

Free to Speak

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Preface to the Second Printing

While a man serves a congregational pulpit, he is limited in his message. He must speak only those things which fit the consensus of the group which supports him. He does not want to be disruptive. So, he does not feel free to speak those things which would raise questions about mainline positions, traditional interpretations, or the structure of the system. That does not mean that I have not tried! Repeatedly, I have tried to give redirection only to be frustrated or shot out of the saddle by guardians of the orthodoxy.

Now that I am retired from congregational ministry, I am free to speak, and the Lord has given me an exciting and fulfilling ministry. He worked to allow the publication of *Free In Christ* in December of 1984, making it available for free distribution. Response to its messages has been positive and thrilling. In its first year, we ordered a third printing.

Other messages have been in my heart which did not fit the theme of *Free In Christ*. Those lessons, touching on various themes, are included in this volume, *Free To Speak*, published in September of 1985.

All of my beliefs are tentative, anticipating change or development as I learn more. So, these discussions are not intended to be exhaustive studies revealing the last word on the subjects. If I can only cause you to rethink and restudy positions that you already hold, I shall have accomplished my purpose in them. May His Spirit work in us to accomplish that. May God use us all to work together in bringing the changes that he desires.

Cecil Hook
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CHAPTER 1

MUST GOD PLEAD WITH GOD?

Other questions could serve as a title for this brief lesson: Is the Son more approachable than the Father? Does the mediator relay our prayers to the Father? Is “In Jesus’ name” the password to approach the Father? Have disciples been reconciled to the Father truly, or does their lifelong alienation continue to make a mediator necessary?

The key to those questions is whether disciples are truly reconciled to God or whether we continue in a state of alienation. We are alienated from God by our sins. “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God ...” (Isa. 59:2). In this sinful state we cannot approach God. Our only hope of reconciled fellowship is by means of a mediator who interposes between two parties as the friend of each to effect a reconciliation.

Jesus filled that role of mediation. “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all...” (1 Tim. 2:5). Sin stood between us and God, but Jesus substituted himself for that sin. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). He occupied that sinful zone of alienation which formerly was the area of fellowship of God and man. In Christ, God moved into that area again, for “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor. 5:19).

God made his move toward man in Christ. Now man makes his move toward God in Christ also. Our transition is consummated through baptism into Christ (Rom. 6:34) by which we enjoy the remission of the sins that alienated us. So now our reconciliation is accomplished, and it is maintained by his atonement as we walk in the light in our relationship in Christ (1 John 1:7).

No longer is there alienation and no longer is there need for someone to stand between us and God for we are reconciled. We are in Christ and in God while the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God dwell in us.

Must Jesus continually plead for us before an angry, or more remote, God? Such a concept of mediation was born of Catholic theology. His intercession does not consist of his offering prayers for us but in the continuous merit of his once for all atonement. “Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). He is our Advocate — “to call to one’s side” — not to plead our case but to stand in our place as our propitiation. We continue to be in him, walking in the light of his fellowship, so that his offering continues to make us acceptable to God-reconciled (1 John 2:12; 1:7).

Do we pray to the Son or to the Father? If he is one who actively pleads each of our prayers before the Father as a mediator, our prayers should be to the Son. However, we have a direct line to the Father! We have unashamed boldness to talk with the Father because there is no alienation. He will hear us for Christ’s sake. I used to chide the Baptists for praying “for

Christ's sake" instead of "in Jesus' name," but it is because of what Christ has done, in his behalf, for his sake, that the Father hears us.

Didn't Jesus teach us to pray in his name? Yes. "Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:13~14). But what does "in my name" mean? Is it a required formula to make an action acceptable? Is it a sort of fraternal password without which an earnest prayer is vain? In his name we gather (Matt. 18:20), we baptize (Acts 2:38), we sing (Eph. 5:18-19), and "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through him" (Col. 3:17). That is rather inclusive! In view of this, how could we possibly demand that effective prayer must use the formula "in Jesus' name" and overlook "whatever you do, in word or deed" as needing the same formula?

"In the name of" someone means "by the authority of" or "in behalf of" that person. In our whole-life commitment to Christ as Lord, whatever we do, in word or deed, is directed by our Lord and done in his behalf. It has nothing to do with saying "in Jesus' name" at certain specified times.

When we are in Christ, we are enabled and authorized to speak; directly to our Father because he has brought us to the Father. Jesus declared to Thomas, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:17). Now he has brought us to the Father, reconciled and in fellowship. He is not speaking of his relaying our prayers for us.

Have you ever heard a preacher use John 16:26-27 in a lesson or as a test? I have never heard it used. It does not fit our traditional concept of Jesus having to pray for us or of his relaying our prayers. In his farewell discourse he assures, "In that day you will ask IN my name; and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from the Father." He says he will NOT pray for us. Reconciliation shall have been accomplished and approach shall have been authorized through our High Priest. The Father is not more remote, austere, or vengeful than Jesus so that Jesus should have to plead for us. The Father himself loves us!

There is no example in the New Testament writings of a prayer "in Jesus' name" (See Acts 4:24-30; 7:60; 1 Cor. 16:22). Stephen and John prayed to Jesus (Acts 7:59; Rev. 22:20).

If "in Jesus' name" is a necessary ritualistic password, then we all have erred in singing such prayers as "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah," "Be with me, Lord," and "Have thine own way, Lord."

