:8a)*

INTRODUCTION: Please allow me to ask you a very daring question: "Are you under a curse or under a blessing?"

If you are an obedient tither, you are under God's blessing. God is not afraid to reward his faithful and obedient children. God is a giver. Man is a receiver, but man can't receive if he closes the channels through which God gives His blessings. God can only give to the person whose hand is open to God and to others. God is unable to give to the man with the closed hand.

God's blessings are great to the man who honors God. *"Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty."* (Proverbs 3:9-10)

Said Jesus, *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God...and all these things shall be added unto you"* (Matthew 6:33). *"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom"* (Luke 6:38) According to Malachi 3:10, the obedient believer can expect great blessings:

- The floodgates of heaven will be opened to you.
- The blessing will be too great even to contain.
- Physical protection will be granted ("prevent pests from devouring crops").
- Honor among others ("All nations will call you blessed").

Yes, the generous are the blessed. But the disobedient are cursed! "Thomas Kane published the following question in many religious newspapers in U.S. and Canada: 'Have you ever known of anyone who was less happy, less generous or less financially prosperous from being a tither?' (10,000 No's and not one Yes.)"

PROPOSITION:

Tithing is commanded in the Old Testament and commended in the New Testament. God promised a great blessing to the tither and a terrible curse to the one who does not acknowledge God and therefore does not tithe.

But, in spite of the clear Bible teaching on tithing, there are yet many objections given when

tithing is mentioned. Let's look at some of those objections and seek to give a Biblical answer to those objections.

I. If I Have Bills To Pay, I Should Pay Them Before I Tithe.

1. Which is a greater obligation, your tithe to God or your payment on your car? If God treated some non-tithing Christians as banks treat persons with overdue bills, then God would have to foreclose on some professing Christians.

“Too many are like the man in a Chicago church who was pressed to put something in the contribution box. ‘I can’t do it, deacon’ he replied; ‘I owe too much money.’ ‘Ah, William, said the good deacon, ‘you owe the Lord more than you do anybody else.’ ‘Yes, I know that’, came the reply’ ‘but He ain’t pressing me like these other fellows.’” (Rosell; No. 520).

May I ask, “Are we more indebted to the car dealer than to God, who has so freely given us all things (Roman 8:32)? If we consider tithing on the basis of our just debts, God gets the first and largest share of our money. Our debt to God comes first. Let’s pay it first.” (You Can Be A Joyful Tither; pg. 49)

The following testimony was given many years ago by a wheat farmer. “I was a wheat farmer, \$10,000 in debt, and couldn’t pay. I couldn’t leave and I couldn’t stay. As I was praying about my problem, God plainly told me to tithe. I looked in my Bible and found the same message. When I told my family, they thought I was crazy to talk about tithing when I was \$10,000 in debt. But the next year I had a bumper crop and sold 11,000 bushels of wheat at a dollar a bushel. I tithed \$1,100 and had almost \$10,000 to pay on my debt.” (Ibid.; pg.49)

2. If some non-tithing Christians wait to pay off all their bills before tithing, then they probably will never start tithing. One luxury item which is paid off is often replaced by another expensive luxury item.

Notes one man, “Because tithing is a duty, we should pay our tithes as promptly and as carefully as we make our car payments - and tithes should come first if there is not enough money to go around. Man’s first duty is to God, and if he discharges this obligation promptly he has the promise of divine help: *‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness: and all these things shall be added unto you.’*” (Matthew 6:33) (Ibid;pg.34)

3. If non-tithing Christians honored God by beginning to tithe, then God surely would help them to reduce their bills by living more disciplined lives.

Someone once said, “All people tithe; some tithe to God and some tithe to the

garage mechanic.”

I heard of a person one time who failed to tithe who had an unusual number of breakdowns in household appliances and in car repair bills.

What does Malachi 3:11 mean to us today? Does it not simply mean that the person who does not tithe is subject to “the devourer”? The “vine” of some non-tithing Christians has “cast her fruit before the time in the field.” (“Car broken down before it’s time”; “Family members subject to illness more than usual, with large doctors bills”, etc., etc.)

Remember, God said of those Israelites who failed to pay their tithe to God: “Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.” They had robbed God of the tithes and offerings!

You answer the question for yourself: “How is a non-tithing Christian cursed?” The non-tithing Christian becomes calculating and stingy. He becomes shriveled up in his spiritual life. He can even eventually lose out with God and backslide!

II. When God Prospers Me, Then I Will Tithe!

1. This is unbiblical and unsound. For, using this argument, a believer who is not presently prospering, is not obligated to tithe.

A lack of prosperity financially is no reason not to tithe. It is possible to tithe and yet not prosper financially. The blessings which God pours out upon our lives are not always material or financial.

“Some tithers remain poor. Many years ago a young minister and his bride were in their first year of the ministry earning a salary of less than \$6.00 per week, paying their own rent and utilities, when fire swept the house in which they rented rooms, taking away all their meager possessions. The young couple were strict tithers and had saved six dimes each week to place in God’s storehouse. As soon as the ruins from the fire had sufficiently cooled, the minister began to probe in the ashes for the six dimes he had on hand from the week’s salary. He discovered them, cleaned them, and placed them in the storehouse the next Sunday, according to schedule. The young man testified later that not once did he even remotely consider ‘borrowing’ the dimes for his necessities that week. Nor did the couple even question the fact that tithing pays. They took it for granted that tithing does not of necessity make a man prosperous.” (Ibid;pg.72)

2. To say, “When God prospers me, then I will tithe”, is to bargain selfishly with God. One is saying that only AFTER God gives the money, THEN he will give. This is giving on the

basis of SIGHT, not on the basis of FAITH.

The Bible says that we unconditionally are FIRST to “Give” to God and then AFTER we have given, God will give back to us. Said Jesus, *“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

3. Many talk about giving large amounts to God when some day they prosper. But only when you prove yourself in the little things, can God entrust you with the big things. If a Christian does not tithe when he has little, how can God trust him to tithe if he has a lot? “His master replied, *‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’*” (Matthew 25:23) *“‘Well done, my good servant!’” His master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’”* (Luke 19:17)

“It’s not what you’d do with millions,
If riches should e’er be your lot,
But what are you doing at present
With the dollar and a quarter you’ve got.”

(Rosell: No. 518)

“John D. Rockefeller, Sr. said that his mother taught him to tithe, when, as a very small boy, he began working to help support her. Years later he stated, ‘If I had not tithed the first dollar I made I would not have tithed the first million dollars I made. Tell your readers to train the children to tithe and they will grow up to be faithful stewards of the Lord.’” (You Can Be A Joyful Tither;pg.53,54)

4. The person who says, “When God prospers me, then I will tithe,” fails to see that God needs His money NOW. To postpone giving can be disastrous at times. To wait to give only after you have prospered, is to wait too long.

“A businessman went to a missionary society with \$280.00 toward sending a new recruit overseas, but he was told that he was too late as they had just canceled her passage for lack of the money. In tears he then confessed: ‘God told me to give it some days ago, but I delayed.’” (The Grace Of Giving;pg.89)

III. I Am Only One Person, So What Good Is My Tithe Anyway?

1. “I am only one, but I am one! Because I can’t do everything, I will not refuse to do something!”

2. If everyone adopted that attitude, then the work of God would suffer. I can’t help what

others do; I am responsible for what I do. I am only one link in the chain, but it is my job to be a strong link!

3. My few dollars, reflecting my tithes and offerings, cannot do much, but combined with your tithes and offerings, our money together can do significant things for God, such as supporting a missionary, establishing a Christian College or orphanage or hospital, or building a Church, etc.

One penny, by itself, can do little, but millions of pennies together can do much!

Many hands make work easy. Many tithes together make miracles happen!

One drop of water can do little, but billions of drops of water, working together, can generate electricity!

“The test of generosity and faithfulness in our stewardship is not our wealth, but rather our willingness to give what we have.” (The Grace of Giving;pg.61)

Don't ever under-estimate the power of your tithe!

Think for a minute of what good you can do in a lifetime through consistent tithing!

We are told that on the average a person works 100,000 hours in a life-time! For the sake of illustration, let's suppose that a person received \$5.00 per hour for his entire lifetime (of course most persons will average much more than this).

If a person tithed on his gross income (assuming he averaged \$5.00 per hour), over a lifetime, how much would he give to his Church? Simple arithmetic says 100,000 times \$5.00 per hour = \$500,000 (gross income) or \$50,000 as TITHE! You see from this simple picture, that it is not at all impossible for consistent givers to give at least \$100,000 in a lifetime (in tithes and offerings).

There are those who think that their tithe would not do much in a local Church, so they don't give.

Do you realize the potential of a Church if everyone were tithing, as the Bible commands?

For the sake of illustration, let's suppose a Church has 50 giving units (persons who are working full-time), and for the sake of illustration, let's say that each person, on the average, is earning \$5.00 per hour, and that all are working only 40 hours per week. If all were tithing to the local Church, what would be the result?

50 (persons) times 40 (hours) times 5 (dollars per hour) = \$10,000 per week or \$1,000 per week (TITHE).

A church with 50 giving units should be receiving at least \$1,000 per week, and more likely \$1,500 or \$2,000 or even much more per week. Many are making more than \$200 per week, (the salary of \$5.00 per hour and 40 hours).

Most Churches - even Bible-preaching Churches - are not realizing their full tithing potential. It is my conviction that, if every Christian (adult, teen, child) was tithing, all the basic financial needs of the Church would be met!

Says one author, "If your church is always tottering on the precipice of brinkmanship financing, it is fairly safe to assume that someone is not tithing." (You Can Be A Joyful Tither; page 37)

A study was made in a large - rather wealthy - Church on the West Coast to determine the financial potential of that Church. It was determined that if all in that local Church were living on Welfare and if all were tithing their welfare check, the giving in that Church would be 40% GREATER than what the present giving was!

Think of the great strength a local Church would have if all were tithing! Many Churches are reaching only half of their financial potential - if even that!

Listen to the following story: "The treasurer of a congregation resigned and the local church requested another member, the operator of the local grain elevator, to take over the vacant position. The man consented, with two stipulations: (1) There would be no treasurer's report for a year and (2) No one would ask him any questions about the church finances during the first year period. The church members were reluctant, but finally agreed. They knew him to be an honest man, because most of them did business with him as manager of the local elevator. Besides, no one else wanted the job anyway.

"The church members kept their agreement. Everything seemed to run along smoothly. There were no rumors of unpaid bills, so they asked no questions. At the end of the first year the treasurer presented the following report: The \$250,000 indebtedness of the building was paid in full. Missionary giving was up 200% over the previous year, the minister's salary had been increased, there were no outstanding bills, and the cash balance was just under \$10,000.

"The congregation, which had never known anything except a constant struggle to make ends meet even though it had about 350 families, was dumbfounded. How did you do it?, they wanted to know. The treasurer replied, 'Most of you bring your grain to my elevator. As you did business with me, I simply withheld 10% on your behalf and gave it to the church in your name. When the Lord gets His share first, you never miss it. Do you see

what we could do for His work if each of us were willing to give Him the first tithe, which is really His anyway?" (Selected from newsletter;)

IV. I Can't Afford To Tithe. What I Make Verily Covers My Basic Expenses.

1 One may ask, "Can you afford NOT to tithe?" "Can you afford not to express your love concretely to God?" "Can you afford not to have a local Church which is made possible only because you and others like you tithe?"

"Can you afford to rob God? Usually we afford the things we WANT to afford rather than the things we CAN afford. I have been in homes where there were bare floors, modest cupboards, and simple furnishings, but where the tithe was paid religiously and joyfully. I have also been in homes that had plush furniture, packed wardrobes, new cars in the garage, and speedboats on the lawn - but where the people thought they could not afford to tithe. In both kinds of homes it was a question of gadgets or God. In the former instance it was God. In the latter, gadgets. If you go God's way you will find that blessings are abundant and that tithing will be a pleasure." (Ibid;pg. 57,58)

2. Are there not other things in your life which can go before the tithe? Are there not luxuries which can be sacrificed before the tithe is sacrificed? Do not most Christians (in America, at least) live beyond their means?

3. Is it not true yet (as thousands have testified) that God is able to stretch the 9/10 to do as much or more than the 10/10? Is it not true that the man who honors God with his money is the man who will be honored by God?

Says the Word, "God is able to make it up to you by giving you everything you need and more, so that there will not only be enough for your own needs, but plenty left over to give joyfully to others." (II Corinthians 9:8, Living Bible)

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Robert Laidlaw, well-known businessman of New Zealand tells of his experience of honoring God with his money. "As a young man of eighteen and a half he made a covenant with God that he would give a tenth of all his earnings. Later at the age of twenty-five, he decided to change that amount to fifty percent of all his earnings. God continued to multiply his resources until he was giving even more to the work of the Lord. Later, writing at the age of seventy, he could say: 'I want to bear testimony that, in spiritual communion and in material things, God has blessed

me one hundredfold, and has graciously entrusted to me a stewardship far beyond my expectations when, as a lad of eighteen, I gave God a definite portion of my wages.” (The Grace of Giving;pg. 87,88)

4. One who thinks he can't afford to tithe is one who has not fully surrendered to the Lordship of Christ. “The Lordship of Christ is the measure of our discipline and devotion in Christian stewardship. We can talk until doomsday about being surrendered Christians, but we virtually lie until we give evidence of our surrender through our stewardship.” (Ibid;pg.93)

“Some years ago a committee from a church came into the home of a poor widow and suggested that she should not continue to tithe her meager income. They tried to convince her that she could not afford it. But the lady wept, and wiping her face with her apron said, ‘Let me alone! You are trying to take away the greatest pleasure of my life.’” (You Can Be A Joyful Giver;pg.41)

V. I Don't Believe A Christian, Living Under Grace, Needs To Tithe Like Those In The Old Testament Times.

1. “There is nothing new about the idea of tithing. It is a practice that dates back to the ancients, even outside the Jewish and Christian tradition. The Egyptians and Chaldeans who occupied the fertile valleys of the Nile before the Old Testament was written - and the Assyrians - tithed to their gods. Some claim the practice of tithing dates back as early as 3800 B.C. It is also claimed that the Phoenicians, Chinese, Greeks, Romans, Arabians, and others paid tithes in their religious ceremonies.” (Ibid;pg.18)

Should Christians give less to the True God than what pagans give to their false gods.

2. Tithing is commanded in the Old Testament and tithing is commended in the New Testament. Both the Old Testament and New Testament teach tithing as the minimum standard for giving.

When Jesus came, he did not destroy the Law of the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17). “It is inconceivable that our Lord would have kept every other aspect of the law and overlooked such a matter as tithing.” (Ibid;pg.116)

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former (tithing).” (Matthew 23:23)

3. If Old Testament saints, under the Law, gave 1/5 or even occasionally 1/3 of their income to the Lord's work, it surely is reasonable to expect New Testament saints, living under Grace, to give at least 1/10 of their total income to the Lord's work.

“Were the whole realm of Nature mine,
That were a present far too small,
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

This is the spirit of Grace. Surely, love so great should compel me to give at least a tithe of our income!

I recently heard of one denomination which organized what they called a “Thirty Percent Club.” Members of this club gave an amount equal to three tithes each year.

Perhaps every local church ought to have a ‘Thirty Percent Club’!

VI. I Can’t Believe The Tithe Should All Be Paid To The Local Church, Since There Are Other Charitable Organizations Which Need Some Of My Tithe.

“In the midst of a lively tithing campaign in one church, a member who had been in leadership for years made this statement: ‘I do not go along with this tithing campaign, and I refuse to sign the pledge to pay my tithe into the

storehouse. I give my money where I please. Some of it gets into the collection plate; some of it goes to certain radio preachers and independent missionary enterprises.’

The good brother not only revealed his guilt in stealing from God’s storehouse - he also revealed his poor judgment. He was supporting various radio missionary programs about which he knew practically nothing at all and whose financial policies were suspect.

The Bible is clear about the place where the tithe should be paid: *‘Into the storehouse’* (Malachi 3:10). The storehouse is the local church where you worship. Those who support the various worthy charities of their community should do so from their offerings above the 10 percent. (You Can Be A Joyful Tither;pg. 54,55)”

1. Notes the great preacher, Stephen Olford, “The responsibility to bring ALL the tithes and offerings to the local church is plainly illustrated in the Old

Testament. One of the great sins of our time is the robbing and defrauding of the local church by its membership. And until such restitution is made, God will not bless. This is what is meant by 'storehouse tithing' - the bringing of your tithes and offerings to the place where your membership is established, your spiritual life is nourished, and your church privileges are enjoyed. If you give elsewhere, then it should be over and above the required tithe and offering to your church. Now this is scripturally binding upon all who desire to see the blessing of God." (The Grace of Giving;pg 29,30)

2. It may be legitimate to give to organizations outside of the local Church, but let us not make the local Church suffer in the meantime.

If you give above your tithe to other organizations outside of the local Church, first carefully check out those organizations. Make sure that they are legitimate, Christ-honoring, Bible-teaching, and spiritually-fruitful organization.

VII. I Tithe On The Money That Is Left, After All My Bills Are Paid.

1. This is not tithing to God, this is tipping God. Tithing is based on the total income.

Someone asked a minister, "Should I tithe on my gross income or on my net income?" The minister replied, "Do you want God to bless your gross income or to bless your net income?"

2. The tithe should be paid before any other bills are paid. Give the tithe first, and then use the remainder of your income to honor God by providing for your family, and other needs.

In his little booklet entitled 'Give To God', the late Robert A. Laidlaw illustrates this thought by saying: 'I go to a home where there is a little girl, five or six years of age, and give her a box of chocolates. She straightway disappears, and when she returns her lips and fingers are covered with chocolate. In another home, however, the box is opened at once, and the little lassie brings it to me and says, 'You have the first one.' 'Oh, no!' I say, 'they are for you.' 'But please,' she pleads, 'you brought them to me, do please have the first one.' 'And helping myself I say, 'Thank you, dear.' Which child has the warmest place in my affections, and which is more likely to get another box of chocolates?'" Have you given the first chocolate to God - your tithe, that is? Some eat all the apple and give the core to God! And then

they have nerve enough to keep asking God for more apples! How long can God be satisfied with the core?

Israel was told to bring the FIRSTFRUITS of their labors to God - not the last fruits! *“Honor the Lord by giving Him the first part of all your income, and He will fill your barns with wheat and barley and overflow your wine vats with the finest wines.”* (Proverbs 3:9,10)

“A man who had ten coins met a beggar and was so touched by the pitiful spectacle that he gave the poor man nine of his coins. The beggar, instead of being thankful, followed the man to a lonely spot, overpowered him, and stole the other coin.

“This ancient story reminds us that many people are robbing God of His tenth, even after He has given them the privilege of using the nine-tenths for themselves.” (You Can Be A Joyful Tither;pg.40)

“Would a model husband go to the shopping center, buy a \$125 suit for himself, and then spend \$3 on a calico wrapper for his wife, singing all the way home ‘I Love My Sweet Sue’? No! Nor

would a genuine Christian lavish his Heaven-blessed income on himself, his pleasures, his luxuries, and drop only an occasional dollar in the plate, singing, ‘Oh, How I Love Jesus!’” (Ibid;pg.46)

VII. Some People Tithe Simply To Avoid Paying Income Tax.

1. I seriously doubt that there are enough such persons to count on one hand, within the typical local church.
2. Tithing Christians give because they love God and they want to see the Kingdom of God built and the local Church blessed.
3. There is nothing wrong in Christians being given tax breaks. The money one does not give to ‘Uncle Sam’ to build bombs can be given to the local Church to buy Bibles and to build Church facilities.

Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. Give to God what belongs to God! Be thankful for the residue of Christian beliefs in our nation which has motivated our government to pass tax laws which honor generous-hearted Christians.

IX. I Do Not Need To Tithe If I Give My Talents And My Service To The Church.

“A church worker who was confronted with a tithing pledge card stated defensively that he was exempted from paying his 10 percent on the basis that he was giving his services to the church in lieu of his tithe. Therefore, he figured he was free to allow himself a \$5 deduction from his tithe each time he sang in the choir, \$10 each time he sang a solo, and perhaps \$15 each time he led the singing. Someone figured that according to his scale it would take about \$1,000 per week to operate that local congregation - which had a weekly tithe potential of less than one-half that amount.

“God is not asking for our tithe OR our talents - He wants our tithe AND our talents. Entire consecration reaches all the hidden recesses and gives the total to God, gladly.” (Ibid;pg.54)

CONCLUSION:

“Rev. Leo Guffnett was visiting one of his members who was dying with cancer. She had a small check that she received regularly, and often when her pastor called she insisted on giving him her tithe to place in the collection plate. As Mr. Guffnett tells it:

‘One day when I came to see her she could hardly speak audibly. Her lips were moving and her son kept saying, “I am sorry, Mother, but I can’t understand you.” Finally he said, “Mother, is it your tithe? Do you want me to give the tithe from your last check to Brother Guffnett?” She smiled and nodded peacefully. The boy swallowed hard as he went into the next room and returned with her tithe. By the time he had reached her bedside she had slipped across the borderline of worlds. She had gone to be where her treasures were.’

What better place to make one’s investment???”

MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH UNDER A CURSE OR UNDER A BLESSING?

Q U E S T I O N S

1. According to Matthew 6:33 and Luke 6:38 and Malachi 3:10, what great blessings can the obedient tither expect to receive from God?
2. If you have bills to pay, should you pay them before you give your tithe to your local church? Why or why not?
3. Give your comments and interpretation of the following statement: "All people tithe; some tithe to God and some tithe to the garage mechanic."
4. Should one wait to be financially prosperous first, before he begins to tithe? Why or why not?
5. If a Christian does not tithe when he has little, how can God trust him to tithe if he has a lot? (Note Matthew 25:23 and Luke 19:17)
6. Tell what you would say to a person (a professing Christian) who declared: "I am only one person, so what good is my tithe anyway?"
7. How would you counsel a person whose net income verily covered his basic monthly expenses and who, therefore, felt he could not "afford" to tithe?
8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "One who thinks he can't afford to tithe is one who has not fully surrendered to the Lordship of Christ."
9. Do you believe a Christian, living under Grace, needs to tithe like those ancient Jews who were living under the dispensation of Law? Why or why not? (Note Matthew 5:17 and Matthew 23:23)
10. Based on 'Common Sense' and 'Scriptures', why is it important for believers to give all of their tithe to their local church? Is it ever proper for believers to give money to non-denominational or to para-church organizations? If so, what guidelines should be considered when giving to such organizations?

CHAPTER 13

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

MEANINGFUL WORSHIP

MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH MEANINGFUL WORSHIP

OUTLINE

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 95:1-7

INTRODUCTION: Man is the only creature which is a worshiping creature. He is altogether unique. Man alone can worship his Creator and intimately fellowship with Him.

- I. THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUE WORSHIP
- II. THE OBJECT OF TRUE WORSHIP
- III. THE PLACES OF TRUE WORSHIP
 - A. Improper Uses of God's House.
 - B. Proper Use of God's House.
- IV. THE AIDS TO TRUE WORSHIP
 - A. Personal Aids.
 - B. External Aids.
 - 1. Ritual
 - 2. Symbol
 - 3. Sacrament
 - 4. Sacrifice

CONCLUSION: We must define what worship really is - acknowledgment OF one sovereign God whose character is holy, righteous, and loving. Worship is an attitude of life which should influence man's every action and decision. Worship is a conscious engagement in praise, prayer, and meditation within the corporate body of believers. Through one's own personal discipline, he learns progressively and increasingly how to worship. The church is a God-instituted organization for the purpose of enabling man corporately and individually to come into contact with the Divine Reality. The Church has resorted to certain aids to enable one to better realize that Divine Reality. Ritual, Symbol and Sacrament are aids to enable man to better worship, and to lead him to the culminating act of all worship, which is Sacrifice or self-surrender to God. All worship should lead one to a sense of self-abandonment and overwhelming adoration of God.

The song writer caught the true spirit of sacrifice when he wrote:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small,
Love is so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all.

MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

SUBJECT: Meaningful Worship

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 95:1-7

INTRODUCTION: “Worship is the response of the creature to the eternal.” (Underhill)
Every man has an innate capacity and need for worshipping something or someone.

PROPOSITION: Man is the only creature which is a worshipping creature. He is altogether unique. Man alone can worship his Creator and intimately fellowship with Him.

Let us note certain important things about worship. (1) The Importance of Worship, (2) The Object of True Worship, (3) The Places of Worship, (4) The Aids to True Worship.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUE WORSHIP.

Everyone worships someone or something. Man is incurably religious. He is created to worship the true and the living God, but persons who refuse to worship God, end up worshipping nature or something else. Notes Paul, *“Since earliest times men have seen the earth and sky and all God made, and have known of his existence and great eternal power. So they will have no excuse (when they stand before God at Judgement Day). Yes, they knew about him all right, but they wouldn’t admit it or worship him or even thank him for all his daily care. And after awhile they began to think up silly ideas of what God was like and what he wanted them to do. The result was that their foolish minds became dark and confused. Claiming themselves to be wise without God, they became utter fools instead. And then, instead of worshipping the glorious, ever-living God, they took wood and stone and made idols for themselves, carving them to look like mere birds and animals and snakes and puny men.”* Romans 1:20-23; Living Bible.

The object of one’s worship determines the value of one’s worship. Giving one’s allegiance to someone or something other than God is what constitutes idolatry. The first of the Ten Commandments is this: “Thou shalt have none other gods before me.” We are to worship no other god than the true and the living, self-revealed God, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob - the God most fully revealed in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ!

Those who worship anything other than the true God, are setting their affections upon lifeless objects that are helpless to rescue the lost, that are pitiless to care for the sorrowing, that are emotionless to share with the

lonely. The utter futility of idolatry is vividly portrayed in Psalms 115, *“For he (the true God) is in the heavens, and does as he wishes. Their gods are merely manmade things of silver and gold. They can’t talk or see, despite their eyes and mouths! Nor can they hear, nor smell, nor use their hands or feet! Nor speak! And those who make and worship them are just as foolish as their idols are.”* (Psalms 115:3-8; Living Bible)

We become like that which we worship. “A man will quite inevitably become like the god he worships. If he worships a licentious god like the Baals, he will become a licentious man. If he worships a hard stern god, then he will, as the world has so often tragically seen, become a hard stern man. If he worships a sentimentalized god, he will have a sentimentalized idea of religion. A man’s god dictates a man’s conduct, consciously or unconsciously. The Christian believes in the God who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God whose mind and heart and character is seen in the life and death of Jesus. And for that very reason the Christian Ethic might well be said to be the imitation of Christ.” (The Ten Commandments For Today; Barclay; pg.17)

While it is true that there are great personal benefits to be derived from worshiping the true God, we must always remember that this is not the main reason why we worship God. “There is no subtler perversion of the Christian Faith than to treat it as a mere means to a worldly end, however admirable that end in itself may be. The Christian Faith is important because it is true. What it happens to achieve, in ourselves or in others, is another and, strictly speaking, secondary matter. For the Christian Faith will remain true whether we who profess it turn into heroic saints or into even more miserable sinners. We must insist that we worship God because he is God, not because we want something out of him. What a mean blasphemy it would be, to go through magnificent acts of public worship always with the dominant intention at the back of the mind - ‘This is really going to make a better chap of me!’ What arrogance and presumption, to treat eternal God, throned in glory, as a visual aid to moral self-improvement.” (The Christian Mind; Harry Blamires;pg.110)

We do not worship God in order to be changed and improved; we worship God because he is God! But in worshiping Him for the right purpose - because He is God and ought to be worshiped - we, in the process, become Godlike. “A man will quite inevitably become like the god he worships.” (Barclay)

II. THE OBJECT OF TRUE WORSHIP

It is true that all men worship someone or something, and if it is also true that a man becomes like the god whom he perpetually worships, then it stands to reason that we had better worship the right god! A 'god' is that to which you give your supreme loyalty. If you give your supreme loyalty to money, you are worshipping the god of materialism. Those who consider money to be all-important, are literally worshipping the god of 'mammon'. "When Jesus uses the Aramaic term 'mammon' to refer to wealth, he is giving it a personal and spiritual character. When he declares, 'You cannot serve God and mammon'(Matthew 6:24), he is personifying mammon as a rival god. In saying this, Jesus is making it unmistakably clear that money is not some impersonal medium of exchange. Money is not something that is morally neutral, a resource to be used in good or bad ways depending solely upon our attitude toward it. Mammon is power that seeks to dominate us.....For Christ money is an idolatry we must be converted from in order to be converted to him. The rejection of the god mammon is a necessary precondition to becoming a disciple of Jesus. And in point of fact, money has many of the characteristics of deity. It gives us security, can induce guilt, gives us freedom, gives us power and seems to be omnipresent. Most sinister of all, however, is its bid for omnipotence....Behind money are invisible spiritual powers, powers that are seductive and deceptive, powers that demand an all-embracing devotion.....It is a god that is out to gain our allegiance." (Money, Sex and Power; Richard Foster; pg. 25,26,28,29,30)

There is no doubt that Jesus considered money, i.e., mammon - to be one of the most powerful gods which controlled both men in His day and also in our day! We become like the gods to whom we give allegiance. Those who worship the cold god of materialism become themselves cold and calculating and calloused. "Mammon asks for our allegiance in a way that sucks the milk of human kindness out of our very being." (Ibid; pg.26)

Those who worship the sensual goddess of sex, become themselves dominated by selfish passion. Those who worship the god of power and position, become themselves dominated by wild ambition and cruel exploitation.

If we must tear from our heart's throne, the gods of mammon and sensualism and power and a score of other gods, then what god must we place on the throne of our hearts? It is not a question as to whether there is a god on the throne of a man's life, it is only a question as to what god. There is only one God who is worthy of our worship. He is the true and the living God, the Creator and the Sustainer of life, the Giver of all good and perfect

gifts, and one in whom we live and move and have our being, the one whom Jesus taught us to address as 'Abba' Father!

Who is this God who must be the object of our sole worship? Let Paul give his description of the true and living God - a description that is simple and clear even to pagan worshippers like those on Mars Hill at Athens who were struggling to find the true God.

"Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: 'Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth: and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring." Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone - an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man whom he appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.'" (Acts 17:22-31)

The true God is the self-revealed God whose traits and characteristics are thrilling to contemplate! He is the One eternal God, existent everywhere (Omnipresent), all-knowing (Omniscient), all-powerful (Omnipotent), unchanging in His character and principles, ever faithful to His promises, all-wise, totally good and benevolent, absolutely pure in His motives and holy in His nature, perfectly just in His treatment of mankind, and longsuffering and merciful in His disposition. He is the God whose true identity is best seen in the personality and works of His Incarnate Son. *"Christ is the exact likeness of the unseen God."* (Colossians 1:15) Because Christ came and died and

arose again from the Dead, He is now exalted at the Father's right hand of authority, and all power has been given to Him. Christ the humiliated one is now Christ the exalted one, and the one before whom all knees must someday bow in adoration and worship! To worship Christ truly is to worship God only, for Christ is worthy of all adoration! *"Yes, his (Christ's) honor is far more glorious than that of anyone else either in this world or in the world to come. And God has put all things under his feet and made him the supreme Head of the Church- which is his body, filled with himself, the Author and Giver of everything everywhere."* (Ephesians 1:21-23; Living Bible) *"God raised him (Christ) up to the heights of heaven and gave him a name which is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:9-11; Living Bible)

He who worships the all-together beautiful Christ will himself become a beautiful person in due time, for a man becomes like the god that he consistently worships. "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full into His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace!" You will become transfixed - totally changed - as you continue with adoring worship to look at the beautiful face of Jesus! Jesus is worthy of your worship! You worship God truly when you worship Jesus wholeheartedly! The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who best revealed Himself in the face of His Son - He is the object of all true worship!

III. The Places Of True Worship

If the whole universe is full of God, then it stands to reason that there is no place where it is improper to worship our God! There is no place where God is not! "Tell me where is God", said an atheist to a child. 'I will,' said the child, 'if you will tell me where he is not.'" (Benney's Theological Compend: pg.81) As the hymn writer declares:

"This is my Father's world,
The birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
Declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world:
He shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear Him pass,
He speaks to me everywhere."

To worship alone, to worship with family members, to worship in a

small group with friends, to worship with a large congregation, or to worship moment by moment as you are carrying out your daily tasks - these are places where legitimate worship takes place. Perhaps of all places where it is most important to focus on worshipping God, it is the place of one's daily employment. Working for God daily, by using our spiritual gifts and talents and acquired skills, is really worshipping God, for God created us to be little creators alongside Him who is the Master Creator.

The whole universe is full of His glory, and therefore every place imaginable is a worthy place to worship our God - at home, in our private garden alone, with friends, at the place of work, and in the holy sanctuary amidst a large group of worshipers. Said Jesus, *"It is not where we worship that counts, but how we worship - is our worship spiritual and real? For God is Spirit, and we must have his help to worship as we should. The Father wants this kind of worship from us."* (John 4:21-23; Living Bible)

Let's summarize what we have said thus far. We have said that all men are 'incurably religious' - everyone worships someone or something. A person becomes in character like the god that he consistently worships, even though the reason for which we worship the living God is not for self-improvement but simply because He is God. Nevertheless, the object of one's worship determines the value of one's worship, and the value of true worship is felt by both the living God and by the true worshiper. The only one who is worthy of our worship is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Worthy is the Lamb of God - Jesus - whose blood was shed for the sins of all persons. To worship Jesus wholeheartedly is to worship God truly, for God is best known through His Son. Because God is everywhere, there is no place where He cannot be worshiped. He is not to be worshiped in only one locale (like Jerusalem, John 4:21), for God is a Spirit and they who worship Him must worship Him 'in spirit'. Thus, it is not where we worship Him that is all-important, but it is how we worship Him that is vitally important!

While worship is never to be confined to one location, nevertheless Scripture teaches that it is good for people to worship Him corporately at a designated time and in a special place that is set aside for corporate worship. *"Go through his open gates with great Thanksgiving; enter his courts with praise."* (Psalms 100:4; Living Bible)

Let us give our attention to the importance of corporate worship in what we call 'the House of the Lord' (the local assembly of believers).

We learn throughout Scripture that God's House is not to be used for man's profane activities. It is in the House of God that one finds God's glory.

Let us note, first, the improper uses of God's House, and then note the proper and God-honoring use of His House.

1. Improper Uses Of God's House

A. It is not a place to advertise piety. Piety can be advertised in prayer. Says Barclay, "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.'" (Barclay's Luke, pg.232) Piety can be advertised in testimonies. The testimony which glorifies God is not the one which gives the impression that the testifier never failed, but one which glorifies the God of grace who has been longsuffering and merciful. Our songs can even draw too much attention to self. In Sunday morning worship service it is hymns that should be sung rather than merely Gospel songs. The hymn directs one's attention to God; the Gospel song directs more attention to self.

B. It is not a place to exhibit talent, however excellent the talent. When a preacher, poet, musician, or artist draws attention to himself rather than to God, then his talent is used selfishly, God is not honored, and the people are not worshipping.

C. It is not a place to advance business interests. Just as Jesus drove the greedy exploiters out of the Jerusalem Temple, so likewise the condemnation will come upon every man who uses God's House to advance His own selfish interests.

D. It is not a place to exhibit fashionable clothes. No rented pews; No favoritism and or class consciousness. God has no partiality and He expects man to show no partiality within the church. James wrote, "*If there comes unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there comes in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit under my footstool, are ye not then partial and become judges of evil thoughts.*" (James 2:3,4) We are all on 'Level Ground' Before the Lord.

2. Proper Use of God's House.

Jesus said the church is a House of Prayer. Spiritual growth is a natural benefit which is derived from corporate worship, but the main purpose of God's house is prayer and praise.

If the main purpose of God's House is prayer, the Church should be pervaded with a sense of quietness, reverence, awe, and worship. Such an atmosphere would exclude excessive or unnecessary noise. Noise distracts from worship. In a large college church, a tape recording was made of noise which was made during the transition time between Sunday School and Church Service. The Church people were surprised and ashamed when they heard the noise from the tape which was replayed. Be free in the Spirit as you worship. King David was. Freedom in the Spirit, however, does not mean irreverence to the Spirit, and it does not mean insensitivity to fellow worshippers around you. God is not the author of confusion, but the author of order and holy propriety.

“As the ark of the Lord was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she despised him in her heart. They brought the ark of the Lord and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it. And David sacrificed burnt offerings before the Lord. After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings he blessed the people in the name of the Lord Almighty. Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes. When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, “How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would. David said to Michal, “It was before the Lord, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel - I will celebrate before the Lord. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor. And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.” (II Samuel 7:16-23.)

Don't misunderstand what freedom of the Spirit in worship is, however. Freedom of the Spirit in worship is not freedom to indulge your own flesh or freedom to "do your own thing" without due respect for those around you. There have been times in some Churches' public worship services where the degree of spirituality was been judged by the degree of external emotional expression. There is nothing wrong with external, God-induced emotional expression, but there is much wrong with humanly-induced emotionalism - the kind of emotional expression which distracts and disturbs and causes confusion. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is order! There are some religious leaders who have been known to manipulate people's emotions and to exploit people's feelings, to advance the cause of the leaders or the cause of the organization. Exploitation of people is always wrong - even religious exploitation.