It seems that we have difficulty handling anything that we cannot ritualize, program, put in a pattern, or oversimplify. In this instance it has caused us to fail to appreciate the security of our relationship with the Father making us feel a degree of alienation from him throughout life.

There are difficulties of interpretation that I have not dealt with in this brief lesson. For instance, there is the intercession of the Holy Spirit. But again, must deity plead with deity? Your more scholarly treatment of this subject would be read with interest.

CHAPTER 2

HOW THE SPIRIT LEADS

Because Paul assures us that the Spirit of God is in us and “all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God,” most of us accept the fact that we are led by the Spirit. But how does He lead us?

We have wished for signs or concrete evidences of the Spirit’s leading. Perhaps you, as I, have prayed in times of stress and decision that the right choice would be made clear by some indisputable evidence. God has given such evidence to some, but I have heard no voice from heaven, felt no touch of an unseen hand, seen no sign in the sky, or even felt an assuring bodily sensation at the right moment.

How, then, may I know the Spirit’s leading? I shall not pretend to give all the answers, but here is a conviction that has come to be an assurance to me in recent times as I now see some things that I overlooked previously. Instead of plucking proof-texts to prove my case, let me review some examples of how the Spirit led certain other persons.

1. After his baptism and reception of the Spirit, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. How was he led? By the hand? By a rope? We would conclude that Jesus’ mind and will were the instruments by which he was led. As Jesus was about to enter his ministry, he could see that it would lead ultimately to the hell of separation from God in behalf of mankind. He was tempted to avoid this by serving man in other ways. The Spirit led him in and through this by means of his thinking and volition. Jesus chose the most loving, unselfish course, interpreting the will of God from Scriptures, and made his decision in agonizing fasting. When the decision was made, the devil left him, and Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee.

Let us not reject this example on the ground that Jesus was divine while we are not. Divinity cannot be tempted and has no need of the leading of the Spirit. He was led and tempted in his humanness.

2. After Jesus’ ascension and while the disciples waited in Jerusalem, Peter addressed the disciples on the need of choosing a witness to replace Judas. He initiated a search which produced two men of their own selection. He acted on his own understanding of the will of God relating to this matter, as he interpreted it from the Scriptures. They prayed about it and asked God to make the final decision through lottery. Why put forward two men, one of whom would be rejected and embarrassed? By nominating two and casting lots, they would be depending upon the Spirit directly to make the final choice. Would the Spirit lead through lottery, the flipping of a coin? That is not our usual concept! We generally think of specific inspiration or direct revelation. But neither Peter nor the eleven got up and announced that God had revealed his choice of Matthias to them. Such a revelation would have saved Justus from his embarrassment because then his name would not have been put up. They interpreted the coin

flip as God's answer, and there was never any repudiation of Matthias' apostleship. It was a Spirit-led choice.

The Spirit led through men who unselfishly and prayerfully sought to do what they understood the will of God to be from their reading of the Scriptures.

3. When Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch after preaching to the Gentiles, men came from Judea insisting that all be circumcised to be saved. "Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them." This was a very big issue that could not be ignored. But why should they debate the matter? Why did not Paul get up and say, "Hey, listen; there is no place for debate; I am an apostle fully empowered by Jesus; I will give you the answer by revelation?" That is our common concept as to how spiritual guidance would come.

Paul and Barnabas were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about the question; then they were sent on their way by the church. They were appointed and sent by the church, but later, in Galatians 2:2, Paul wrote, "I went up by revelation." Thus the Spirit led through the decisions of men.

At Jerusalem, there was much debate among the apostles and elders — Spirit-guided men debating to ascertain the truth! Peter made a speech setting forth his views, which was followed by expressions from Paul and Barnabas. Then James replied, "Brethren, listen to me." He gave his reasoning based on his interpretation of the scriptures, and concluded with, "My judgment is..." and detailed his solution to the problem. His suggestions "seemed good to the apostles and elders, with the whole church," and they agreed to send a letter to Antioch stating their conclusions.

Here we see sincere disciples debating, investigating the will of God, and reaching conclusions based on their judgment. Yet, in their letter, they could claim that "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" to reach those conclusions. They recognized the leading of the Spirit!

4. In his farewell to the Ephesian elders, Paul warned, "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers." How and when did the Spirit appoint elders? In the only record of appointment, two evangelists, Paul and Barnabas, appointed them. And the evangelist, Titus, was instructed to appoint elders in Crete. No doubt, they consulted with the people of the congregations in making their selections. They prayed and fasted in their sincere effort to do the will of God. In this manner, they were being led by the Spirit so that Paul could affirm that the Spirit did the ordaining!

5. Now let's look at Paul's writing about marriage in 1 Corinthians 7. This has been puzzling to most of us because it does not fit our ideas of inspiration and revelation.

In verse 8, Paul bases his instruction simply on "I say." In verse 10, he says, "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord" Jesus had spoken on that subject. But in verse 12, he says, "To the rest I say, not the Lord" In similar manner, in verse 25, he says, "Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion... I think...." Verse 40 states, "In my judgment...."

In these references we have “I say,” “I say, not the Lord,” “I think,” “I give my opinion,” and “in my judgment.” Are these instructions by Paul merely human guidance? No. In the concluding sentence, Paul assures us, “And I think that I have the Spirit of God.” This unselfish, loving, spiritual man gave advice based on his deep understanding of the will of God, and he trusted that the Spirit of God was leading him in it.

6. Paul explains that “by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” Have you seen the Spirit in one of our baptistries immersing anyone? All of our baptisms have been performed by men who were acting on their understanding of the will of God, and Paul interprets that as the leading of the Spirit so much as to say the Spirit actually does the baptizing. Thus, “All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”

Now, can we not apply the things we have observed from these examples of the Spirit’s leading to our own life situations? Our lives are made up of constant decisions. Some are casual while some involve weighty, complex problems. Shall I buy a new car, quit this job, help this man, use my time for this or for that, use my money in this way or in that way, marry, divorce, read, scream, sleep, pray, visit, or whatever? Does the Spirit lead me in these decisions? What confidence may I have that he does?

I may have the same confidence in the Spirit’s leading as the persons in our examples did, if I seek earnestly in the Scriptures to know what God wants, make the most loving and unselfish choices, and pray for God’s help in choosing the right course. Prayer helps me to see things from God’s viewpoint and it helps me to see through my own selfish interests and my rationalizations to please myself. Thus, when I make or implement a decision, I may rightly declare, “The Spirit led me in this!”

Such a view makes no claim of perfection. The Spirit-filled apostles were not inerrant in their lives and judgments. But God will save his Spirit-led children in spite of their lack of perfection.

The views expressed here do not deny that God has ever spoken to anyone audibly, given physical assurances, or revealed truth through specific inspiration or direct revelation. But the present-day disciple who looks for those demonstrations may never be confident that the Spirit is leading him in any personal way.

(The basic thought of this lesson was gained from a taped lesson by Wes Reagan.)

CHAPTER 3

PHYSICAL REINFORCEMENTS OF FAITH

The title of this lesson may seem to express conflict. “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Sight includes the things which can be detected by the physical senses. Faith is mental, spiritual, and abstract. Isn’t Paul saying that our lives are directed by the spiritual rather than the physical? Yes, but God has used, and continues to use, physical things to make our faith more substantial.

Those who make use of graven images and crucifixes in their buildings and who wear medallions and scapulars claim that such objects are merely reminders of spiritual things. In their case, however, they have come to venerate, and look upon, such things as having mystical, sacramental powers. Thus they have become a pitfall to them. We must avoid this danger but, in doing so, we should not fail to recognize and make use of physical reinforcements of faith.

The omnipresent God does not dwell in temples made by hands, but he used the Tabernacle and Temple to fortify the Israelites’ faith in his presence. Victory in battle was at times attributed to God through the assurance of having the Ark present. God recognized that man interprets according to his earthly nature, and he made some accommodation to that tendency.

Jesus made use of saliva in healing three times (John 9:6; Mark 7:33; 8:23). He touched and laid hands upon persons ceremonially in healing. Evidently, Jesus did not consider such actions as detracting from his power, even though a person might attribute the miracle to the power of saliva or to a ritual. Those actions added a dimension of credibility.

We shall now give a few examples which show that faith may be reinforced by physical presence, physical actions, and physical symbols.

James invites the sick person to call the elders to his bedside for healing through anointing and prayer (James 5:14-16). Why call those men from their jobs or families to go to the sick room? Why not send word to each elder soliciting his prayers? Wouldn’t their prayers be as effective in their homes? The answer must be that the physical presence of those men at the bedside adds a dimension to their prayers, both for the elders and the patient.

Why should they anoint the sick with oil? The oil had no curative powers. James says that the prayer of faith, not the oil, would be effective. The anointing would give more substance to their belief. The fact that some have accepted the anointing as a ritual conveying special power or have incorporated it in a sacrament for dispensing grace does not invalidate its purpose or use.

Why lay hands on the sick? Although some may think it was an effective ritual, it only gave extra vitality to faith through physical presence and action.

If you are very ill, you appreciate the visitor who assures you that he will be praying for you. You value it more if he prays for you while in your presence. It becomes more meaningful if he touches you or holds your hand while praying. And strength is added in proportion to the number of persons involved. Faith is bolstered by physical presence.

They appointed elders with fasting and prayer (Acts 14:23). Fasting, though not a ceremony commending special grace, might add a dimension of assurance to prayer. You may try this for yourself. When you have a truly deep concern to pray about, try fasting for a time and see if your faith is not reinforced.

No posture for prayer is prescribed in the Scriptures. A person may bow, kneel, or lift up hands, using the posture that would make his prayer seem more real. Mental prayers are acceptable, but an audible prayer may seem more effective to the one praying.

One may continue in faith and Christian service without assemblies, even as shut-ins do. But there is great strength in the reassurance of the physical presence of the spiritual body. God must have had that in mind in directing us to assemble.

Even our buildings may play a part in strengthening or weakening our faith. A building may say that we are confident, abounding, energetic, and enduring, or it may say that we are weak, indecisive, and unconcerned and that we may fold.

The invisible God made himself known in various ways. But earthly man has difficulty in feeling a fellowship with a Spirit. So, to bridge this

gap, the eternal Word became flesh. The incarnation gave more substance to faith. Because of it, we are assured that “we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses” (Hebrews 4:15). Being omniscient, the Word did not learn from experience. He already knew man. But his bodily suffering adds to our confidence.