Feel free to express your God-induced and genuine feelings in worship - whether this means a spontaneous verbal testimony or a spontaneous "Amen" or an upraised hand, or a shout of praise, or hand clapping while a chorus is being sung; or whether this means simply basking quietly and contemplatively in God's presence and letting the tears of joy trickle down your cheeks. Be respectful of those around you, but always be "free in the Spirit", while you are worshiping. Whatever you do in public worship services, make sure it is genuine and orderly and Spirit-honoring. Let us be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's moving. On one hand, let us not be guilty of dead formalism which has no spirit of enthusiasm, and on the other hand, let us not be guilty of excessive emotionalism which has no spirit of reverence. Wrote Bishop B.T. Roberts: "We do not fear any of the manifestations of the Spirit of God. But let the emotions you manifest be an effect produced by the Divine Spirit. We may shout until shouting becomes a habit.... There may be a formal noise as well as a formal silence. What we want is not noisy meetings, not still meetings - but the spirit of the living God in all our worshiping assemblies." (From *Age to Age a Living Witness*; Marston; pg. 332)

As an earnest Christian, you always should seek for at least three things: genuineness in your Christian experience, order in your public worship, and balance in your Biblical interpretation!!

The "fire" of the Holy Spirit is not "wild fire" - i.e., it does not lead to excesses and extremes and radical fanaticism! The "fire" of the Holy Spirit brings authenticity to your inner life, order to your public worship and saneness to your mental processes. The fire of the Spirit enables you to feel authentically and to act appropriately, and to think rationally!

IV. THE AIDS TO TRUE WORSHIP

If worship is the most important activity in which man engages, what aids are available to enable man to center his mind on God. Two categories of aids can be named: Personal aids, and External aids.

1. Personal Aids.

A. Habit of regular Church attendance. The most important things of life, become a person's habits. The way one habitually uses his time and where he habitually spends his time, reveals much about a person's loyalties.

It is the purpose of every service to point man's attention God-ward in an attitude of adoration, but especially is this true of the Sunday morning worship service. Sunday night service is especially dedicated for the close fellowship and sharing. Wednesday night service provides opportunity for receiving inner renewal, strength, and enlightenment through study and prayer. The dedicated Christian will make a supreme effort to attend God's House as often as possible.

B. Meditation prior to service to prepare one's heart for worship. This can be accomplished by (a) silently reading a good hymn which fixes one's mind on God's greatness, (b) silently reciting a Scripture verse which tells of God's love and power (Psalms 145-150) Preparing heart for worship, or reading Church Bulletin, silently praying that God will apply the truth to one's daily life. (Praying for service, leaders, fellow worshippers.)

C. Choosing place to sit which is conducive for worship. If one sits in the back seat he may have to exert special discipline to sing, pray, and listen well. As a child in my church, I was kindly motioned to by an old sainted man, to come up to the second seat in the church to sit beside him. It seemed that I could always worship better when I sat in the front of the church beside this godly man. One's companions do have influence on him.

D. Wholeheartedly participate in every worship activity.

(1) Sing hymns not only for musical harmony but for the meaning that can be derived from the words. (Think about what you are singing.)

(2) Give tithes and offerings as an act of worship, not as an 'necessary obligation' aside from worship. Each time tithes and offerings are taken, this is an opportunity for one to give himself anew to God. This is the reason why one's tithe should not be given in one lump sum, but rather in weekly portions.

(3) When the pastor prays, pray with him, instead of listening to the way he phrases his words. Feel free to audibly say 'Amen', when the pastor says 'Amen' or at any time when you feel led of God. Prayer emotional expression is edifying to all involved.

(4) Listen devotionally and open-mindedly to the preacher. An overly-critical and close-minded person will not learn. Even if the preacher is not the best of speakers, listen anyway for the purpose of discovering new truths. Even if one doesn't agree with all that is said, listen openly, for this is a sign of maturity. Don't develop casual attitudes because of frequently hearing preaching.

E. Apply truths to daily life. Jotting down notes during the service helps keep one's mind on the sermon. Meditate upon the new truths, soon after the service. Ask God to help you to put into practice what you have learned. Obey James' exhortation, "*Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.*" James 1:22. Follow along in Bible while taking notes. Have a Study Bible that you feel free to underline and mark or take notes on.

We have looked at the personal aids to worship; let us now look at the traditional, external aids to worship.

2. External Aids

A. Ritual

(1) Definition - "A religious ritual is an agreed pattern of the framework within which corporate religious action can take place." (Underhill, pg.32)

(2) Purpose - to enable a group of people to do something together with a minimum amount of confusion. There must be organization in any worthwhile social endeavor, and public worship is no exception. It is helpful to have a regular form since a pattern will enable everyone who is present, to know what activity comes next. If there was no form, the attention of the congregation would be diverted from worship to a wondering of what will come next. There is a reason for an order of service. It is to make it easier for all to keep their mind on worship. If all know what activity is coming next, then the attention of all can be kept centered upon worshipping

God. This does not mean that there should not be an occasional change in the order of service for the sake of wholesome variety. Neither does it mean that there should not be a spontaneous element in the worship service. An occasional 'Amen' or a spontaneous testimony in the service is very conducive to worship. Any other emotional expression is proper if it aids others in worship. However, emotion which draws the attention of others to you and away from God, is selfish and harmful. In the expression of emotion, one should especially be considerate of outsiders and new-comers. It is God that must have all of the attention, not the preacher or any other person in the service.

(3). Danger - Dependence upon the ritual as a means to gain God's favor, is the danger associated with ritual. Ritual must not be made an end within itself, but rather a means to an end. Ritual must aid us in worshipping God. God is the object of man's worship - not ritual. To become preoccupied alone with formality, is to become divorced from true religion. True religion is concerned only with glorifying God through active obedience. Through the prophets, God told the Israelites that their religious acts were rejected because they were not performed from the heart. God said through Isaiah, "This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me." (Isaiah 29:13). Paul spoke of people who have a form of religion but who deny the power of true religion.

B. Symbol

(1). Definition - "Since the true Object of man's worship always lies beyond his comprehension, we are obliged to bridge the gap by means of symbolic images; chosen objects which signify, mediate or suggest, but never explain, the Reality that we adore." (Underhill, pg.38)

(2). Purpose - We use visible symbols "to arouse, maintain, and express our worship". The appearance of a cross in our church, reminds us of the suffering and sacrifice of our Savior, whose death and resurrection brought man's salvation. A steeple on a church guides our eyes upward, reminding us that it is the God of Heaven whom we worship and from whom we receive help. The pulpit which is placed in the middle of the

platform, reminds us of the centrality of God's Word as the final standard of authority in matters of life and conduct. Because the sacrament table is on the same floor level as the congregation, this shows that all the people - not just the clergy - have a right to partake of the cup, which represents Christ's blood, shed for the sins of all men.

Symbols have no virtue within themselves but are only useful as they remind us of a spiritual reality! Reality beyond ourselves which we cannot fully comprehend. As humans, we are confined to time and space, and must oftentimes depend upon external objects as means by which we express our deepest feelings. Thus, for example, we express love - an indefinable quality - by the giving of a gift. Love cannot be equated with the small gift, but the gift is merely a token or symbol of a deep indefinable quality that can only be expressed by an outward act.

Thus, such acts as the sign of the Cross, the kiss of peace, and the prostration may all be outward symbols of deeper meanings. Says Evelyn Underhill, "The symbol, or significant image, is not, as its unfriendly critics suppose, a substitute for spiritual truth. It is rather the point where physical and metaphysical meet - a half-way house, where the world of things and the world of spirit unite, and produce a new thing possessed of sensible and supra-sensible reality. And man, who partakes himself of this double character, finds in it the natural means of access to God." (pg. 40)

(3). Danger - The misuse of a symbol in worship leads to idolatry - that is, worshiping the symbol, rather than the God of which the symbol is intended to remind one. To worship the symbol, is to divorce oneself from true religion.

C. Sacrament

(1). Definition - "A sacrament is a significant deed, a particular use of temporal things, which gives to them the value of eternal things and thus incorporates and conveys spiritual reality." (Underhill, pg.42)

(2). Kinds - Water is used to cleanse, oil is used to anoint, and the imposition of hands is used to consecrate. The most

significant sacrament is the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Participation in this religious act is a command of our Lord. Paul recalled the institution of this rite when he wrote, "*After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*" (I Corinthians 11:25,26)

This act carries with it, deep spiritual significance. It not only reminds us of the body and blood of Christ which was given for our sins, but it provides opportunity for renewing our faith in God and more deeply submitting our lives to the ministry of God's Spirit. It is a means of grace as well as a reminder of Calvary.

D. Sacrifice

The all-encompassing and culminating act of worship is sacrifice. When man realizes his finiteness and moral defilement and God's infinite power and holiness, man feels compelled humbly to surrender himself to the Creator, just as Isaiah of old did. (Isaiah 6)

Underhill well summarizes the act of sacrifice in these words, "As man begins to wake up to the Reality over against him, there comes to him as the sequel to his sense of awe and dependence the feeling that he wants to offer something - indeed, must offer something - to the unseen Power...The sacrifice may have as its immediately inciting cause awe, fear, anxiety, the impulse to propitiate, or the sense of need or guilt; for all these paths, the spirit of men is persuaded to seek communion with God. But whether this declared cause be the desire to adore, to atone, or to obtain benefits - behind all and coloring all is the remote cause; the deep conviction that sacrifice is the sum of worship, the way in which man must approach God, his first lesson in creaturely love." (pg. 47,48)

CONCLUSION:

An attempt has been made to define what worship really is - acknowledgment of the sovereign God whose character is holy, righteous, and loving. Worship is an attitude of life which should influence man's every action and decision. Worship is a conscious engagement in praise, prayer, and meditation within the corporate body of believers. Through one's own personal discipline, he learns progressively and increasingly how to worship. The Church is a God-instituted organization for the purpose of enabling man corporately and individually

to come into contact with the Divine Reality. The Church has resorted to certain aids to enable one to better realize that Divine Reality. Ritual, Symbol and Sacrament are aids to enable man to better worship, and to lead him to the culminating act of all worship, which is Sacrifice or self-surrender to God. All worship should lead one to a sense of self-abandonment and overwhelming adoration of God.

The song writer caught the true spirit of sacrifice when he wrote:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love is so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all.

MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

Meaningful Worship

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Give evidence that documents the truth of the following statement: "Every man has an innate capacity and need for worshipping something other than himself."
2. Does Scripture teach that 'polytheism' is a corruption of monotheism? (Note Romans 1:21-23)
3. Is there evidence from Scripture that what God one time overlooked, in terms of man's worship practices, He now reacts to with greater severity? (Note Acts 17:30)
4. What are some ways in which God's House can be profaned? (John 2:12-6: Luke 19:45,46; James 2:3,4)
5. According to Habakkuk 2:20, with what attitude should believers enter the sanctuary of the Lord?
6. Why is the 'habit' of regular church attendance so important in the development of one's spiritual life?
7. Suggest specific 'aids' that one can use to help him better to meditate on the Lord, prior to the beginning of a public worship service.
8. What activities should one involve himself in, as he seeks wholeheartedly to participate in public worship services?
9. Define and outline the purpose of Ritual within a public worship service. When does 'Ritual' become a hindrance rather than a help in worship services?
10. What is the significance of each of the following 'Symbols', as they are used within the local church? - (a) Cross, (b) Steeple, (c) Pulpit in the middle of the platform, (d) Sacrament Table on the level of the congregation, (e) Sign of the Cross, (f) Kiss of Peace, (g) Prostration. What results when Symbols are misused within a Church?

11. If a sacrament is "a representative deed which conveys spiritual meaning", what specific spiritual meaning is conveyed when the following are used? - (a) Water, (b) Oil, (c) Laying on of hands, (d) Use of bread and grape juice.

12. Considering the nature of man and the holiness of God, why is the following statement a declaration of sober truth? - "The all-encompassing and culminating act of worship is sacrifice"?

CHAPTER 14

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

THE CALL TO TRUE WORSHIP!

MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH THE CALL TO TRUE WORSHIP!

OUTLINE

SUBJECT: The Call To True Worship!

SCRIPTURE: John 2:12-16

INTRODUCTION: What made Jesus so angry on that day, during the Jewish Passover celebration? Jesus was angry because the Jewish leaders were making it difficult, if not impossible, for the common Jewish worshipers to worship God truly and sincerely. In other words, the actions and example of the religious leaders resulted in hindering the people's communion with God in prayer.

PROPOSITION: In Jesus' dramatic act of cleansing the temple, Jesus teaches us some important lessons regarding the nature of true worship. (1) True worship consists of reverence for God, not exploitation or discrimination of men. (2) True worship consists of reality in person communion, not irrelevance in meaningless ritualism. (3) True worship consists in renewal through prayer, not confusion through distraction.

I. REVERENCE FOR GOD (Not Exploitation or Discrimination of Men)

- A. There Is Religious Exploitation.
- B. There Is Economic Exploitation
- C. There Is Social Discrimination
- D. There Is Racial Discrimination.
- E. There Is Doctrinal Discrimination.

II. REALITY IN WORSHIP (Not Irrelevance in Ritualism)

III. RENEWAL THROUGH PRAYER (Not Confusion Through Distraction)

CONCLUSION: What is true worship? It includes reverence for God, made possible in the atmosphere of love and acceptance. The unity of the faith in the bond of peace must be felt by all - for this is the atmosphere in a church service which is conducive for true reverence and worship.

Reality in worship means that all irrelevant ritualism must be eliminated. Notes Barclay, "A liturgy is a means of worshiping God; but an elaborate liturgy can become an end in itself, so that the means and the method of worship end by becoming more important than the worship itself."

Real worship means renewal through prayer, not confusion through distraction. It is still true that God's House is not a house of merchandise but a 'house of prayer'. Therefore, quietness, meditation and prayer should still be main ingredients of worship.

The call to worship comes to us yet. Will we respond to that call?

MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH THE CALL TO TRUE WORSHIP!

SUBJECT: The Call To True Worship!

SCRIPTURE: John 2:12-16

INTRODUCTION: How do you react to this picture of Jesus which we have in John 2:12-16? Does it come to you as a shock that Jesus, the sinless Son of God, became so angry that He made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle, and that He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables?

What made Jesus so angry on that day, during the Jewish Passover celebration? Jesus was angry because the Jewish leaders were making it difficult, if not impossible, for the common Jewish worshipers to worship God truly and sincerely. In other words, the actions and example of the religious leaders resulted in hindering the people's communion with God in prayer. In Jesus' dramatic act of cleansing the Temple, Jesus teaches us some important lessons regarding the nature of true worship. (1) True worship consists of reverence for God, not exploitation or discrimination of men? (2) True worship consists of reality in personal communion, not irrelevance in meaningless ritualism. {3} True worship consists in renewal through prayer, not confusion through distraction.

I. REVERENCE FOR GOD (Not Exploitation or Discrimination of Men)

“The Passover was the greatest of all the Jewish feasts. The law laid it down that every adult male Jew who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem was bound to attend it. But it was not only the Jews in Palestine who came to the Passover. By this time Jews were scattered all over the world, but they never forgot their ancestral faith and their ancestral land; and it was the dream and aim of every Jew, no matter in what land he stayed, to celebrate at least one Passover in Jerusalem. Astonishing as it may sound, it is likely that as many as two and a quarter million Jews sometimes assembled in the Holy City to keep the Passover.

“There was a tax that every Jew over nineteen years of age must pay. That was the Temple tax. It was necessary that all should pay that tax so that the Temple sacrifices and the Temple ritual might be carried out day by day.....What enraged Jesus was that pilgrims to the Passover who could ill afford it, were being fleeced at an exorbitant rate by the money-changers. It was a rampant and shameless social injustice - and what was worse, it was being done in the name of religion.

“Besides the money-changers there were also the sellers of oxen and sheep and doves. Frequently a visit to the Temple meant a sacrifice. Many a pilgrim would wish to make thank-offering for a favorable journey to the Holy City; and most acts and events in life had their appropriate sacrifice. It might therefore seem to be a natural and helpful thing that the victims for the sacrifices could be bought in the Temple court. It might well have been so. But the law was that any animal offered in sacrifice must be perfect and unblemished. The Temple authorities had appointed

inspectors to examine the victims which were to be offered. The fee for inspection was 1p. If a worshiper bought a victim outside the Temple, it was to all intents and purposes certain that it would be rejected after examination. Again that might not have mattered much, but a pair of doves could cost as little as 4p outside the Temple, and as much as 75p inside. Here again was bare-faced extortion at the expense of the poor and humble pilgrims, who were practically blackmailed into buying their victims from the Temple booths if they wished to sacrifice at all - onces more a glaring social injustice aggravated by the fact that it was perpetrated in the name of pure religion." (Barclay's John pg. 109-111)

Worship means to value highly the worth of God, i.e., to appreciate something of the greatness and the majesty of God. That is why we come to church services - to grow in our appreciation of God's greatness and to grow in our love for God. That is why the many Jewish pilgrims had come to the Jerusalem Temple on that Passover Day - to worship God, to reverence the Holy One! However, the Jewish leaders did not come for that noble purpose. They had ulterior motives. Behind the mask of pure religion, their intention was evil and their motive was ulterior. They came to the Temple to exploit the people economically. They intended to line their own pockets with money. Said Jesus to them, as He drove them and the livestock out, "*Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!*" John 2:16

The church and its leaders today must be facilitators of true worship, not destroyers of true worship. The church and its leaders must always serve the people's needs, never exploit the people to their own selfish advantage!

Jesus' action of cleansing the Temple is not only a motivation for true worship, but it is, at the same time, a warning against exploitation of people who come to the Temple or Church to worship. In considering this warning of Jesus, let us consider some of the ways that churches and church leaders can still today exploit people or show discrimination. In looking at the possible types of exploitation or discrimination, let us be positively motivated to be a church which encourages true worship, to be a church where people are helped to reverence God in true worship.

A. There is religious exploitation. All of the cults today are guilty of this. By using 'fear tactics', 'pressure tactics', cunning and craftiness, and even mass 'brain washing', cultic leaders are able to build a large gathering of followers. Some religious leaders, like Jim Jones, are fanatical, overpowering personalities who use a variety of power tactics (including fear and suspicion, pressure and brainwashing) to get a following. The Moonies, as well as many other cults today, are Master Deceivers. People in these cultic groups are not taught to reverence the God of love and mercy as shown in the person of Jesus, but they are instead pressured to follow a certain leader and to adopt a certain lifestyle which brings glory to that leader, and wealth to the movement which that leader controls.