Jesus bore our sentence of death. Our sentence for sin is death of the soul, not of the body. It is separation from God. Jesus made his soul an offering for sin (Isaiah 53:10; Acts 2:27). He experienced that separation for us. We have little comprehension of such an experience because it is so abstract. But Jesus’ physical suffering and death gave us an acceptable framework for understanding and believing in the atonement.

A renewed life is an essential evidence of our faith. Jesus chose the ritual of baptism symbolizing a death, burial, and resurrection to add concreteness to that faith.

The atonement is the basis of our hope. God wants us to keep belief in the atonement renewed in our minds continually. We may do this by private meditation at any time at any place. The Lord’s Supper employs symbolic materials which can be touched and tasted to give more substance to our faith. Paul used the cross as a symbolic reminder of the atonement. Christian art uses many symbols constructively. Art was used in the Tabernacle and Temple. Symbolic art and venerated images are not to be confused with each other.

May we not rightly conclude that there are physical reinforcements of faith and that we may employ them to our own advantage? God sees us in our earthly surroundings and uses some of these earthly things to make our faith more concrete. We are social beings also, and God uses the physical presence of others to reinforce our faith.

CHAPTER 4

JESUS' PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL DEATH

Admittedly, I am rushing in where angels fear to tread when I propose that Jesus died spiritually, as well as physically, and that, in his spiritual death, he endured hell. Though I may entice others who are as foolish as I am into this forbidden concept also, you are still my brother, even though you are too wary to become so foolhardy.

Jesus suffered bodily upon the cross. We flinch at his pain as we read of his being whipped, stricken, pierced by thorns and nails, and suspended on the cross. His extreme thirst brought on by his wounds and trauma tenses our throats. We can understand why he would dread this ordeal and fervently pray about it in Gethsemane. We appreciate and sympathize with his dreadful suffering of bodily pain.

Please do not consider me to be irreverent when I ask if men have not faced death with more courage and have not endured extreme physical agonies for longer periods of time than Jesus did. Heroic men have faced death without flinching and have endured torture willingly, as painful as the human body can feel, for days. Even the thieves endured longer than Jesus did. The fact that Jesus was bearing our sins would not make physical suffering more intense, because guilt of sin is spiritual rather than fleshly.

It is most difficult, if not impossible, for us as earthly beings to comprehend any truth without having some physical concept with which to relate it. For instance, can you think of love, peace, or pain totally in the abstract? Man has little capacity to comprehend what spirit or spiritual death is. Logically, we can explain that spiritual death is separation from God, that ultimate separation is hell, and that hell is eternal spiritual torment, but who can truly comprehend and appreciate those realities?

God accommodates our physical concepts in many ways. For instance, he gave our Savior a physical body as a point of identity with man, even though he is an eternal spirit. He permitted that body to bear the same kind of pains that we feel, and to die as we die, so we would have a point of reference by which to discern and to translate into that which is spiritual and abstract. Thus, the crucifixion is depicted to us, but not with all the grotesque description that some men use. The Scriptures speak of his death on the cross, his suffering there for us, and his bearing our sins in his body, yet these are accommodative in order to direct our minds to the more abstract and spiritual concepts. Who could comprehend and appreciate the suffering of a divine Spirit for us without our having any physical concept to tie it to?

Jesus bore our sentence of death. Our penalty for sin is death of the soul, not of the body. That death is separation from God. It is emphatic that Jesus made his soul an offering for sin (Isaiah 53:1023). Jesus' sorrows, wounds, stripes and chastisements of Isaiah 53 were not physical endurance alone, which are powerless to atone, but they were the spiritual wounds received in

mortal combat with Satan in which Jesus died, as predicted in Genesis 3:15. In that battle he was separated from God because of sin, abandoned temporarily into the hands of Satan. This horrible experience brought forth the most agonizing and awesome cry of all history, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It was the cry of the damned in hell, of him who became sin and accursed in our place. Anticipation of this experience caused Jesus to pray fervently that he might avoid the cross. His knowledge of what alienation from God is like induced such trauma as to cause sweat to pour from his body as freely as though he were bleeding. He went to hell for us, and the Gethsemane and the cross experiences were the most explicit revelations in the Bible of the horrors, not of physical death, but of hell. Jesus' physical suffering and death gave us an acceptable framework for understanding and believing in the atonement as an escape from the most awesome fate, that of eternal separation from God.

"He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption." The physical resurrection of Jesus has far greater significance than that of offering us hope of a similar rescue from physical death. It is the physical evidence that the Father brought Jesus back from Satan, breaking his power over sin. It offers us a basis of hope that we can also be brought into eternal fellowship with God in spite of our sins. Now, in baptism we are painlessly and symbolically buried with him in Joseph's tomb and raised with him, free from the effects of sin. Thus, the resurrection is a physical reinforcement of our faith.

Jesus' blood was shed for our atoning. This is another accommodation to our earthliness. The blood represented his life, even as the blood represented the life of the animal of atonement under the law. The animal died in place of the offender. Blood shed without the death of the animal would have been ineffective. So, it was the life, represented by the blood, that counted. The blood of Jesus represented the life of his body which, in turn, in its death depicted the spiritual separation from God which he experienced because of our sin, so that we may avoid eternal abandonment by God.

Persons like Enoch and Elijah had avoided physical death, and others like Lazarus and the widow's son had escaped from its clutches. No one, however, had bridged that chasm back to God after having been separated by sin. The redeemed of all ages owe their reconciliation to being in Jesus symbolically as he bridged the chasm of alienation for them. All are saved by his grace, if saved at all.

Even as the burial and raising of my body in a baptistry depicted an unseen and spiritual transaction, so the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus involved the spiritual being, far beyond what the eye could see or the mind of man could discern without such a physical accommodation to our thinking. My faith and appreciation are reinforced by the physical demonstrations.

CHAPTER 5

IS THERE MERIT IN PAIN?

Are we saved by Jesus' pain? He suffered for us. Suffered what? To suffer means to endure or to experience. We may suffer shame, loss, dishonor, pain, shipwreck, or wrong. The idea of enduring or experiencing is primary; the thought of pain is secondary. Jesus suffered death. He experienced death in our place. It is not his suffering primarily, but what he suffered, what he endured. In a similar way, God saves us through preaching. But it is not by preaching primarily, but what is preached. It is not by Jesus' enduring, but what He endured — death.

The agony in the Garden did not expiate. Any blood shed in His abuse would not have atoned if he had not died. Under the Law, the blood of animals was offered. It represented the life of the animal. Had the animal not died, the blood would have been ineffective. Jesus' blood represents the life offered instead of ours. We are not saved by His wonderful life, His teachings, His miracles, His pain, but by His death. By means of this experience he conquered Satan for us.

“But the idea of sacrifice always implies pain,” you may object. Does it? Literally, the word “sacrifice” means “to slaughter.” More basically, it means “to offer, to make an offering.” Any offering, whether it be a song, a prayer, a dollar, or a cup of cold water, is a sacrifice. The thought of pain or impoverishing is not in the word. Jesus offered himself in our place, but the endurance of pain was incidental to the offering.

What about us; aren't we supposed to “sacrifice,” to “give till it hurts?” “Let us offer up a sacrifice of praise.” Does that mean that we must sing or shout until our throats hurt?

When the rich Abraham sacrificed, did he impoverish or pain himself? Is this concept of pain or privation inherent in any of the Mosaic laws concerning sacrifices?

“Give till it hurts” is foreign to Christianity. Give till you feel good. It makes one happier to give than to receive, Jesus said. Christian service is done cheerfully and willingly, not out of necessity or constraint. Expressing love does not hurt, but it makes one happy.

“Doing our duty” (a vain effort!) may be drudgery or painful, but showing love is fulfilling. If all of your Christian service is not fulfilling and does not make you happier, then a new appraisal of your discipleship is in order. Duty can be performed legalistically and hints of meritorious achievement. Not so with love.

In order to bind this “Do your duty” concept, an idea of meritorious suffering has been attached to the term “sacrifice” describing our service. We offer sheaves, not lambs. Man cannot offer sacrifices of merit or atonement; he can only bring offerings of praise and thanksgiving.

In John's day the Gnostics thought that matter and the flesh were inherently evil. From this developed the asceticism of the early centuries — purging by pain, privation, and poverty.

Further development brought forth the doctrines of penance, purgatory, indulgences, and the grotesque emphasis of the physical agony of Jesus. All of these are built upon a false premise.

We need to take the Lord's Supper out of Gethsemane and put it back on Golgotha.

A frustrated conscience in many devoted disciples makes them enjoy a lashing, whipping harangue of a sermon. By their pained conscience they feel that some retribution has been paid, some satisfaction has been met for their sins. While it is true that the impenitent must be brought to penitence, the purpose of it is not to foster this concept. It is true that Jesus preached cutting sermons, but they were addressed to the calloused hypocrites, not to the devout.

Blessed is the man who overcomes trial and temptation. Blessed, also, is the man who has few to overcome. When the tree stood through the storm, it demonstrated strength, but did that tree that stood against frequent blasts bear more fruit or make better lumber than the tree which knew nothing but calm?

In bearing the penalty of our sins, Jesus endured extreme mental agony. In the process of his physical death, there was extreme physical pain. This is not being overlooked. However, Jesus' sorrows, wounds, chastisement, stripes, etc. of Isaiah 53 were not physical endurances which are powerless to atone, but they were the spiritual wounds of combat with Satan in which Jesus died. In the circumstance of the Christian life, men have been impoverished, imprisoned, whipped and tortured with a similar degree of physical pain that Jesus bore. Man has little capacity to share His mental and spiritual agony, however. But Jesus' agony did not expiate, nor can our torture make us merit more grace.

When we deny ourselves and take up our cross, we are saying, "Lord, my life is an offering of thanksgiving to you. I have been crucified with Christ. My life now will be a daily offering. Not my will but yours be done. Please accept me and use me."

CHAPTER 6

THE SIX DAYS OF CREATION

Last week Lea and I visited the Space Center in Alamogordo, New Mexico which boasts of a planetarium the likes of which there are only nine others in the world. We viewed with awe the presentation depicting how scientists believe the universe began and how the features of the earth were shaped. The realism of the projections make some viewers airsick. It was an unforgettable highlight of our vacation.

There was a time, however, when such a presentation would have made me sick — not airsick, but soul sick. It would have been shocking and unsettling to me and I would have rejected it in its entirety. The program, called “Genesis,” spoke of Creation and ended with Frank Borman’s dramatic reading of Genesis 1:12 as he viewed the distant earth rising over the horizon of the moon, but it did not limit the time of creation to six twentyfour hour days about six thousand years ago.