A preacher or a religious movement must never be guilty of exploitation. There must be no 'playing upon' people's emotions or weaknesses for selfish advantage, and no attempt by the leader to get a personal following. Paul, the great apostle, wrote to the Corinthians:

“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.” (I Corinthians 2:4,5) Paul further says in II Corinthians 4:2 (in the Living Bible): “We do not try to trick people into believing - we are not interested in fooling anyone. We never try to get anyone to believe that the Bible teaches what it doesn’t. All such shameful methods we forego. We stand in the presence of God as we speak and so we tell the truth, as all who know us will agree.”

B. There is economic exploitation. As we just mentioned, there are religious leaders today - false prophets and teachers - who are out to exploit people economically. They are out to collect ‘tithes and offerings’, not for the Lord’s work (as the Scriptures command), but for themselves and their own selfish and indulgent causes. Even Paul, the great apostle was accused of exploitation, and therefore he had to defend himself. Wrote Paul to the Corinthian church, *“Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent you? I urged Titus to go to you and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he? Did we not act in the same spirit and follow the same course?” (II Corinthians 12:17-18, NIV)*

The verses just before these describe the accusation which the Corinthians were throwing in the face of Paul *“Now I am coming to you again, the third time; and it is still not going to cost you anything, for I don’t want your money. I want you! And anyway, you are my children, and little children don’t pay for their father’s and mother’s food - it’s the other way around; parents supply food for their children. I am glad to give you myself and all I have for your spiritual good, even though it seems that the more I love you, the less you love me. Some of you are saying, ‘it’s true that his visits didn’t seem to cost us anything, but he is a sneaky fellow, that Paul, and he fooled us. As sure as anything he must have made money from us some way.’” (II Corinthians 12:14-16, Living Bible)*

Paul was innocent of economic exploitation!

Besides certain types of exploitation, there are types of discrimination which also can destroy worship in the temple or church.

C. There is social discrimination. *My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you?” Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?” Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? James 2:1-7* William Booth, founder of the ‘Salvation Army’ was a minister in the

Methodist Church in London for a few years, but he resigned from this church because he found himself attracted to the outcasts and poor people whom the Methodist leaders did not want Booth to include in his circuit. "He became a free-lance evangelist and in 1865 began meeting in London's East End, where extreme poverty and hardship were the rule for most people." (Dictionary of The Christian Church, pg. 145) Thus began what became known as "The Salvation Army". Booth could not discriminate against the poor and the outcasts.

D. There is racial discrimination. There are still some churches in the United States where a black man would not feel welcome to attend.

A church must always be 'free' from social, class, and racial discriminations. May everyone, regardless of color or nationality, feel welcome in our churches!

E. There is doctrinal discrimination. There must be doctrinal integrity and commitment to the basic orthodox beliefs of Christianity, but there must also be freedom of thought and tolerance towards those who believe differently. Total commitment by all to the fundamentals - the basic Christian doctrines - with freedom granted to all in the interpretation of secondary doctrines of Scripture. All who believe that 'Jesus is Lord' should be welcomed to our church, regardless of difference of interpretation in some of the specific and less important doctrinal issues.

Worship is hindered if people are given the impression that they all must believe in the exact way. This does not mean that we are to be 'hazy' in our teaching. We are to have deep convictions and doctrinal distinctives, but we are also to be loving and open and accepting towards those who differ from us in doctrinal interpretation.

Tolerance, of course, can be exercised to excess, and compromise of basic Christian doctrines is then the tragic consequence. However, there is just as much danger today of Christians becoming intolerant towards each other, as regards doctrinal beliefs and convictions, as there is in Christians lowering their standards and compromising basic Christian beliefs.

Jesus' tolerance is demonstrated in His treatment and attitudes towards others who were not a part of His immediate and close company of disciples. "*His disciple John came to him and said, 'Master, we saw someone using your name to cast out demons. And we told him not to. After all, he isn't in our group.'* But Jesus said, '*You shouldn't have done that! For anyone who is not against you is for you*.'" {Luke 9: 49-50, Living Bible}

Notes William Barclay, regarding this portion of Scripture: "There is no passage in which Jesus so directly teaches the duty of tolerance as in this. In many ways tolerance is a lost virtue, and, where it does exist, it exists for the wrong cause. Of all the greatest religious leaders none was such a pattern of tolerance as John Wesley. 'I have no more right,' he said, 'to object to a man for holding a different opinion from mine than I have to differ with a man

because he wears a wig and I wear my own hair; but if he takes his wig off and shakes the powder in my face, I shall consider it my duty to get quit of him as soon as possible.’ ‘The thing,’ he said, ‘which I resolved to use every possible method of preventing was a narrowness of spirit, a party zeal, a being straightened in our own bowels - that miserable bigotry which makes many so unready to believe that there is any work of God but among themselves.’ We think,’ he said, ‘and let think.’ When his nephew Samuel, the son of his brother Charles, entered the Roman Catholic Church, John Wesley wrote to him, ‘Whether in this Church or that I care not. You may be saved in either or damned in either; but I fear you are not born again?’ The conviction that our beliefs and our methods alone are correct has been the cause of more tragedy and distress in the Church than almost any other thing. There are many ways to God. God has His own secret stairway into every heart. God fulfils Himself in many ways; and no man and no Church has a monopoly of the truth of God.” (The Daily Study Bible; Gospel of Luke; by William Barclay; pgs. 131, 132)

II. REALITY IN WORSHIP (Not Irrelevance in Ritualism)

Ritualism without reality was one of the problems which incited the wrath of Jesus. Ritualism is making the aids to worship more important than what the aids to worship were intended to be, until the aids to worship become the substitute for worshipping God Himself.

This happened at this Passover celebration. The animal sacrifices became more important than the worship of God Himself. Proper procedure in offering sacrifices replaced personal worship of God Himself.

The prophets had long shown the irrelevance of animal sacrifices. *“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? Says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats,....Bring no more vain offerings.”* (Isaiah 1: 11-17) *“For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.”* (Jeremiah 7:22). *“With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the Lord, but they will not find him.”* (Hosea 5:6). *“They love sacrifice; they sacrifice flesh and eat it; but the Lord has no delight in them.”* (Hosea 8:13) *“For thou hast no delight in sacrifice; were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased.”* (Psalms 51:16)

Jesus taught that true worship is a thing of the heart, not a performance of certain rituals on certain days in certain places. To the Samaritan woman who wanted to debate with Jesus regarding the proper place to worship (John 4), Jesus replied, *“The time is coming when we will no longer be concerned about whether to worship the Father here or in Jerusalem. For it’s not where we worship that counts, but how we worship - is our worship spiritual and real? Do we have the Holy Spirit’s help? For God is Spirit, and we must have his help to worship as we should. The Father wants this kind of worship from us.”* (John 4: 21-23, Living Bible)

“Is our worship spiritual and real?” That is the important question to answer. Those in the

Temple that day had substituted the real worship of God with the rituals and ceremonies and formalities of animal sacrifices. These were not necessary to worship God. It is true that there was a time in Jewish history (when the Mosaic Law was given) when sacrificing animals in prescribed ways (as outlined in the book of Leviticus) was vitally important, but now Jesus is declaring that these animal sacrifices are superfluous and irrelevant. The elaborate system of sacrificing animals had obscured the true worship of God from the heart. Form and formality had replaced the warm and spontaneous and personal worship of the heart. An elaborate ritual or a lavish sacrifice can never take the place of the humble and personal worship of the heart. Even the Old Testament prophets taught this. Wrote Micah: *“How can we make up to you for what we’ve done?” you ask. ‘Shall we bow before the Lord with offerings of yearling calves?’ Oh, no! For if you offered him thousands of rams and ten thousands of rivers of olive oil - would that please him? Would he be satisfied? If you sacrificed your oldest child, would that make him glad? Then would he forgive your sins? Of course not! No, he had told you what he wants, and this is all it is: to be fair and just and merciful, and to walk humbly with your God.”* (Micah 6:6-8, Living Bible)

True worship is a thing of the heart, not confined to any one time or place or procedure, and true worship of God always manifests itself in just and right relationships with one’s fellowman. To the religiously-oriented, self-righteous Pharisees, Jesus said, *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”* (Matthew 23:23)

Notes Barclay: *“We are not totally free from this very tendency today. True, we will not offer animal sacrifice to God. But we can identify his service with the installation of stained glass windows, the obtaining of a more sonorous organ, the lavishing of money on stone and lime and carved wood, while real worship is far away. It is not that these things are to be condemned - far from it. They are often - thank God - the lovely offerings of the loving heart. When they are aids to true devotion they are God-blessed things; but when they are substitutes for true devotion they make God sick at heart.”* (John, pg. 113)

True worship is not involved with certain rituals or forms or ceremonies or procedures. True worship is not man-centered, with a congregation’s attention simply fixed on a singer singing or a musician playing, or a preacher speaking. True worship is not preoccupation with the size or beauty of a building. True worship is first a private attitude of the heart, a personal communion with God - with or without a lot of outward and visible emotion.

True worship is a way of honoring God. It means ascribing to God that honor which is appropriate to His character.

“Honor and majesty are before him, strength and beauty within his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength! Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name.” (Psalms 96:6-8)

Worship means gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of his worth.

True worship is an activity of the heart - a heartfelt response to God's love. Said Jesus, "*This people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me.*" (Matthew 15:8)

Said Jesus, "*True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him.*" (John 4:23)

Worship from the heart means having a sense of awe and reverence as we are silent before God: "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him." (Habakkuk 2:20)

Worship from the heart involves having a broken and a contrite spirit (Psalms 51:17), and worship means having a longing for God. "*As a heart longs for the flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*" (Psalms 42:1-2)

Worship means having gratitude for God's goodness, and it means having hope for God's future provisions. It means centering our affections on the true and living God Himself.

Someone once said, "The real duty of worship is not the outward duty to say or do the liturgy. It is the inward duty, the command -- '*Delight yourself in the Lord!*'" (Psalms 37:4). "*Be glad in the Lord and rejoice!*" (Psalms 32:11).

However, while true worship begins in the heart of the individual worshiper, it does not end there. Individual worship leads to corporate worship. Notes Trueblood, "Obviously it is possible for individuals to pray alone, and we are commanded by Christ to do so (Matthew 6:6), but the experience of being together is wholly a different one, and equally necessary....it is necessary for people to meet together....If we are angels, this might not be necessary, but we do not happen to be angels. Consequently, we need the strength that comes from one another, as God reaches the entire company. The finest figure of speech which we ever employ to explain the need we have of one another is that of the burning logs or coals. When people gather for genuine worship, said Penington, 'They are like a heap of fresh and burning coals warming one another, as a great strength, freshness and vigor of life flows into all.' As almost anyone knows, it is hard to have much of a fire with only one log, whereas several rather poor logs may make quite a conflagration." (The People Called Quakers; pg. 91, 92) Hebrews 10:25 says, "*Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.*" (Living Bible)

III. RENEWAL THROUGH PRAYER (Not Confusion through Distraction)

"The Temple authorities and the Jewish traders were making the Court of the Gentiles into an uproar and a rabble where no man could pray. The lowing of the oxen, the bleating of the sheep, the cooing of the doves, the shouts of the hucksters, the rattle of the coins, the voices raised in bargaining disputes - all these combined to make the Court of the Gentiles a place where no man

could worship. The conduct in the Temple court shut out the seeking Gentile from the presence of God. It may well be that this was most in Jesus's mind; it may well be that Mark alone preserved the little phrase which means so much. Jesus was moved to the depths of his heart because seeking men were being shut out from the presence of God." (John; commentary by Barclay, 113, 114). (Mark 11:17 says, "*My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.*")

Asks Barclay, "Is there anything in our church life - a snobbishness, an exclusiveness, a coldness, a lack of welcome, a tendency to make the congregation into a closed club, an arrogance, a fastidiousness - which keeps the seeking stranger out? Let us remember the wrath of Jesus against those who make it difficult and even impossible for the seeking stranger to make contact with God." (John; pg. 114)

What can we do to help make the church a 'House of Prayer'? How can we help create an atmosphere which is conducive for Worship, an inviting place for all, including the newcomer or stranger? Here are a few very practical suggestions:

1. Arrange to have infants cared for in the Church Nursery, and small children cared for in the planned 'Children's Church.'
2. Show friendliness to all, not only during 'moments of friendship', but before and after services.
3. Welcome the guest and sit near the newcomer to help him feel comfortable and 'at ease'.
4. Come early to services to meditate, pray and read Scripture (at least 5 minutes early, and quiet your heart as the organ music is played).
5. Maintain a receptive and teachable mood throughout the service. An expectant and worshipful mood is the mood of faith when God can minister to human needs.
6. Sit in a place in the sanctuary that is most conducive for worship, and on a Sunday morning, sit 'as a family' if possible.
7. Participate in every part of worship - the singing, the public prayers, the silent meditations, the giving of tithes and offerings, the careful listening to the message.
8. Pray for those who lead the services and pray for those worshipers nearest you.

That which every minister likes most to hear when they visit in the home of those who have recently attended their services is something like this: "I sensed that God was in your Church. I felt a spirit of warm love from all the people in the congregation!"

That which we must covet most and that which we must work most for is a spirit of unity and love and prayer in every one of our services. How can this be accomplished? First, throughout the entire week, be in prayer. Pray alone each day during your designated Quiet Time. Pray with your family during designated Family Worship. Pray throughout the day, silently in your heart, as you carry on your work. This is called Mental Praying. Be an active participant in a Christian Growth Group and learn to enjoy small group praying. Then, come a little early to the sanctuary (about 4 minutes early) and spend some time in Silent Prayer before the service begins. Then, throughout the Public Worship service, breath a few prayers for those around you.

Your prayers create the spiritual atmosphere for a service. Listen and participate, but as you do, be praying also. Ask God to make you and those around you receptive to new truths, and pray that sinners will be convicted and saved, and believers edified and strengthened.

CONCLUSION: What is true worship? It includes reverence for God, made possible in the atmosphere of love and acceptance. We have noted, as in the case of the money-changers in the Temple, that exploitation and discrimination are always enemies of true worship. There must be no religious or economic exploitation, and there must be no social or racial or doctrinal discrimination! The unity of the faith in the bond of peace must be felt by all - for this is the atmosphere in a church service which is conducive for true reverence and worship.

Second, reality in worship means that all irrelevant ritualism must be eliminated. We are not saying that all orders of service or rituals or liturgical ceremonies should be eliminated, but we are saying that anything that hinders in the worship of God should be eliminated. In the cleansing of the Temple, Jesus was not only angry because of gross exploitation in the name of religion, but Jesus was angry because the ritual of animal sacrifice had become the substitute for personal worship of God. The aids to worship had taken the place of God. Having an unblemished animal to sacrifice had become more important than having a pure heart in worship. "A liturgy is a means of worshipping God; but an elaborate liturgy can become an end in itself, so that the means and the method of worship end by becoming more important than the worship itself." (The Ten Commandments For Today, pg. 21, Barclay)

Third, real worship means renewal through prayer, not confusion through distraction. It is still true that God's House is not a house of merchandise but a 'house of prayer'. Therefore, quietness, meditation and prayer should still be main ingredients of worship.

The call to worship comes to us yet. Will we respond to that call? First, let us learn to reverence the Lord. Second, let us seek reality in worship, enjoying meaningful ritual and order, but cleansed from needless and irrelevant ritual. Let us never allow the aids to worship to take the place of worshipping God Himself. Third, let us do away with needless confusion and distractions in our worship, and learn regularly to experience renewal through prayer, for it is still true that God's House is 'A House of Prayer'. Let's accept God's call to true worship!

**MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH
THE CALL TO TRUE WORSHIP!**

Q U E S T I O N S

1. What is your initial reaction to the picture of Jesus, as he responds with strong anger to the money changers, as recorded in John 2:12-16?
2. Explain the type of exploitation which was taking place in the temple courts, that incited Jesus' great anger.
3. Share illustrations of the following types of exploitation which exist in our contemporary society, all of which 'victimize' people in the name of religion:
 - (a) Religious exploitation
 - (b) Economic exploitation
 - (c) Social exploitation
 - (d) Racial exploitation
 - (e) Doctrinal exploitation
4. What did the Old Testament prophets declare regarding the irrelevance of mere ritualism which became a substitute for genuine worship? (Note Isaiah 1:11-17; Jeremiah 7:22; Hosea 5:6; Hosea 8:13; Psalms 51:16)
5. What is the essence of true worship, according to John 4:21-23?
6. How does true worship manifest itself, according to Matthew 23:23?
7. What substitutes do some people today use to replace true devotion to God?
8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "While true worship begins in the heart of the individual worshiper, it does not end there. Individual worship leads to corporate worship. We need the strength that comes from one another, as God reaches the entire company."
9. What can we, as members of the local church, do to help make the church a 'House of Prayer'? How can we help create an atmosphere which is conducive for worship, an inviting place for all, including the newcomer or stranger?
10. What can you personally do to help create a spirit of unity and love within the public worship services of your local church?

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

CHAPTER 15

PEOPLE WITH A VISION

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

SUBJECT: 'PEOPLE WITH A VISION'

SCRIPTURE: John 4:34-35

INTRODUCTION:

A congregation is only as great as its vision is Biblical! A worldly vision makes for a worldly church! A clear Biblical vision makes for a truly spiritual church! Tell me a church's vision, and I will tell you a lot about the church. Great churches are filled with people who have great vision.

PROPOSITION:

A great church is a church which corporately holds and maintains a God-centered and Biblically-based Vision.

I. **NEED FOR A VISION**

- A. Without A Vision 'the people perish'
- B. Without A Vision the Church dies.
- C. Without A Vision the Kingdom of God Suffers.
- D. Without A Vision the People of God Grow Fainthearted and Despair.

II. **MEANS OF A VISION**

- A. The Vision of God
- B. The Vision of Self
- C. The Vision for Society

III. **FULFILLMENT THROUGH A VISION**

- A. Fulfillment of God's Will Through a Vision.
- B. Fulfillment of Human Aspirations through a Vision.
- C. Fulfillment of the Church's Mission through a Vision.

Conclusion:

Look at God and His holiness. Then see yourself with your need for inner cleansing. Then lift up your eyes, as a cleansed 'vessel' of the Lord, and ask God, like Isaiah, to send you into the world of needy people. God has a wonderful place for you in His master plan for world redemption! A clear vision is the basis for a compelling call! Say, "Here am I, Lord, send me!"