By instruction, posters, and art work our children are impressed from their earliest Bible class experiences with the contention that God made the universe in six literal days about 4000 B.C. I am convinced that our wellmeaning teachers do our children a great disservice by such teaching. It is good that they instill belief that God created the universe in the children, but it is regrettable that, in the same process, they put a scientific stumbling block in the path of their faith. The Catholic Church made the scientific belief that the sun orbits the earth a tenet of soulsaving faith. Their hassle with Galileo has embarrassed them for centuries, and they learned not to make scientific interpretations into matters of faith. Unfortunately, we have not learned that lesson yet.

Our literal interpretation of the creation account collides with scientific explanations. We have made it an either/or proposition; if we accept one interpretation, we must reject the other. So, often faith is shaken in those who accept scientific conclusions. Instead of holding our views of both science and the Bible as interpretations to be studied for harmony, we have accepted our Biblical interpretations as ultimate truth which must displace any scientific interpretation which varies from it.

More needs to be said about our claimed literal interpretation of Genesis. We are not so literal except on the points that we are hung up on. Is a snake subtle, having a reasoning intellect like a man? If it could reason, could it talk without a voice box? Could it hear Eve, having no ears? Could Adam and Eve eat knowledge? Did they not have knowledge of good and evil before eating the forbidden fruit? Was Adam endowed with unlearned speech, language, information, and experience? Was he given tools and knowledge to dress the garden? Were Adam and Eve given a culture at the time of their creation? Were they given vessels, cutlery, a nail file, and scissors to cut their hair? If they were given this culture and knowledge, how can we account for the loss of such practical knowledge as the use of tools later in history by aboriginals? Can man hear God walking? Does a snake eat dust? Did the tree of life die? What became of the Garden of Eden? Adam’s need for food indicates that his body would consume and expend energy. Would he have died before the fall without food?

When we face these and other similar questions, our literal approach to Genesis begins to evaporate, leaving us high and dry.

I do not claim to have all the simplistic answers, but that is not alarming, because my salvation in no way depends upon understanding of scientific data. The Genesis account is intended to instill faith and awe in us toward an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Creator and God rather than giving us soulsaving scientific facts.

“Each has an interpretation” and is usually eager to impose it. My understanding is different from others which I have read on the creation account. If you will indulge me, I will state it briefly for what challenge it may offer you. Surely, you do not have to accept it.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Every atom of every element brought into existence from nothing is included in that first sentence of the Bible. That was the creation — period! All the creative acts described in the six day periods were but the arranging of these material elements and endowing with life from the Original Life. It is similar to the housewife who creates/makes a cake. She makes a new arrangement of existing materials. When this elemental creation took place and how long the process took is not revealed. It was in the beginning of creation, not in the beginning of existence, for the existing Spirit had no beginning. Whether God took a moment or billions of years is neither revealed nor relevant.

Now that the universe is created, the reader’s attention is directed to changes taking place on the earth. It is still molten hot so that it is waste, void, and shapeless with all of its moisture in steam and vapor shrouding the surface in darkness, with turbulent winds caused by the heat.

In the cooling process the clouds thinned so that light could filter through. “Let there be light” on the earth. Light was not created then, for the universe had millions of suns, but it penetrated to the earth’s surface. Continued cooling and further thinning of the atmosphere allowed for distinction between day and night on earth. The mass already had undergone periods of darkness and light due to its rotation. More cooling allowed the moisture to form clouds with sky between them and the earth. The condensed moisture gathered on the cooled surface of the earth and, because of the upheavals of the earth’s crust, separated from the land to form seas. By natural process it would require more than a day for the water to drain off the continents. By all this process God has now made the earth ready for life and habitation. God could have done this in a few hours, but He could have let natural processes work for millions of years to bring it all about. He is still its Creator.

On the third day God brought forth vegetation producing seed and fruit after its kind. And it was so! These were truly fast producing plants if they brought forth seed and fruit after their kind in twentyfour hours. Literal interpretations overlook this point, but reproduction was demonstrated on what is called the third day.

Whether God put the earth in orbit around the sun on the fourth day, or actually formed the sun and moon then, is not of importance. It seems more likely that He set them in the heaven for signs then in the same sense that He set the rainbow for a sign in Genesis 9:13. He called a

special attention to the rainbow rather than altering the way that light is refracted. So He gave special meaning to the sun and moon.

On the fifth day the fish and fowl were created and charged to multiply after their kind and to swarm, which they did. The length of time and the process of forming them is not the emphasis. Again, the reproductive process bringing swarms of marine life would require more than a literal day.

The same can be said about the reproduction of cattle and beasts on the fifth day.

Whatever the length of the sixth day was, it gave time for God to pass all the animals and fowls in review before Adam that he might name them. This was before Eve was made for him (Gen. 2:18-22). Could Adam possibly have named each of the thousands of species of animals and fowl in twenty four hours?

The creation account in Genesis actually follows the same general pattern set forth in scientific theory. Science tries to define the natural process, but the Bible does not describe the process. Literal interpretation claims instantaneous creation allowing for no process of development. Truly, God could have created and formed the universe and all that is in it in ten seconds. Or he could have taken ten billion years. If God let natural laws, which he ordained, work in the process of developing and forming the universe, does that detract from his power?

Since God was establishing a natural order, it seems only reasonable that he would have let it operate from the beginning. For example, the light from M 33, the nearest star group outside our Galaxy, could have been made to reach the earth instantly, or natural law could have allowed 850,000 years for it to reach us. What purpose could have been served by suspending the natural law concerning the speed of light in this instance?