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

SUBJECT: 'PEOPLE WITH A VISION'

SCRIPTURE: John 4:34-35

INTRODUCTION:

“A healthy church lives out of a healthy dream. For example, the SIZE of a dream is crucial. What we expect from life is usually what we get. In ‘Winnie-the-Pooh,’ Pooh and Piglet take an evening walk. For a long time they walk in companionable silence. Finally, Piglet breaks the silence and asks, ‘When you wake up in the morning, Pooh, what’s the first thing you say to yourself?’ ‘What’s for breakfast?’ answers Pooh. ‘And what do you say, Piglet?’ ‘I say, I wonder what exciting thing is going to happen today?’

“Small expectations yield meager results. Unhealthy visions produce sick congregations. A church can choose a ‘breakfast dream’ or an ‘excitement dream’.” (To Dream Again; pg. 12; Robert Dale)

A congregation is only as great as its vision is Biblical! A worldly vision makes for a worldly church! A clear Biblical vision makes for a truly spiritual church! Tell me a church’s vision, and I will tell you a lot about the church. Great churches are filled with people who have great visions.

Proposition:

A great church is a church which corporately holds and maintains a God-centered and Biblically-based Vision.

Let us first note the need for a vision, secondly, the means of a vision, and thirdly, the fulfillment that comes through a vision.

I. NEED FOR A VISION

Why is it so important for an individual or a church to have a vision?

A. Without a Vision ‘the people perish’. But with a vision, the people are saved.

“Rescue the perishing, Care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o’er the erring one, Lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.

Rescue the perishing, Care for the dying;
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.

How can the lost be snatched from sin and the grave, if there is no one to extend a hand of compassion to the sinner? If there is no vision for the lost, there surely will be no action of compassionate initiative to 'lift up the fallen'. It is the vision of lost souls going to hell that motivates believers to pray, to fast, to 'reach out in love', and to share the gospel message in personal witnessing. Without a vision for the lost, the lost will perish!

A vision for the lost around us is what constitutes a call from God to go and reach the lost for Christ. "Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how shall they ask him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them unless someone sends him? That is what the Scriptures are talking about when they say, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace with God and bring glad tidings of good things.' In other words, how welcome are those who come preaching God's Good News!" (Romans 10:14-15; Living Bible)

Without a vision, the lost around us will die in their sins! Why? For the lost will go unwarned of their dangerous spiritual condition, and they will fail to repent of their sins, and without repentance there is no salvation. Hear what the Lord said to the prophet Ezekiel: "*Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked man, 'you will surely die', and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood.*" (Ezekiel 3:17-18)

Without a vision, backslidden 'Christians' may continue their spiritual drift and eventually be lost eternally. Christians with vision will 'go after' the backslidden persons, seeking to bring them back to repentance and to the security of God's family. Wrote James, "*Dear brothers, if anyone slipped away from God and no longer trusts the Lord, and someone helps him understand the Truth again, that person who brings him back to God will have saved a wandering soul from death, bringing about the forgiveness of his many sins.*" (James 5:19-20; Living Bible)

B. Without a Vision the Church Dies. (But with a vision, the church grows!)

Notes Robert Dale, "Churches must constantly open themselves to revitalization. They must dream again! To stand still is to die...A healthy church is proactive and takes initiative for its ministry, builds on and is renewed by its dream, and ministers to others. On the other hand, an unhealthy church is reactive and surrenders its initiative for ministry, declines and doubts itself to death, and must itself be ministered to." (To Dream Again; pg. 16)

Someone said that the last seven words of a dying church are: “We Never Did It That Way Before”. That is, a dying church is static and rigid and inflexible and unwilling to change or to risks.

Donald Bastien notes three types of church leaders. There are risk-takers, caretakers and under-takers.

“The risk-taker is not merely a gambler, He carefully assesses a situation, seeing the new possibilities within it. In a wholesome way, he is visionary. His risks are calculated, and he derives blessing from helping his followers to see and share the risks - for Christ’s sake. The risks may have to do with new ministries, new approaches to evangelism, the planting of new churches, outreach into new communities, new ways of experiencing Christian fellowship, or new ways to make worship more meaningful to Gods people. You’ll see all these concerns reflected in the vibrant church of New Testament times.

“The risk-taker knows better than to lead his followers in an incessant confrontation with risk. Christians, too, are creatures of habit, and to have old habits constantly assailed is unsettling. In any healthy church there is a balance between continuity and innovation. Wise risk-takers see this. Theirs is the artistic task of appreciating all that is traditional while building on that foundation for growth.

“The caretaker-type leader is more interested in maintenance. He thinks in terms of leaving things no worse than he found them. He is the faithful sort but cautious and unvisionary. Caretaker leaders are not nearly so stimulating to be around as risk-takers.

“The problem so far as the church is concerned is that caretaker leaders too often pave the way for the undertaker. He, too, is a kind of leader, presiding with dignity over the affairs of death. Local churches too long on a caretaker regime will eventually be ready for the ministrations of the undertaker.” (Belonging: Adventures in Church Membership; Bastian; pg. 203)

Someone said, “If you can dream it, you can do it.” “Our dreams are the first step in defining effective ministry. In the church, visionaries are gifted with holy imagination and act on their dreams.” (To Dram Again; pg.16)

“How do visionaries act”? “Visionaries are nicked by thorns but still smell roses. Visionaries get sand in their shoes but still hear the ocean’s surf. Visionaries are soaked by rain but still anticipate rainbows. Visionaries see ordinary believers like you and me but still sense God’s kingdom arriving in and through us.” (Ibid; pg. 14)

One great visionary was Walter Reuther. “He was founder of the United Auto Workers and served as that union’s president from 1946 until 1970. A journalist once described Reuther as the only man he had ever met who could reminisce about the future.

That's also an apt description of a dreamer.” (Ibid; pg. 14)

Can you “see”, in the future, hundreds of new people discovering your church and making it their ‘Church Home’?

Can you ‘see’ your church growing from 20 to 40 to 50?

“Our dreams give us a bull’s-eye to shoot for. They are targets for service. A vision focuses our energies in a single direction.”

One great scientist was described as a “one-dream-man”. Are you a single-minded person - a person who wants nothing but the kingdom of God to grow? The Bible emphasizes the importance of being single-minded, for a ‘double-minded man’ is “unstable in all his ways”.

C. Without A Vision The Kingdom of God Suffers. (But with a vision, the kingdom expands!)

Countless times throughout history, the church has held back in its witness when it should have been forward-moving and aggressive in outreach to the lost, and redemptive in loving concern for the pagans. It is reported, for instance, that Ghandi one time was very open to Christianity during a time when, as a young man, he visited an evangelical church in South Africa. The congregation where he was attending was so lacking in zeal and compassion and personal concern for him, that he decided not to become a Christian. If only that congregation would have been full of vision and love, Ghandi would doubtless have become a believer, and perhaps millions in India today would be Christian because of Ghandi’s tremendous influence in that large country. The entire kingdom of God suffered because Ghandi failed to become a Christian, due to a congregation’s lack of vision!

“Nicolo and Maffeo Polo were at the court of Kublai Khan, whose empire stretched from the Urals to the Himalayas, and from the Danube to the China Sea, and Kublai Khan said, ‘I want you to go back to the Pope and I want you to ask him to send a hundred missionaries, and I’ll become a Christian, and you will have more Christians in the east here than ever in the west’. So they went back and they asked the Pope, but the Pope was too busy playing politics. For eighteen years nothing was done and then a few missionaries were sent, just a handful; too late and too few. Now think what might have happened if that chance had been taken. China would have been Christian; Japan would have been Christian; the Middle East would have been Christian; Turkey would have been Christian, even India would have been Christian - the face of the world would have been changed. But the Church refused the chance.” (The Life of Jesus For Everyone; by William Barclay; pg. 95)

Nietzsche (whose philosophy Hitler believed in and acted on) one time felt the appeal of the Christian faith, and “set himself to study it in the lives of some Christians he knew. He was acutely disappointed in their joyless natures and finally said, ‘These Christians will have

to look more redeemed before I can believe in them.””

We all influence others for or against Christianity, according to the degree of genuine joy we manifest in our lives. Visionless and joyless Christians can hinder the growth of the Kingdom of God.

But when Christians have a vision, the church grows and thrives.

David Livingstone, a Scot of lowly birth who was raised by humble but godly parents went to work in a cotton mill at the age of ten, but, because of his love for learning, he went to night school and read such books as he could get hold of. After a deep religious experience, he decided to become a medical missionary and received training in medicine and theology. Livingstone was challenged by a missionary to Africa, Robert Moffat, who said that from where he lived on any clear morning the smoke of a thousand villages could be seen where the name of Christ had never been heard. Livingstone went to Africa to evangelize in hundreds of native villages, some of which had never before been seen by a European. This great frontier missionary felt the heartbeat of Christ's love, and felt compelled to go and to tell of God's love.

D. Without a Vision the People of God Grow Fainthearted and Despair. (But with a vision, the people of God are renewed and invigorated and become zealous of good works).

Amidst the changes and the chances of life, during times when it seems that our efforts are all in vain, what keeps a Christian on course? “Our dreams provide us with stability and continuity over our life-times. They are compasses to hold us on course. A vision gives us steadfastness in life and work. The steering current of the kingdom of God guides us in ministry. This vision buoys us up; it propels us forward.” (Keeping The Dream Alive, pg. 19,23 By Robert Dale)

A vision of eventual spiritual harvest keeps hope alive in the hearts of hard-working believers:

“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
“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Galatians 8:9.

What kept Abraham walking with God during difficult times? *“He (Abraham) lived in tents like a mere visitor, as did Isaac and Jacob, to whom God gave the same promise. Abraham did this because he was confidently waiting for God to bring him to that strong heavenly city whose designer and builder is God.”* (Hebrews 11:9,10. Living Bible) Having a clear vision of our heavenly home will stabilize us during our storms of life here on this

earth. Knowing that the sufferings on this earth are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall follow in heaven, is what enables saints to endure the trials and tests of life.

Think also of Moses. *“He thought that it was better to suffer for the promised Christ than to own all the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking forward to the great reward that God would give him.”* (Hebrews 11:26) Moses’ vision of God’s promised future rewards gave him courage to suffer greatly for the sake of God’s people.

Because Christ’s vision was focused on the purposes and will of His heavenly Father, He was willing to sacrifice His life for mankind. *“He (Christ) was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterwards; and now he sits in the place of honor by the throne of God.”* (Hebrews 12:2, Living Bible)

Paul endured long battles because he envisioned future rewards.

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

The vision of future joys with Christ in heaven is what gives suffering saints courage to endure persecutions and afflictions here on earth. It is all worthwhile because of the joy that they know will be theirs afterwards! The vision of that future joy makes all the difference. Hold clearly in your mind the vision of future glory with God!

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’” Revelation 21: 1-5.

“I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb

is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.” Revelation 21: 22-27.

“Then the angel showed the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great tree of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.” Revelation 22: 1-5.

II. MEANS OF A VISION

If it is true that without a vision sinners perish, and the Church dies, and the Kingdom of God suffers, and believers despair, then how does one get a clear spiritual vision? What is the method by which one receives a vision that will transform his entire life?

Isaiah 6: 1-9 outlines clearly the means by which one receives a transforming vision.

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; and the whole earth is full of his glory.’ At the sound of their voices the door posts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.’ Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’ He said, ‘Go and tell this people....’” (Isaiah 6:1-9a)

A. The Vision of God

The thing which most stands out about the account of Isaiah's encounter with God, is God's holiness. God's holiness means God's separateness from the common and the finite, and refers to God's glory, brightness, majesty, and mystery. It was God's moral excellence and purity that bowed Isaiah before God in contrition to confess his own moral impurity.

B. The Vision of Self

When Isaiah saw this vision of God's holiness, he cried out, "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." (Isaiah 6:5)

To see God truly is to see one's self realistically. Only as man sees himself against the background of a vision of God's holiness, can he see himself as he was meant to be, and as he is not.

Man was made for God, but has fallen from God. Man is in need of genuine repentance, the same kind of contrition that Isaiah manifested as he saw a true vision of God's purity and holiness. A true vision of God will drive a man to such repentance. However, unless a man first has a vision of God's beauty and perfection (holiness), he will (at best) manifest only a half-hearted repentance.

When Isaiah cried out to God for help, God responded in mercy (verses 6 and 7). The live coal from off the altar symbolizes God's cleansing from sin. God cleanses from the pollution of sin and He also cleanses from the power of sin.

C. The Vision for Society

Against the background of God's purity and holiness, Isaiah not only appeared unclean, but society also appeared unclean. Declared Isaiah, "*I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.*"

In our modern society there is such a light regard for sin. Says Mavis, "Sin, as a matter of fact, seems rather impersonal to many contemporary religious people. George Buttrick tells of overhearing two college girls on the Northwestern University campus discuss one of his messages. 'He kept talking about sin', one of the girls said. 'What did he mean?' The other replied, 'I don't know, but I think that it had something to do with Adam and Eve.'" (Beyond Conformity; pg. 57)

So often in modern society, there is no real repentance of sin. The attitude of man is as follows:

“A Christian is a man who feels
Repentance on a Sunday
For what he did on Saturday
And is going to do on Monday.” (Ibid;pg.58)

Our intellectually sophisticated society feels that the concept of ‘sin’ is antiquated and is therefore no longer a valid concept. There are many who align themselves with modern psychology which teaches that man’s behavior is completely the result of heredity and environment. “Many sociological theories suggest that a man is not really responsible for the set of his soul, that unfavorable social influences and pressures are responsible. Man is molded necessarily by his contacts.” (The Psychology of Christian Experienced, pg. 112) “Some theologians 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.” (Ibid; pg. 98)

The vision of God is transforming. Seeing a true vision of God’s holiness, revealed in God’s Word and through a personal encounter with God, enables a person to have a realistic vision of himself. Like Isaiah of old, every person who sees God must cry out for cleansing. God’s cleansing of a man prepares him for his commission to society. Society needs cleansed men who can apply the salve of God’s healing to the sores of society’s sins. The vision of God is transforming because it leads to the vision of self and in turn to the vision of society.

III. FULFILLMENT THROUGH A VISION

When Isaiah was purged of sin, he had a new concern for the sin-sick society about him. God’s cleansing of Isaiah prepared Isaiah for his commission. “*Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people.*” (Isaiah 6:8,9)

A clear vision of God gives us a clear vision of ourselves, driving us to the mercy-seat of God to find forgiveness and cleansing. When we are cleansed, we then are commissioned by God for service. Spiritual visions are meant to lead to practical actions of involvement in society. “Our vision becomes our passion, our magnetic pull, our spiritual and emotional glue, and our ownership of and stake in a cause.” (Keeping The Dream Alive; pg. 12; Robert Dale)

A. Fulfillment of God’s Will Through A Vision

God’s will for Isaiah was fulfilled because Isaiah had a spiritual vision of God.

Do you have a vision - a picture - of God’s will for His world? Do you have a vision -

an understanding - of how you personally fit into God's master plan for His world?

What is God's general will for His world? "God is not willing that any should perish, and he is giving more time for sinners to repent." (2 Peter 3:9, Living Bible) Do you have a vision for the lost ones around you? Do you see people as persons for whom Christ died, as objects of God's special love, and as persons who are redeemable? Jesus saw potential in sinners. He saw a woman who was possessed of demons - Mary Magdalene - and He touched her with His redeeming touch and she became a great and loving saint! One time the great sculptor, Michelangelo, saw a piece of stone and declared, "I see an angel in that rock!" And he carved an angel out of that lifeless rock! God sees an angel in every person - the potential for great sainthood! When believers share God's vision for the lost, believers become God's tools to make sinners into saints!

If you want God's will to be fulfilled in your life, then come before the Lord in humble contrition, be cleansed of any moral defilement (like Isaiah), and then offer yourself for service to the world's hurts. Say humbly, but confidently, "Here am I, Lord, send me!"

The story of God's leadership in the life of V. Raymond Edman illustrates this truth very well. While a missionary to Ecuador, Edman heard the small still voice of God ask him the question, "Are you willing to go anywhere for Me?" After some mediation upon that question, and finally realizing that 'anywhere' could mean somewhere else besides the country of Ecuador which he loved, Edman, quietly and sincerely, answered, "Yes, Lord, anywhere Thou sayest I will go, only that my life may be always a constant pageant of triumph in Thee." Says Edman about his answer to God, "During those sacred moments in the crisis of comradeship I had utterly abandoned myself. Who would not do anything, go anywhere, be anything He decreed, He, the unspeakable precious Savior? Could any place be safer than the center of His will? Did not He assure me by His very presence that His thoughts toward us are good, and not evil, to give us an expected end?" *For I know the plans I have for you' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.....'* (Jeremiah 29:11). Death to my own plans and desires was almost deliriously delightful. Everything was laid at His nail-scarred feet, life or death, health or illness, appreciation by others or misunderstanding, success or failure measured by human standards. Only He Himself mattered." (Crisis Experiences, pg. 12,13) God eventually led Dr. V. Raymond Edman to Wheaton College. He had a wonderful career there as a teacher. Says Edman, "These are some of the consequences of the commission that has come out of the choice to accept this divine comradeship. Many friends God has brought into this adventure of faith, as He has directed - His Majesty Haile Selassie in Ethiopia and Her Excellency Madame Chiang Kai-shek in Free China; Christian businessmen like Robert G. LeTourneau of Texas and Kenneth S. Keyes of Florida; a soldier like General William K. Harrison and a missionary statesman like Cameron Townsend. Fellow pilgrims on the pathway of the just have included students like Ruth and Billy Graham and Ed McCully, Jim Elliot and Nate Saint martyred in Ecuador." (Ibid:17)

B. Fulfillment of Human Aspirations through a Vision

A vision of God, as in the case of Isaiah, gives birth to a desire to be active for God. When God asked the question ‘Who will go for me?’ Isaiah was quick to respond, ‘Here am I, Lord, send me!’ When one is cleansed of his own moral pollution, he does not remain a passive subject, but he becomes an active initiator. The cleansed person becomes the challenged person! He wants to be up and about his Heavenly Father’s business! He is challenged to become involved in God’s vast kingdom work! He wants to ‘roll up his sleeves’ and get to work for God! Clear spiritual visions quicken human aspirations, resulting in practical actions and compassionate involvements!

God created a good world, but not a completed world. He intends for man to become a co-creator with Him to accomplish His redemptive goals. God and man work together to fulfill divine purposes.

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

Everyone longs for fulfillment and for significance. Everyone wants their lives to count! It is a vision of God which gives a vision, not only of ones own unworthiness because of sin, but of human potential because of divinely-wrought cleansing. God cleanses in order to prepare the cleansed ones for powerful ministry in society and for deep fulfillment through that selfless ministry. Fulfillment of human aspirations comes through a vision of the Lord! Without a God-given vision and the willingness to take risks to fulfill that vision, life becomes drab and mundane and meaningless.

Notes Barclay, “There is all the difference in the world between existing and living. To exist is simply to have the lungs breathing and the heart beating; to live is to be alive in a world where everything is worth while, where there is peace in the soul, joy in the heart, and a thrill in every moment....In our day and generation it is not likely to be a question of martyrdom, but it still remains a fact that, if we meet life in the constant search for safety, security, ease and comfort, if every decision is taken from worldly-wise and prudential motives, we are losing all that makes life worth while. Life becomes a soft and flabby thing, when it might have been an adventure. Life becomes a selfish thing, when it might have been radiant with service. Life becomes an earthbound thing when it might have been reaching for the stars. Someone once wrote a bitter epitaph on a man: ‘He was born a man and died a grocer.’ Any trade or profession might be substituted for the word grocer. The man who plays for safety ceases to be a man, for man is made in the image of God.” (Barclay’s Matthew; vol. 21, pg. 152-153)

C. Fulfillment of the Church’s Mission through a Vision

A church is only as great as its vision is Biblical and its diligence in fulfilling the vision

is wholehearted! As a church dreams, so it will be come! “A corporate vision gives a congregation a steady, enduring, sustaining, and invigorating purpose...Our dreams define and shape us. Our vision of God’s kingdom molds us and becomes the steering current for our life and work. Vision makes a difference in our lives. How different Jesus’ life and work would have been without His dream of the Kingdom of God! A legitimate Christian vision isn’t just positive thinking or fuzzy guesses; real vision grows out of Jesus’ kingdom dream and steers us into profound and practical ministries.” (Keeping The Dream Alive; pg. 12,13 by Robert Dale)

What is the corporate dream of the local church? It is the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Said Jesus, just before He returned to heaven: “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.*” (Matthew 28:19,20)

If a local church is committed to fulfilling the Great Commission of Jesus - to - make disciples of all people - then the local church must open its eyes to see the limitless possibilities for evangelism - or ‘spiritual harvesting’. “Then Jesus explained: *‘My nourishment comes from doing the will of God who sent me, and from finishing his work. Do you think the work of harvesting will not begin until the summer ends four months from now? Look around you! Vast fields of human souls are ripening all around us, and are ready now for reaping. The reapers will be paid good wages and will be gathering eternal souls into the granaries of heaven! What joys await the sower and the reaper, both together! For it is true that one sows and someone else reaps.’*” (John 4:34-37, Living Bible)

The local church whose people all have a clear vision of the ripening harvest fields of human souls, is the church that is constantly ‘reaching out in love’. Such a church is deeply fulfilled, for such a church is fulfilling the purpose for which Christ created the local church - to extend the kingdom of God through the salvation of the lost ones. “The Son of God has come to give His life as a ransom for the lost”, and so must the church if it is to fulfill its corporate purpose.

The Early Church grew and so must the local church today. Glance at the growth of the Early Church, as related in the Book of Acts. *In the Upper Room after Jesus’ Ascension, there were about 120 present (believers), all of whom were waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit* (Acts 1:15). On the Day of Pentecost, when Peter preached, many more became believers: “*And those who believed Peter were baptized - about 3000 in all!*” (Acts 2:41) Then notice Acts 4:4 - “*But many of the people who heard their message believed it, so that the number of believers now reached a new high of about 5000 men!*” Then notice Acts 6:7 - “*God’s message was preached in ever-widening circles, and the number of disciples increased vastly in Jerusalem; and many of the Jewish Priest were converted too.*” Notice Acts 11:21 - “*And the Lord honored this effort so that large numbers of these Gentiles*

became believers.” The norm of the Early Church, in terms of evangelism, is noted in Acts 16:6 - *“So the church grew daily in faith and numbers.”*

What is the corporate vision of the local church? To build the kingdom of God - to seek the lost and to grow the local church! Why does God intend for His Church to grow? (1) Because God loves all sinners, (2) Because Jesus died for all sinners, (3) Because the Holy Spirit convicts all sinners, (4) Because vast multitudes today are spiritually hungry (“The fields are white, ready for harvest”), (5) Because the Church has been given the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19,20), (6) Because every Christian is spiritually reborn in order to spiritually reproduce (it is natural to grow).

Fulfillment of the Church’s Mission comes through a Vision!

CONCLUSION

Do you want to fulfill God’s will for your life? Do you want your deep human aspirations to be satisfied - aspirations for significance and for true purpose? Do you want the Church’s Mission - to make disciples - to be accomplished?

God’s will cannot be done, human aspirations cannot be fulfilled, and the Great Commission cannot be accomplished, unless there is a clear vision of God. Seeing God truly, we see ourselves honestly, and the result is confession of sin and inner God-wrought cleansing from all moral defilement and the call to redemptive service in the world of hurting people. We first see God’s holiness, then we see our own sinfulness, then we see and experience God’s cleansing, and then we see society’s sin-sickness which calls for our personal involvement as God’s tools for redemptive healing.

Look at God and His holiness. Then see yourself with your need for inner cleansing. Then lift up your eyes, as a cleansed ‘vessel’ of the Lord, and ask God, like Isaiah, to send you into the world of needy people. God has a wonderful place for you in His master plan for world redemption! A clear vision is the basis for a compelling call! Say, “Here am I, Lord, send me!”

MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH - "PEOPLE WITH A VISION"

Worksheet

1. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "What we expect from life is usually what we get."
2. Give your comments or interpretation of the following statement: "A congregation is only as great as its vision is Biblical!"
3. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "Without a vision, the people perish. The vision for the lost around us is what constitutes a call from God to go and to reach the lost for Christ." (Note Romans 10: 14-15)
4. What does it mean for a believer to be a "Watchman" for the Lord? (Note Ezekiel 3:17-18)
5. According to James 5:19-20, what responsibility does a spiritually-minded person have towards "backslidden" Christians?
6. Give your comments and interpretation (and illustrations) of the following statements: "A healthy church is proactive and takes initiative for its ministry, builds on and is renewed by its dream, and ministers to others. On the other hand, an unhealthy church is reactive and surrenders its initiative, declines and doubts itself to death, and must itself be ministered to."
7. In terms of different types of church leaders, describe the three following types of leaders:
 - (a) Risk-takers
 - (b) Care-takers
 - (c) Under-takers
8. Amidst the changes and the chances of life, during times when it seems our efforts are all in vain, what keeps a Christian "on course"? (Note Hebrews 11:9, 10, 26; 12:2)
9. According to Isaiah 6: 1-9, what is the "method" by which one receives a vision that will transform his entire life?
10. What are some of the modern-day reactions against the Biblical concept of "sin", the results of which are most spiritually destructive?

11. Why is a “spiritual vision” necessary if God’s will is to be fulfilled in our personal lives? (Note II Peter 3:9)
12. From your own experience or from your observation of others, illustrate the truth of the following statement: “Clear spiritual visions quicken human aspirations, resulting in practical actions and compassionate involvement.”
13. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: “God created a good world but not a completed world. He intends for man to become a co-creator with Him to accomplish His redemptive goals. God and man work together to fulfill divine purposes.”
14. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statement: “God cleanses in order to prepare the cleansed ones for powerful ministry in society and for deep fulfillment through that selfless ministry.”
15. Seek concretely to illustrate the truth of the following statement: “A legitimate Christian vision isn’t just positive thinking or fuzzy guesses; real vision grows out of Jesus’ kingdom dream and steers us into profound and practical ministries.”
16. What should be the “corporate dream” of a local church? (Note Matthew 28: 19-20, Acts 1:8; John 4: 34-37)

MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

CHAPTER 16

POWER FROM ON HIGH

CHAPTER 16

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

POWER FROM ON HIGH

Scriptures: Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:6-9

Text: *“Ye shall be witnesses unto me...unto the uttermost part of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8)

INTRODUCTION: Christ showed a tremendous amount of trust in the disciples when he assigned such an immense task of world evangelism. Christ spent many months with his disciples, instructing, preparing and encouraging them. He knew that He would soon become and the disciples must carry on His work and teachings. Christ chose the twelve to be His instruments through which a world could be won for Him. Jesus said to the apostles, *“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”* (John 15:13)

PROPOSITION: It is important for us to try to answer a few fundamentals question regarding witnessing. What is the source of power for witnessing? What characteristic must a person possess in order to be an effective witness? What specific advice and techniques can be suggested in developing the art of witnessing?

I. POWER FOR WITNESSING

- A. Necessity Of Spirit’s Baptism For Witnessing
- B. Necessity Of Dedication Of Will To Witnessing
- C. Necessity Of Fellowship With Holy Spirit
- D. Necessity Of Going Forth Boldly In Witnessing

II. ADVICE AND TECHNIQUES IN WITNESSING

- A. Personal Conduct
- B. Complete Dependence On Spirit
- C. Spirit’s Guidance

CONCLUSION: Christ commissioned His followers to witness to the world (Matthew 28:19). He promised to empower His disciples, to enable them to witness boldly to a hostile world. It is the Christian's responsibility not only to have a silent witness, but also a verbal witness to his faith. The life of the disciple must be beautiful, lovely, gracious, and attractive. The Christian's life can only be fragrant when he spends much time in the beautiful presence of Christ.

CHAPTER 16

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

POWER FROM ON HIGH

Scriptures: Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:6-9

Text: *“Ye shall be witnesses unto me...unto the uttermost part of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8)

INTRODUCTION:

Jesus said, *The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.*” (Matthew 13:31-32)

Never has any movement had such a small beginning as the movement of Christianity. Never has a small group faced such difficult obstacles, as the small group of Jesus’ disciples faced in the formation of the Christian Church.

Jesus Christ chose twelve men through whom to spread His teachings and to establish His Church in the world. He commanded His disciples to take the Gospel to all nations. This command primarily involved spreading the Gospel in lands which were under the rule of the Roman Empire. To obey Christ’s command meant to endure harsh persecution, separation, and even death.

Christ showed a tremendous amount of trust in the disciples when he assigned such an immense task of world evangelism. Christ spent many months with his disciples, instructing, preparing and encouraging them. He knew that He would soon become and the disciples must carry on His work and teachings. Christ chose the twelve to be His instruments through which a world could be won for Him. Jesus said to the apostles, *“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”* (John 15:13)

The disciples which Jesus chose were ordinary men. They had no formal college education or special social distinction. It was to these men that Jesus commanded, *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”* (Matthew 28: 19)

PROPOSITION

It is not difficult to understand why it was important for the apostles to witness to their faith. Just as a small fire can spread to produce a large fire, so the fervent witness of only a few men resulted in spreading the Gospel of Christ throughout the world.

It is important for us to try to answer a few fundamental questions regarding witnessing. What is the source of power for witnessing? What characteristic must a person possess in order to be an effective witness? What specific advice and techniques can be suggested in developing the art of witnessing?

I. POWER FOR WITNESSING

What explains the remarkable growth of the Christian movement in the first century? Barclay says that “within thirty years of Jesus’ death, by AD 60, Christianity had traveled all over Asia Minor and Greece and had arrived in Rome.” (Barclay’s John, Vol. 1 pg.2) What explains the boldness of disciples, even as they faced the threat of death? The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is the secret to such remarkable success. The Church received great encouragement from daily fellowship and prayer.

A. Necessity of Spirit’s Baptism For Witnessing

Jesus said to His disciples, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:19) It was the disciples’ responsibility to follow Christ. It was Christ’s responsibility to make the disciples fishers of men. Only Christ could enable them to be soul winners.

Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit, whose ministry would be to empower the Christian.

Before Jesus ascended, He promised his disciples divine enablement for their great task. “*Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses with me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*” (Acts 1:8)

Before a disciple goes, he must pray in the unity of the Spirit with other Christians. Before the Upper Room disciples were Spirit-filled, it is recorded that “*those all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.*” (Acts 1:14)

On the day of Pentecost Peter stood before a crowd and proclaimed to them the Gospel of Christ. Fearlessly he said, *Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*” It was the Holy Spirit who changed Peter’s fear and cowardice into boldness.

It was the Holy Spirit who gave Stephen the courage to say to his critical audience, “*ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and care, ye do always resist*

the Holy Ghost.” (7:51) In his hour of death, it was the Holy Ghost who surrounded Stephen with His presence. *“But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.”* (Acts 7:55)

It was the Holy Spirit who gave the apostle Paul courage to go to Jerusalem, even when Paul was quite sure that bonds and afflictions awaited him (Acts 20:23) It was the Holy Spirit which enable Paul to fight a good fight and finally to die for his faith.

Many died courageously for their faith during the first three centuries of the Christian Church. One courageous martyr was an aged bishop of Smyrna named Polycarp. He was dragged by a mob to the tribunal of the Roman magistrate and was given the choice of either sacrificing to the godhead of Caesar or dying for his faith. Said Polycarp to the Roman magistrate, “Wight and six years have I served Christ, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my king who saved me?” Polycarp was then taken to the stake where he breather his last prayer: “O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy well-beloved and ever-blessed Son, by whom we have received the knowledge of Thee...I thank Thee that Thou hast graciously thought me worthy of this day and of this hour.” (Barclay’s Matthew Vol. 1, pg. 111)

It is so essential that we are bold in our witness in the twentieth century. A modern-day illustration of a bold witness is related by Trueblood in the area of race problems. A white man overheard a hotel clerk tell a Negro man that there was no unoccupied rooms. After the Negro man was turned down, the white man, in his turn, asked the hotel clerk for a room. The clerk replied to the white man that there was an unoccupied room for him, and asked him what price he had in mind. The white man turned then to the Negro man who had not yet left the hotel lobby and said to him, “Come back the clerk made a mistake. There is a room, because there is a room for me!” The white man then said to the clerk, “What are you going to do about it? You know the law of this state. I mean to see that it is enforced.” The clerk gave both the white man and the Negro man a room. (The Yoke of Christ, by Trueblood, pg. 104)

A verbal witness is not only needed to oppose social injustice, but it is oftentimes needed in order to win a soul for Christ. A businessman was saved in a Billy Graham Crusade, and the following Sunday night he went to a church where he met the man with whom the new Christian had associated in business for twenty-three years. The new Christian asked the business associate, “have you know Christ as your Saviour all of twenty-three years?” “Yes, I have,” about the Lord Jesus Christ. I admired you so much that I felt that if or Lydia? Lydia or India?...’ But Martyn was a mastered man - mastered by love and love’s Master. Therefore, the mastery was his in a crisis of poignant choice. Pain-drenched yet triumphant was his witness: ‘My dear Lydia and my duty call me different ways. Yet God hath not forsaken me...I am

born for God only. Christ is nearer to me than father or mother or sister.” (Prayer and Life’s Highest, pg. 24, 25)

C. Necessity Of Fellowship With The Holy Spirit

1. Apostles’ Boldness

The early disciples were Spirit-filled Christians who exercised fellowship and prayer in the Church. Acts records that their disciples “*continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer.*” (2:42)

The Jewish Counsel which arrested Peter and John were amazed at the apostles’ boldness, and “took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” After the apostles were released from the counsel, “they went to their own company” and prayed together. “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” The disciples were bold witnesses because they daily engaged in prays.

2. Apostles’ Beauty

There is a word in the New Testament Greek which vividly describes the character of an effective witness. That word is Kalos. This word describes the goodness of a person which is characterized by beauty, loveliness, graciousness, and winsomeness...The person who is Kalos, has an indestructible and intrinsic loveliness, attraction, and fragrance in his life. A witness who is a Kalos has a character which is lovely and pleasing to the eyes of others.

How appropriate it is for a Christian to sing ‘Let the Beauty of Jesus Be Seen In Me!!
When God’s love shines through the Christian, others will be attracted to Christ.

“Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me
All His wonderful passion and purity;
O Thou Spirit divine, All my nature refine
Till the beauty of Jesus my Saviour be seen in me”

The Christian needs times of intimate fellowship with God in order to see the glory of God and become enraptured by it. Every Christian needs the mountain of Transfiguration in his life. However, to always remain on the mountain of Transfiguration, is to never share in the glory of God with the men of the world. It is the radiance of the Christian life which the sinner must see in order to be attracted to Christ. Susanna Wesley had this prayer: “Help me, Lord, to remember that religion is not to be confined to the church or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere I am in thy presence.” (Barclay’s Matthew, Vol. 2, pg. 180)

After H.M. Stanley had discovered David Livingstone in Central Africa, and had spent some time with him, he said, "If I had been with him any longer I would have been compelled to be a Christian and he never spoke to me about it at all." The radiance of Livingstone's life was self-evident.

The beauty of Christ can only be seen when we spend much time in the beautiful presence of God.

D. Necessity of Going Forth Boldly In Witnessing

While the disciples were enjoying the Lord's presence in the Upper Room of Jerusalem, Christ said, "*That the world may know...Arise, let us go hence,*" George Delamarter imagines Peter thinking or saying something like this: "No, Master, let's stay here. Your words have blessed our souls tonight. Never has our fellowship been more precious. Speak on, tell us more; our souls are being fed. Besides, the hour is late and the Master stay here." (GO, pg. 31) Christ has called us to leave our comfortable abodes and our beautiful churches, and to go out into the highways and byways of life, to lift men out of the abyss of sin, and to share God's love with them.

I said, "Let me walk in the field."
He said, "No; walk in the town."
I said, "There are no flowers there."
He said, "No flowers, but a crown."

I said, "But the skies are black,
There is nothing but noise and din."
And He wept as He sent me back.
"There is more," He said; there is sin."

I said, "But the air is thick
And fogs are veiling the sun."
He answered, "Yet souls are sick,
And souls in the dark undone."

I said, "I shall miss the light,
And friends will miss me, they say."
He answered, "Choose tonight
If I am to miss you, or they."

I pleaded for time to be given.
He said, "Is it hard to decide?"
It will not seem hard in Heaven
To have followed the stops of your Guide."

I cast one look at the fields,
Then set my face to the town;

He said: "My child, do you yield?
Will you leave the flowers for the crown?"

Then into His hand went mine:
And into my heart came He:
And I walk in a light divine,
The path I had feared to see.

(By George MacDonald, Taken from
Christ and Fine Arts; pg. 14)

Jesus said, *:You are to go and make disciples of all the nations and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.*" Because dedicated Spirit-filled men down through the ages have taken this commandment seriously, nations have become partially or wholly evangelized.