One of our problems has been in trying to define a method that God used when the Bible does not give us that information. The next problem has been in making that interpretation a matter of faith. Our inconsistency is evident in disclaiming any accommodative language or literary style in the Genesis account while we attempt a literal interpretation only of the areas on which we have become hung up.

You may contend that my explanations are weak and destructive to faith. I believe that this approach makes faith easier by avoiding unnecessary scientific obstructions to faith. It has worked for Lea and me and our children, and I am convinced that the same can be true with you and your children.

CHAPTER 7

ADDING GUILT TO ANXIETY

We all have heard those lessons about worrying. Selected passages are emphasized: “I tell you, do not be anxious...” (Matt. 6:25-34); “Have no anxiety about anything” (Phil. 4:6). The conclusion: It is sinful to worry, because we are commanded to have no anxiety about anything. Such a simplistic explanation does not always help the listener.

You are diagnosed as having a malignancy, and I advise, “Just don’t worry about it!” Your business is failing, and I urge, “Don’t be concerned.” Your daughter is missing, and I admonish you, “It is a sin to be anxious!” A world is dying in sin, and I explain, “You should carry no burden of care, for anxiety is sinful!” Those answers are as inappropriate as telling a person not to become hungry when he has no food, not to hurt because of a smashed thumb, or not to grieve for the companion taken by death. Such advice may seem pious and high-sounding, but it is impractical and guilt-inducing. It would stifle the basic feelings and emotions which social beings share, and it would add a weight of guilt to the burden of concern.

To seek to relieve anxiety by asserting that one is commanded not to worry is no more effective than trying to produce faith by declaring that one is commanded to believe. To be effective, we must teach what will produce faith and what will relieve anxiety.

Jesus had extreme anxieties. His temptation was real, and it brought overwhelming concern. In the garden he “began to be greatly distressed and troubled... My soul is very sorrowful, even to death...” (Mark 14:33f). In the depth of distress he prayed, “Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me... there appeared to him an angel from heaven strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground” (Luke 22:41f). And think of this: “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear” (Heb. 5:7). Does that sound like one who had no worries?

These passages reveal such intense anxiety in Jesus as he approached the cross that he feared that the trauma would kill him physically before his atoning sacrifice could be completed. But the Father heard his loud, fearful cries and sent an angel to sustain him, thus saving him from that abortive death.

Life with no anxieties does not exist. “Look at the birds,” Jesus urges in teaching about anxiety. I watch the birds eating crumbs on the patio. They make a few quick pecks and then look around to see if they are in danger. Their constant anxiety causes them to interrupt their eating every few seconds. And have you not seen the anxieties of a mother bird as she watches her fledglings leave the nest and begin testing their wings? Evidently, Jesus’ teachings about anxiety have some limitation in their application. When Jesus taught, “Do not be anxious about your life,” he must have been setting an ideal to be sought rather than commanding the absolute achievement of that state of mind in all circumstances.

Paul had anxieties. After Epaphroditus had recovered from near death, Paul sent him to Philippi “that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious” (Phil. 2:28). Anxiety over Titus moved that devout preacher to walk away from an open opportunity to preach at Troas: “When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went into Macedonia” (2 Cor. 2:12). Also, he wrote of “the pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28). Other evidences of his anxieties are seen in the Scriptures.

When Paul urged the Philippians to “Have no anxiety about anything,” he must have considered that to be a sublime state of mind which he himself had not reached rather than an absolute achievement of mental discipline necessary for salvation.

Some anxieties are helpful. They stir us to appropriate activity to relieve the need or solve the problem. They move us to treat our cancer, search for the missing child, work to evangelize the lost, and to pray and to depend upon God.

A courageous man once stated, “I enjoy myself most when I am scared.” He was spurred to do greater things then. Fear, rightly directed, is the father of courage. It stimulates the adrenaline and brings out the best in us.

Some anxieties hinder. Anxieties must be acted upon or they can become paralyzing. One of the words used by Jesus means more literally “to draw in different directions, to distract.” When we permit worries to build so as to distract us from trust in God or from acting to solve the source of the anxiety, then Jesus would rebuke us also with: “Don’t be anxious, you of little faith.” But to bear guilt for weakness of faith would only add greater burden by further straining the faith that allowed the worry in the first place.

Some anxieties help us to attack our problems to solve them; others tend to enlarge and multiply the problems. Some worries lead to joy; others rob of all joy. Jesus would have us to be free of anxieties, not because total mental discipline which overrides emotions is necessary for salvation, but so that we may enjoy a fuller, happier life as a disciple.

Mary V. Littrell expressed it nicely in her little poem:

*A traveler crossed a frozen stream
In trembling fear one day;
Later a teamster drove across,
And whistled all the way.
Great faith and little faith alike
Were granted safe convoy;
But one had pangs of needless fear,
The other all the joy!*

CHAPTER 8

WINE AND THE DISCIPLE

Wine was a common commodity in ancient life, being mentioned over 250 times in the Bible. All of the wine was not used by bad people. Because of prejudicial notions which are held and expressed so strongly, it has been difficult to bring an objective lesson on the use of wine. For many, the only use of wine is no use, and those people usually question the motives of anyone who justifies any use of wine, often accusing him of being a drunkard or condoning drunkenness.