One classic example of a man who took Christ's commandment seriously, was David Livingstone. Livingstone planned and prepared and finally penetrated the dark continent of Africa in the 19th century to present the light of the Gospel to the heathen natives. Says Latourette about the primitive condition of the Africa to which Livingstone was called to minister: "In the nineteenth century Africa south of the Sahara contained the largest population of 'primitive' cultures to be found anywhere on the planet. Except in a few places, largely on or near its northern borders, it had no continuing states or kingdoms. For the most part its organization was tribal. The vast majority were not only illiterate but also spoke languages which had never been given a written form. Religion was chiefly animism in one or another of its protean manifestations." (A History of Christianity, pg. 1303)

David Livingstone, a Scot of lowly birth who was raised by humble but godly parents went to work in a cotton mill at the age of ten, but, because of his love for learning, he went to night school and read such books as he could get hold of. After a deep religious experience, he decided to become a medical missionary and received training in medicine and theology. Livingstone was challenged by a missionary to Africa, Robert Moffat, "who said that from where he lived on any clear morning the smoke of a thousand villages could be seen where the name of Christ had never been heard." Livingstone went to Africa to evangelize in hundreds of native villages, some of which had never before been seen by a European. This great frontier missionary felt the heartbeat of Christ's love, and felt compelled to go and to tell of God's love.

II. ADVICE AND TECHNIQUES IN WITNESSING

A. Personal Conduct

1. Make Contacts

William Sangster suggests that contacts can be made by rendering some service for someone, or by seeking the service of someone. By giving an honest word of praise or by speaking about some common taste, any lead to a conversation about

serious spiritual issues. Wearing a Christian witness pin may be an effective way to get a conversation about God started. Reading the Bible in public or while travelling may be a great witness, at times.

Returning a blessing before a meal in public, may not lead to a conversation, but it at least gives an effective silent witness.

2. Be Courteous

Paul wrote to Timothy, *“Have nothing to do with silly and ill-informed controversies which lead inevitably, as you know, to strife. And the Lord’s servant must not be a man of strife: he must be kind to all, ready and able to teach: he must have patience and the ability gently to correct those who oppose his message. He must always bear in mind the possibility that God will give them a different outlook, and that they may come to know the truth.”* (II Timothy 2:24,25)

Huxley, the great agnostic of the nineteenth century, was once a member of a house-party at a country house. On a Sunday morning, while the others were preparing for Church, Huxley made no attempt to get ready, but instead asked a simple radiant Christian if he would stay home and simply tell why he was a Christian. The man replied to Huxley, “But you could demolish my arguments in an instant. I’m not clever enough to argue with you.” Huxley gently replied: “I don’t want to argue with you; I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you.” Huxley and the simple Christian stayed home and the Christian shared his faith with Huxley. With tears in his eyes, Huxley said, “I would give my right hand if only I could believe that.” (Barclay’s John Vol. 1, pg. 76-77) One will not be won to Christ by clever argumentation, but rather through a simple radiant testimony. There is no place for a hot temper, rash interruption, or high pressure tactics.

3. Be Frank

While a witness does not needlessly offend a person, he nevertheless presents an uncompromising, direct, and frank answer to the inquiry of the seeker. The true witness doesn’t try to ‘save face’ but is faithful to his witnessing mission, even if it results in snobbery or persecution. A witness presents the essentials of the Gospel and does not become side-tracked by complex, theological issues. A witness makes no pretense, but frankly acknowledges to the inquirer if he doesn’t know the answer to some question. He does quickly assure the seeker that he knows Christ and that Christ presently extends an open invitation to him to receive new life.

4. Be Discreet

It is wise for a personal worker to deal with a person of the same sex, and if possible the same age. A personal worker should usually deal with only one person

at a time. To avoid unnecessary embarrassment, and to make it easier for a seeker to freely open his heart, a personal worker should deal with a person alone.

5. Establish Follow-Up Program

Loren Sanny of the Navigator Organization suggests that the Christian worker must make sure that the new Christian does not doubt his new experience. Make sure the new Christian learns a verse which speaks of God's assurance - one of the best of which is 1 John 5: 11, 12." And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

Help the new Christian to realize that he can always trust God's promise even if he has no particularly good feeling. Faith does not solely depend upon feeling. The young Christian must realize that there is need for much growth. (II Peter 3:18) "But grown in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever." Mature take time. It is the Christian worker's responsibility to care for the new convert, just as a parent cares for a new-born babe.

Sammy gives the following specific advice to the Christian worker:

1. Pray daily for the one you counselled. The Counsellor should pray that the new Christian may be strengthened by God's Spirit, rooted in love, and filled with God's knowledge (Ephesians 3: 14-19) - example of prayer for new convert) *"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that You might be filled with all the fulness of God",*

2. Contact New Christian within 48 hours. This contact should be a time for fellowship, discussion of problems, Bible study, and prayer. A letter should be written if a personal visit is impossible.

3. Encourage new Christian to begin to memorise Scriptures and to daily read the Bible (starting with Mark, John or I Thessalonians)

4. Make sure new Christians become established in good church. This may mean that the worker should take the new Christian with him to church.

B. Complete Dependence on Spirit

No persuasion by man can save a soul. It is not a doctrine or a theory which saves; but only the Holy Spirit. One cannot depend upon elegance, learning, or talent, but must depend completely

upon the Spirit. The dedicated Christian must depend upon the Holy Spirit to give him opportunities to witness. The Holy Spirit is the Guide to Christian.

.C. Spirit's Guidance

Throughout the Book of Acts, there are many interesting examples of the Spirit's guidance in the lives of men, as they attempted to witness in a hostile environment.

After Philip had a revival in the city of Samaria, he was led by God into the southern desert of Gaza. Under the Spirit's direction, Philip led an Ethiopian man to Christ. It is probable that this Ethiopian spread the Gospel in Africa. (Acts 8:39) *"And when they were come out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing."*

It was the Spirit that directed Cornelius to send for Peter, and it was the Spirit that guided Peter to Cornelius's home. (Acts 10: 5,19) *"And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee."*

It was the Holy Spirit who directed the Antioch church to send Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey. (Acts 13: 2,3) *"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."* *"So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence sailed to Cyprus."*

It was the Holy Spirit who forbid Paul to enter Asia, and instructed him to go to Macedonia, from which the Gospel was spread throughout Europe. (Acts 16: 6, 9) "Now when they had come throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia," "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us."

Throughout the Centuries of Christianity, the Spirit was guided the Church. Missions have been founded under the guidance of the Spirit.

CONCLUSION

1. Christ commissioned His followers to witness to the world. (Matthew 28:19) *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:"* (John 15: 27) *"And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning."* Christ not only commanded, but he promised. He promised to empower His disciples, to enable them to witness boldly to a hostile world. It is the Christian's responsibility not only to have a silent witness, but also a verbal witness to his faith. Says Trueblood, *"Whose life is so good that his mere example, alone is a sufficient witness? It is precisely because our lives are not good enough that we must also have the courage to witness by word. If our doctrine is not better than our lives, our lives will soon become worse than they now are."* (The Yoke of Christ, Trueblood; pg. 102)

The life of the disciple must be beautiful, lovely, gracious, and attractive. The Christian's life can only be fragrant when he spends much time in the beautiful presence of Christ. When a group of young people from different nations were discussing how the Christian Gospel might best be spread, the girl from Africa spoke. "When we want to take Christianity to one of our villages, we don't send them books. We take a Christian family and send them to live in the village and they make the village Christian by living there." (Barclay's Matthew Vol. 2; pg. 86) That is the answer! The Christian must witness by deed and word within his own world where man and woman live, with all their frustrations, perplexities, and guilt. Christ is the answer! We are His ambassadors!

1. Check the statements which desirable those indispensable childhoods which are necessary if a person is to be in an effective witness for Christ.

- _____ 1. Formal college education.
- _____ 2. Special social distinction
- _____ 3. Testimony of a personal sinless life.
- _____ 4. Skill in articulation in sharing a personal testimony.
- _____ 5. Theological training.
- _____ 6. Extroverted personality
- _____ 7. Ability to answer all questions of unbelievers with whom a witness is shared.
- _____ 8. Mature Christian life as a witness to unbelievers.
- _____ 9. Special call from God to witness.
- _____ 10. Possession of the “spiritual gift of evangelism.”
- _____ 11. A compassion for “the unsaved.”
- _____ 12. Confidence in God’s power to convert and to transform sinners.
- _____ 13. Commitment of one’s will to obey Christ’s “Great Commission.”
- _____ 14. Basic Biblical knowledge of God’s “Plan of Salvation.”
- _____ 15. A “vision” for the lost ones, and a desire to share the Good News of God’s Grace.

2. According to Matthew 4:19, what must one do if he is to become a “fisher of men”?

3. According to Acts 1:8, what resource has God made available for the believer who wishes to tell others about Christ’s saving offer?

4. Why is it appropriate to call the Book of Acts the “Acts of the Holy Spirit”?

5. As it relates to witnessing, give your personal reaction to the following statements: “There are items when the Christian may seem to be wasting time, when he must wait in a wise passivity. Action without preparation must of necessity fail. There is a time to wait on God and a time to work for God.”

6. What, according to your understanding, explains the dynamic ministry of great soul-winners such as Dwight L. Moody?
7. With what degree of conviction do you believe the following statement: "All the leaders of the Church were men of the Spirit."
8. What, according to your understanding, explains the unusual success of the life of Henry Martyer?
9. When fear attempts to paralyze you into passive and inactivity, regarding taking bold initiative to witness to the unsaved people about the saving power of Christ, from what source can you find your zeal and boldness kindled and awakened? (Note Acts 2:42; Acts 4: 13-31)
10. Explain the meaning of the Greek word "Kalos", and explain why this quality of character is so very important in the life of an effective witness for Christ.
11. In your opinion, why do you think it is so difficult for many (if not, most) Christians to become aggressive in personal witnessing and evangelism?
12. Do you believe that the "Great Commission" of Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20) has generally become the "Great Omission" of the Christian Church in our modern day? Why or why not?
13. Why do you believe David Livingstone was so effective as a witness for Jesus Christ? Give your explanation of Proverbs 29:18.
14. Share, from your own personal experience, ways in which you have effectively make "contacts" with non-Christians, with the purpose of sharing the Good News of Christ's saving power with them.
15. According to II Timothy 2:24-25. That should be the Spirit and attitude of a believer when he approaches a non-believer for the purpose of witnessing for Christ?
16. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A witness presents the essentials of the Gospel and does not become side-tracked by complex, theological issues."
17. What specific goals should a soul-winner focus on, in his attempts effectively to follow-up a new believer, immediately after his conversion?
18. Why is it folly for a believer to solely depend upon his own eloquence, or learning, or talents, or personality in his attempts to win lost people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

19. Share “ingredients” in the effective witness of Philip to the Ethiopian man, as recorded in Acts 8:26-40.
20. What part does specific guidance from the Holy Spirit have in effectively witnessing to non-believer? Do you believe you should always “feel” a special “impulse” or “compulsion” from the Holy Spirit before you attempt to witness to an unbeliever? Why or why not? Should not the fact that Jesus gave the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) to the Church, and the gift of empowerment from the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) to each surrendered believer, sufficient “motivation” to witness to unbelievers, without a believer “waiting” for a “special impression of guidance” from the Holy Spirit in order to witness.
21. Tell to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements; “Whose life is so good that his mere example alone is a sufficient witness? It is precisely because our lives are not good enough that we must also have the courage to witness by word. If our doctrine is not better than our lives, our lives will soon become worse than they now are.”

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

CHAPTER 17

THE GREATEST TEST OF A GREAT CHURCH

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

SUBJECT: ‘THE GREATEST TEST OF A GREAT CHURCH’

SCRIPTURE: Luke 13: 6-9

INTRODUCTION:

Writes Ogilvie, “What measurements would you use to evaluate the effectiveness of a church? What would you say distinguishes a great congregation?.....The church is not only a place we go; it is what we are between Sundays. It is the equipping center for the ministry of the laity in the world. The effectiveness of worship, education and fellowship has a bottom line accountability in the quality of people the congregation produces for discipleship in daily living. The one test of a great church is the fruitfulness of its people.”

PROPOSITION:

The parable of the fig tree teaches us very simply the importance of being fruitful Christians, and, as a result, a fruitful Church. Leaves without fruit is like being a Church member without love. Love and tenderness are the fruits that God expects the Church and individual Christians in the Church to bear.

I. THE FRUIT OF LOVE

- A. Lovelessness Is Sin.
- B. Love Changes a Dull Existence Into A Delightful Life.
- C. Love Is The Distinguishing Characteristic of a Spirit-filled Christian.
- D. Love Is Creative and Contributive.

II. THE FRUIT OF TENDERNESS

CONCLUSION:

A tender-hearted Church is one that is characterized by charitable attitudes towards others. Such a church never condones sin but neither does it condemn sinners. It gives the benefit of the doubt to people. It thinks the best of others. It feels deeply the hurts of others. It weeps with those who weep. It feels deeply the tragedy of human circumstances, and never offers easy answers to difficult questions. It is never shallow in reason, or indifferent in attitude, or indecisive in action. Rather it thinks perceptively, feels deeply, and acts compassionately.

A tenderhearted church knows how to give a listening ear, knows how to shed a sympathizing tear, and knows how to help lift a heavy burden off the shoulders of the heavy-

laden travelers of life. It seeks always to be helpful, expecting nothing in return except the joy of being considered God's faithful servant in a world of hurting souls.

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH

SUBJECT: ‘THE GREATEST TEST OF A GREAT CHURCH’

SCRIPTURE: Luke 13: 6-9

INTRODUCTION: Lloyd Ogilvie, pastor of the well-known Hollywood Presbyterian Church, wrote a sermon, based on the parable of the Fig Tree, and titled the message, “The One Test of a Great Church”.

Writes Ogilivis, “What measurements would you use to evaluate the effectiveness of a church? What would you say distinguishes a great congregation? Many of us think of the local church as an end in itself. Therefore, our answers about the success of a church would be to judge what happens within the building and program of the congregation. The size of the membership, the quality of the preaching, the vitality of the educational program or the warmth of the fellowship would be our measuring lines. We think of the church as something we go to for inspiration, enrichment and encouragement. These are all crucial elements of a dynamic church, but are not the ultimate test of greatness. The church is not only a place we go; it is what we are between Sundays. It is the equipping center for the ministry of the laity in the world. The effectiveness of worship, education and fellowship has a bottom line accountability in the quality of people the congregation produces for discipleship in daily living. The one test of a great church is the fruitfulness of its people.” (The Autobiography of God; pg. 242, 243)

William Sangster, the great Methodist preacher in England, one time asked the question, ‘What is a successful Church?’ and then proceeded to answer his own question: “Some would say ‘a crowded Church’ but every devout preacher knows that a crowd is not an achievement but only an opportunity. Some would say ‘Any Church where the Sacrament of Holy Communion is regularly celebrated’ but that rule...would shut out all Quakers and Salvationists, and Jesus would never do that. Some would say ‘Any Church which gives large sums to Overseas Missions’...some, ‘Any Church where worship is sincerely offered’, but the worship of some people never expresses itself in any kind of service to others, and something must be deficient there. Some will suggest ‘A Church rich in prayer meetings’ but we all know that prayer meetings vary very widely...This question is harder then we thought.

“...I think I would say ‘Any Church filled with the love which is the life of God.’.....’A successful Church is any Church filled with that love which is the life of God.” (Daily Readings; pg. 167)

PROPOSITION: The parable of the fig tree teaches us very simply the importance of being fruitful Christians, and, as a result, a fruitful Church. Leaves without fruit is like being a Church member without love. Love and tenderness are the fruits that God expects the Church and individual Christians in the Church to bear.

I. THE FRUIT OF LOVE

A. Lovelessness Is Sin

If fruitfulness is defined as love, it is easy to understand that a lack of love or loss of love leads to barrenness.

In living the Christian life it is always possible for our love to grow cold! To the Church at Ephesus, the Lord says, *“But this is what I have against you: you do not love me now as you did at first. Think how far you have fallen! Turn from your sins and do what you did at first. If you don’t turn from your sins, I will come to you and take your lampstand from its place.”* {Revelation 2: 4, 5}

Lovelessness is sin, such a serious sin that God threatens to remove a Church that fails to regain its ‘First love’. Another way of saying that if the fig tree does not begin to produce figs, the tree will be cut down. (Luke 13:7_! Lovelessness always invites disaster, because lovelessness is sin!

B. Love Changes a Dull Existence Into a Delightful Life.

A fruit tree without fruit is dull, not delightful! A life without love is dull, not delightful!

Says Sangster, “No machinery runs without motive power: it is heavy and cumbersome until the current is supplied; but then everything performs its function and nothing is found to be superfluous. When our lives are dominated by love for Him - love that begets an utter determination to be like Him - the machinery of our faith throbs with a new-found power and reveals itself as efficient for its task. Christian fellowship becomes a real joy: the New Testament is an irresistible book: prayer cannot lose its wonder and charm: the Holy Communion is a boon never to be missed....

“To the poet and musician the love seems to come first, and they learn the rules or make new ones as they go along. Many of us learned the rules first. We were brought to Church and told to read the Bible: taught to pray - and it’s all very proper and very dull until the love of Christ grips the heart. Then dullness and monotony fly: it all becomes amazingly rich and new: existence has flowered into life.

“Religious observance was the most utterly boring thing I knew until I felt the touch of God’s reality and swelling Christ-ward heart. That is why the average congregation moves me to a mingled admiration and pity. I see so many people who are splendidly dutiful but painfully bored....I have a friend who was one of the first men to take a B. Sc. Degree in Aeronautics at London University. He designs airplanes, superintends their building, repairs them and improves them, but he cannot fly. He knows all about it - and nothing.

“You may know all about the machinery of the faith. Have you ever flown into His burning presence? Did the mists roll away? Could you say in simple spiritual truth, ‘Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face’”? (Daily Readings; pg. 341)

Love changes one’s whole perspective of life, from dullness and grayness to delight and brightness! The difference between loving and not loving is greater than the difference between seeing the world through dark glasses and seeing the world through rose-colored glasses!

“A change in oneself can mean a change in the whole scene....I was asked once, when I was a minister in the North, if I would find time to cheer up a young man who had been sent into our neighborhood to recuperate after a nervous breakdown. I promised to do my best. I sought the young man out, and I began, but, oh, it was hard work. ‘This is a grey world’, he said. ‘I see no purpose in it. It is dull, meaningless and evil. Its pleasures soon pass. Its pains endure. I seriously ask myself the question “Is life worth having?”’ - and much more - very much more - in the same strain.

“I saw him once or twice a week for nearly two months, and every conversation was the same - and then something happened to that young man! He fell in love. None of this nervous, hesitant venturing into the waters. He took a header! And on the day his engagement was announced...he came and saw me, and began the conversation with words something like this: ‘This is a lovely world. Come out into the garden and listen to that little bird singing fit to burst its heart. Isn’t it a glorious morning? How good it is to be alive.’

“I listened to his raptures in reverent silence, and all my smiles were up my sleeve. It was just the same old world he had been castigating for months. Just the same; no better and no worse. The change was all in him, I rounded off the little episode by marrying them, and I pass the parable on to you. There are people here who find life horribly dull, commonplace and matter of fact, but if they fell in love with Jesus Christ, what a difference it would make.” (Sangster; Daily Readings; pg. 78)

Just as a tree without fruit is dull and barren, so with life. Life without love is tasteless, monotonous, dull, and barren. The fruit of love in life is what makes all the difference! A great Church is a church that is full of people, all of whom have fallen in love with Jesus! Pure delight!

C. Love Is The Distinguishing Characteristic of a Spirit-filled Christian

Jesus said, “*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another.*” It is love which unites Christians from all different backgrounds, cultures, races, and affiliations.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Galatians 5:22,23

All the fruits of the Spirit relate directly to love. God is love; therefore, he who is possessed by God is possessed by love. All other fruits are simply descriptions of love.

“Joy is the joy of love; peace is love grown quiet; long-suffering is love stretched out; kindness is love with hands outstretched; goodness is love relating itself to the moral law; faithfulness is love holding steady amid everything; gentleness is love expressing itself in relationships; self-control is love in charge within.” (Christian Maturity; E. S. Jones, page 119)

What is the source of such supernatural love”? It is God. A Christian gets this fruit of love from God. Said Christ, *I am the vine; ye are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*” (John 15: 5,8; NIV)

The secret to fruitfulness in the Christian life is abiding or remaining in Christ. “To abide means to dwell, remain, and rest. The word also implies to continue in a relationship, faithful and unchanging. Sojourn, tarry and wait are synonymous for abide. Most of all, it means to remain continuously.” (Ogilvie; page 248)

D. Love Is Creative And Contributive

A fruit tree is meant to produce fruit. The gardener in the parable was greatly disappointed, as expressed in his words, “*Look, for three years I have been coming here looking for figs on this tree, and I haven't found any.*” (Luke 13:7)

A tree with only leaves is a tree that cannot produce another tree after its kind. Its leafy branches may be nice to look at, but the tree nevertheless is sterile and useless without fruit. According to the parable, it is only fit to be cast aside, cut down! Says the gardener about the fruitless tree, “*Cut it down! Why should it go on using up the soil?*” (verse 7)

A tree is meant to be productive and contributive. A tree is meant to give something to the world - fruit to enjoy now and, by the seed of its fruit, new trees for others to enjoy in the future. A fruitless tree is a useless tree! It lacks the creative and contributive features that are a part of a healthy tree!

The fig tree originally represented the nation of Israel which was called by God to produce the fruit of righteousness. But Israel proved to be fruitless - leaves without fruit, i.e., religion without Christ! “*Even in his (Christ's) own land and among his own people, the Jews, he was not accepted. Only a few would welcome and receive him.*” (John 1:11, Living Bible) Sterile! Religion without Christ! Leaves

without fruit! "Rites, rules, regulations, and restrictions had become more important than the fruit of personal faith." (Ogilvie; page 246)

The Church is God's fig tree today. God is expecting His Church to produce fruit. Even in the modern-day Church, "the danger of leaf without fruit is ever-present. Today our buildings, massed choirs, magnificent educational programs, and religious organizations mean little if there is no real fruit as result." (Ibid; page 247). We must win souls, because winning souls to Christ constitutes Christian fruitfulness. We must become Christ like!

But to personalize this parable, each person is like a fig tree. God has given to each of us a life - a life that has the potential for fruitfulness, for usefulness. God expects our lives to bear fruit for the Master!

Our lives are like a fig-tree. Each life is either barren or fruitful. "The parable teaches that nothing which only takes out can survive. The fig tree was drawing strength and sustenance from the soil; and in return was producing nothing. That was precisely its sin. In the last analysis, there are two kinds of people in this world - those who take out more than they put in, and those who put in more than they take out.....There is laid on us the duty of handing things on better than we found them." (Barclay's Luke; page 175)

"Die when I may," said Abraham Lincoln, "I want it said of me that I plucked a weed and planted a flower wherever I thought a flower would grow." (Ibid; page 175)

There is great potential in every life. The Father (i.e., owner of the fig tree) is pleased when we bear much fruit, when our lives are useful to God and a blessing to others. (Use of Spiritual Gifts, Romans 12:1-8; Ephesians 4:1-16; I Peter 4:7-11; I Corinthians 12)

"Charles Lamb tells of a certain man called Samuel le Grice. In his life there were three stages. When he was young, people said of him, 'He will do something.' As he grew older and did nothing, they said of him, 'He could do something if he tried.' Towards the end they said of him, 'He might have done something if he had tried.' His life was the tale of a promise that was never fulfilled." (Barclay's Mark; pages 270,271)

The tree in the parable was to be cut down if it did not fulfill its purpose in being planted, i.e., to produce figs. Unfulfilled potential - that was the sin of this tree, and it is the sin which brings death to every unfruitful person!

God has created man with the capacity to love. That is the greatest potential of every God-created person. Failure to fulfill that potential through Christ will eventually bring judgment from the Gardener (God).

“Only one life,
Twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last!

Love alone will last. All else will perish! Whatever is not done in love will be burned up!

QUOTE I CORINTHIANS 13:8-13

“The parable tells us of the gospel of the second chance. A fig-tree normally takes three years to reach maturity. If it is not fruiting by that time it is not likely to fruit at all. But this fig-tree was given another chance.....But the parable also makes it quite clear that there is a final chance. If we refuse chance after chance, if God’s appeal and challenge come again and again in vain, the day finally comes, not when God has shut us out, but when we by deliberate choice have shut ourselves out. God save us from that!” (Barclay’s Luke; page 176)

The fruitful Christian is the reproducing Christian. He is born to be fruitful, to reproduce himself in the lives of others.

“If we love people, we will want them to know the joy we have found. Fruitfulness is the sharing of our faith with others and introducing them to the love of Christ. Unwillingness to help others find Christ is not shyness, it is lack of love. It is as if we had discovered a cure for a form of cancer we are suffering and being unwilling to share our gift of healing. Can you imagine refusing to communicate our healing if it could help other sufferers?.....Reproduction of our faith in others is the test of fruitfulness. We are productive trees in the Lord’s vineyard if we have the figs of hope for people. We lay down our lives when we crucify our privation, separateness, and lack of concern. The Lord constantly sends us people to look for life through us.” (Ogilvie; 250)

II. THE FRUIT OF TENDERNESS

Lovelessness is sin, for love is the fruit of the Spirit which God intends for every person to develop in his life. Love is like a sparkling diamond - several sides to it. But one of the greatest characteristics of love is tenderness.

Some religious leaders of Jesus’ day were loveless - loveless as seen in their lack of warmth and tenderness toward people.

“The Pharisees present the most terrible illustration in all history of how good people can go wrong. You can be an upholder of the law; you can be a close student of the Book; you can be forward in all things that make for the moral well-being of our race, and yet you can go as terribly wrong as the Pharisees went....

“It is usually spiritual pride which ensnares men of this quality. They reach the dizzy heights of moral achievement and they forget that one can only live at those heights upon one’s knees. They begin to think that they themselves are the architect of their own virtues....Let us remember...that unless our lives are controlled by the Holy Spirit, we also may go tragically wrong. It is a particular danger of the good at any time....

“It is a sad thing when the warm life of God in Jesus is chilled by the rigor and coldness of our moral codes...I have known good men, whose word was their bond, who were honest in all their business dealings, just and above reproach in the commerce of the nation, and yet strangely lacking in tenderness and in that melting love we look for in a follower of Christ. We stand for strict moral principles, but...when an unmarried girl comes in penitence to confess that she is to be a mother, let us not spurn her...but stretch out loving hands and help her back to God...When a man, disregarding our counsel, finds himself in the grip of alcoholism, let us...keep the fellowship unbroken...The Pharisees had lost tenderness. If we lose tenderness, we shall be more guilty than they because we have a Nobler Example.” (Sangster; page 340)

Jesus never condoned sin, but neither did he condemn the sinner. He was always tender in dealing with broken people. The Bible says that “*A broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*”

Says Jesus, “*Come to me and I will give you rest - all of you who work so hard beneath a heavy yoke. Wear my yoke - for it fits perfectly - and let me teach you; for I am gentle and humble, and you shall find rest for your souls; for I give you only light burdens.*” (Matthew 11:28, Living Bible)

Love must be both tough and tender. Tough in dealing with sin, but tender in dealing with the sinner. In the midst of His moral toughness, Jesus never lost tenderness for the morally weak and the spiritually degenerate. It is possible to be morally good and yet to lack loveliness, attractiveness, and graciousness in the expression of moral righteousness. It is possible to speak out prophetically against adultery, for instance, and yet in the process to lack tenderness and love for the fallen one. How easy it is to be tough in moral pronouncements against drunkenness, and yet to lack compassion for the drunkard. It is possible to be practically and morally good and yet not to be aesthetically good. To be aesthetically good is to be attractive, winsome, and lovely in one’s actions of good.

An incident out of Jesus' ministry illustrates this.

“Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is - that she is a sinner.’ Jesus answers him, ‘Simon, I have something to tell you.’ ‘Tell me, teacher,’ he said. “Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?’ Simon replied, ‘I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.’ ‘You have judged correctly,’ Jesus said. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven - for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.’ Then Jesus said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ The other guests began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’” (Luke 7:36-50, NIV)

The fruit of Christian love manifests itself not only in the toughness of moral pronouncements, but also in the sweetness of a holy temper!

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” He replied. “How do you read it?” He answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was and when he

saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37, NIV)

The story of the Good Samaritan illustrated the fact that God's people can lose tenderness. The priest failed to help the injured man. The priest was the student of sacred writings, a scholar of the Book. He had lost tenderness. He stood for moral laws, but he had lost moral compassion!

The Levite also failed to help the injured man. He too passed by on the other side. The Levite was skilled in Levitical Law, master of the code. He also had lost tenderness. Full of law, but empty of love!

Both of these had the leaves of religion but no fruit! They had religious knowledge, position, morality, but they had no fruits of practical love.

It is possible for us, too, to lose tenderness, to become cold and calculating in our religious observance, to become proficient in our religious knowledge, to be exacting in our performance of religious duties, and, at the same time, to pass by the bruised and bleeding traveler who stumbles across our road of life! We must have fruit, not simply leaves in our lives. We must be like the Good Samaritan who, although he was without position, or power, or learning, or boasted birth, was nevertheless full of love and compassion. He made himself available, even though he had a busy life. He had room for 'divine interruptions' in his daily schedule! He was willing to be inconvenienced! He took a risk! (How did he know but what there were robbers hiding behind a rock, ready to pounce on him the moment he started to help the wounded man?) He was vulnerable. He was sacrificial and uncalculating. He became involved with the needy person who was literally thrown across his pathway. It cost him to care! It cost him time and money! But his life bore fruit, not simply leaves!

He had not lost tenderness in life! He cared! He shared! He remained sensitive to human need! His heart was moved with compassion!

Jesus said that there will be those on Judgment Day who will be cast into outer darkness, even though they had called Him 'Lord'! It is possible to declare Jesus as 'Lord' with our lips, and to deny Jesus' 'Lordship' with our lives. It is possible for a fig tree to have leaves without figs!

It is he who does the will of the Father who shall inherit eternal life.

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” Matthew 25:41-46

These persons at Judgment can call Jesus ‘Lord’ with their lips, but deny Jesus’ lordship with their lives! No tenderness, no compassion, no practical love, no fruit! Only leaves! Only a profession of faith; no possession of real faith!

Faith without works is dead! *“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” (James 2:14-17, NIV)*

Again, James is saying what Jesus clearly stated: A fig tree with all leaves and no figs is ready to be cut down! Fruitlessness invites disaster!

Good appearance is not enough. The purpose of fig trees is to produce figs. Good intentions without good actions is not enough!

Christianity involves thinking that is right, philosophy that is proper, theology that is thorough, moral codes that are commendable, rituals that are orderly, but Christianity is only complete when all else issues forth in compassionate actions. Thinking and feeling must issue forth in doing!

Says James, *“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” (James 1:27)*. Notice that pure religion not only involves separation from worldly pollution, but it also involves compassionate involvement in the world’s problems.

James’ concept of true and pure religion is no different than the concept of true religion as taught by the great teachers and prophets in the Old Testament.

Micah 6:8 *“He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”*

Hosea 6:6 *“For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”*

Isaiah 1:17 *“Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.”*

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 *“And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?”*

What is the essence of true religion? It is figs, not mere leaves! It is love, not mere law! It is delight, not mere duty! It is heart experience, not merely head knowledge! It is obedience, not merely sacrifice! It is passion, not merely performance! It is participation, not merely observance! It is knowledge of God, not merely knowledge about God! It is a godly trust, not a mere godly tradition!

It is still possible to have leaves without figs! It is possible to have a form of religion without the power of religion! It is possible to have religious knowledge without spiritual conversion! It is possible to know the machinery of Christianity without experiencing the power of Christ! Machinery without power, how pitiful!

To have leaves without fruit is like having strict moral principle without practical compassionate application! It is like a lake which has inlets with no outlets - stagnant, motionless, dead! It behooves us never to become a ‘Dead Sea’ - a life that is lifeless with no currents of new thoughts, no movements toward new behavior, no outlets of dynamic love. Inflow without outflow results in stagnation and death! All leaves and no figs! Useless! Ready to be cut down!

Let us remain tender, for to be tender is to be fruitful. Compassion is the open heart and the open hand. Empathy is a movement outward - getting out of your skin into the skin of another!

My own dad, who passed away many years ago, was a tenderhearted man. His tenderness was manifested in acts of generosity and compassion. I remember, as a small child, that I observed the tender care my dad gave to a lonely older widow in our small town. He cared for that elderly widow for years. She apparently had few if any relatives and my dad reached out in compassion to her. He provided a place for her to live for years with little or no rent, gave her groceries, and when she finally died, my dad paid for her funeral expenses. He did all of these things with no fanfare. I doubt if anyone knew, except my immediate family, of my dad’s compassionate actions. He helped others in varying degrees. Dad was so uncalculating in his generosity. He had a tender heart. He could not stand to see others suffer. He was known for years in our community as a man with a big heart!

Tenderheartedness and generosity always go together. For the tenderhearted man is one who not only feels deeply, but one who acts decisively and compassionately.

The tenderhearted man is not only generous in giving material aid, but he is also one who is generous in extending mercy and in restraining judgment towards others. Tenderheartedness and judgementalism do not go together.

CONCLUSION:

What is the greatest test of a great Church? It is the test of tender love! God is calling us to produce figs, not just leaves!

A tender-hearted Church is one that is characterized by charitable attitudes towards others. Such a church never condones sin but neither does it condemn sinners. It gives the benefit of the doubt to people. It thinks the best of others. It feels deeply the hurts of others. It weeps with those who weep. It feels deeply the tragedy of human circumstances, and never offers easy answers to difficult questions. It is never shallow in reason, or indifferent in attitude, or indecisive in action. Rather it thinks perceptively, feels deeply, and acts compassionately.

A tenderhearted church knows how to give a listening ear, knows how to shed a sympathizing tear, and knows how to help lift a heavy burden off the shoulders of the heavy-laden travelers of life. It seeks always to be helpful, expecting nothing in return except the joy of being considered God's faithful servant in a world of hurting souls.

THE MARKS OF A GREAT CHURCH
THE GREATEST TEST OF A GREAT CHURCH

Q U E S T I O N S

1. According to your perspective and experience, what would you say distinguishes a truly great congregation?
2. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "The church is not only a place we go; it is what we are between Sundays."
3. Cite Scriptural references that document the truth of the following statement: "Lovelessness Is Sin."
4. What power alone is sufficient to motivate our Christian Faith, such that our faith will be effective in Christian service?
5. When God's love is shed abroad in the heart of a believer (Romans 5:5), what practical results can one anticipate, in terms of daily service, and personal devotions, and ecclesiastical involvements?
6. Why are some believers in local churches today both 'splendidly dutiful' and yet, at the same time, 'painfully bored'?
7. What, according to John 15:1-8, is the source of supernatural love and spiritual fruitfulness?
8. Demonstrate how all the fruits of the Spirit relate directly to Love?
9. Using the analogy of the "figless fig tree" (Luke 13:6-9), how would you describe a modern-day 'figless Church', a church which has 'all leaves with no figs'?
10. Tell why you agree with the following statement: "Unfulfilled potential - that was the sin of this figless fig tree, and it is the sin which brings death to every unfaithful person!"
11. Considering Luke 13:6-9, what is meant by the phrase "the Gospel of the second chance"?
12. Give your comments on the following sober statements: "The parable (Luke 13:6-9) also makes it quite clear that there is a final chance. If we refuse chance after chance, if God's appeal and challenge come again and again in vain, the day finally comes, not when God has shut us out, but when we by deliberate choice have shut ourselves

out.”

13. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Unwillingness to help others find Christ is not shyness, it is lack of love.”
14. In what ways do the Pharisees illustrate the tragic fact of how “good people can go wrong”?
15. Is it possible for Christian people to be morally good and yet to lack loveliness, attractiveness, and graciousness in the expression of moral righteousness? How does the story of the Good Samaritan illustrate the fact that good people can lose tenderness? (Note Luke 10:25-37).
16. Is it possible to declare Jesus as ‘Lord’ with our lips, and yet to deny Jesus’ ‘Lordship’ with our lives? (Note Matthew 25:41-46)
17. What does a person’s so-called ‘Christian Faith,’ that is not accompanied with ‘Good Works’, say about the authenticity of that person? (Note James 2:14-17).
18. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Christianity involves thinking that is right, philosophy that is proper, theology that is thorough, moral codes that are commendable, rituals that are orderly, but is only complete when all else issues forth in compassionate actions.” (Note James 1:27 and I John 3:17-18).
19. What is the “essence of true religion”, according to Micah 6:8; Hosea 6:6; Isaiah 1:17; Deuteronomy 10:12-13?
20. In terms of actions and reactions and attitudes, give your description of a ‘tender-hearted Church’.
21. Carefully read Luke 7:36-50, and answer the following questions:
 - (a) What actions, on the part of the sinful woman, showed that she was genuinely repentant?
 - (b) What attitude must one have towards himself and towards his own sins, as a prerequisite to experience a great love for Jesus? Must one be a ‘great sinner’ before he can become a ‘great lover’ of Jesus? Why or why not?
22. Share creative ways in which believers can cultivate and practice ‘the tender touch’ in the home, the local church, the community, and on the job.