We should be candid in our investigation of the subject. We gain nothing by being evasive, illogical, inconsistent, or dishonest about it. An incident in a Vacation Bible School class which I once taught in a neighboring congregation illustrates our evasiveness. We were studying this subject. To warn against use of wine, a kind and lovable elder of advanced age read Proverbs 31:4: "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink; lest they drink and forget what has been decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted." After he made his point, a young woman inquired sincerely and respectfully, "What do the next two verses mean?" So he read: "Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more." Having never considered that there was a proper use for wine, he became confused and embarrassed, and he was unable to give a coherent answer. He did not help his case by ignoring those passages. And he was not the first to do so.

We will review some of the teachings in the Old Testament writings about wine. The first mention of wine tells about Noah who "planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and became drunk ..." (Gen. 9:20f). Other liquors are not mentioned in the Bible, but they are referred to as strong drink. Methods of making distilled liquor had not been invented. Spiced wine was called "mixed wine." Noah got the drinking of wine off to a bad start.

Plenty of wine indicated prosperity and blessing. "May God give you ... plenty of grain and wine" was the blessing of Isaac upon Jacob (Gen. 27:28; see Deut. 7:13; Amos 9:14). When David said, "My cup runneth over," it is not likely that he was referring to goat milk!

Melchizadek, priest of God Most High, brought bread and wine to offer Abraham when he returned from battle (Gen. 14:18).

A part of the Levitical priests' portion was the best of the vintage (Num. 18:12). The priests were to offer upon the altar day after day the fourth part of a *hin* of wine for a drink offering (Exo. 29:38f). (A *hin* was about 12 pints.)

The people were to tithe their wine along with their other produce (Deut. 14:23).

Levites had charge of the stored wine at the Tabernacle (1 Chron. 9:29).

“Say to the people of Israel, When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazarite, to separate himself to the Lord, he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink, and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried” (Num.6:2f). Such abstinence from grapes and wine was not required of all persons. After the Nazarite had fulfilled the vow, “the Nazarite may drink wine” (v. 20).

Priests were forbidden to drink while in service: “Drink no wine nor strong drink, you nor your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die” (Lev. 10:8f).

The references above show that there was a proper and approved use of wine that holy men of old could enjoy. There are many warnings given against drunkenness, and there are ugly scenes involving strong drink. We are so familiar with those that it is superfluous to recite them here. But to incriminate righteous men and holy institutions in their use of wine because of the abuse that sinful, intemperate men displayed is unjust and slanderous.

Looking into the New Testament writings, we observe that the same attitude toward wine prevailed. For the moment, we will pass over all the many references which warn that a drunkard definitely will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Let us consider the attitude that Jesus and Paul had toward the use of wine. They were by no means total abstainers.

Jesus used an illustration that the Jews understood readily when he talked about putting new wine in old wineskins. The juice expands only while fermenting. If fermenting juice was considered sinful to them, his illustration would have had an evil connotation to them.

At a wedding feast, Jesus performed his first miracle by turning water into wine (John 2:1f). In fact, he made about 108 gallons of it! And it was for social drinking! Was it just fresh grape juice? If any use of alcoholic drink was sinful, surely Jesus would have clarified that point then and there. Are we to say that the Holy Spirit made a bad choice of words which would easily lead people into a misinterpretation that encourages sin? I think not.

Vacuum seal bottles are a modern invention. They had no means for keeping fresh grape juice, but by fermenting it, they could keep it as wine. I have read some fantastic claims that the Jews had some means of preserving “unfermented wine.” If they could do it, why can’t we? If someone will demonstrate that grape juice can be kept in any desirable state for drinking from summer until Passover in the spring, without the benefit of cold, vacuum seal, or fermentation, he will have a plausible argument. To say that they drank diluted wine does not meet the issue for, whether it be 2% or 16% alcohol, it still would be alcoholic. New/sweet wine was alcoholic (Acts 2:12).

Jesus drank wine in contrast to John’s abstinence: “For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of man has come eating and drinking; and you say, ‘Behold, a glutton and a drunkard...!’ “ (Luke 7:33f). If he drank fresh grape juice only, would they have accused him of being a drunkard, or winebibber?

In his parable, Jesus pictured the Samaritan as pouring oil and wine on the wounds of a man for medicinal purposes. Oil and grape juice?

In initiating the Lord's Supper, Jesus used the cup which was a part of the Passover meal (Luke 22:14f). It was too early in the spring for fresh grape juice. Following the pattern of Jesus and the apostles, the Corinthian disciples still had a meal as the setting for their Lord's Supper. Abuse of the meal resulted in the drunkenness of some: "For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?" (1 Cor. 11:21). It was fermented. Even though some got drunk, Paul did not forbid that any of them drink. He said that they had homes to do it in.

Even though Paul says that "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking" (Rom. 14:17), many today would contradict him in maintaining that one who drinks cannot remain in the kingdom.

In defending the personal rights of Barnabas and himself, Paul asked the rhetorical question, "Have we no right to eat and to drink?" (1 Cor. 9:4).

Paul declared, "It is right not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble" (Rom. 14:21). But he did not indicate that no one could properly eat meat or drink wine forevermore. Abstinence was considered to be needful only when someone's faith would be jeopardized. In similar setting, Paul indicates that a person might glorify God in his drinking: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

At Miletus, Paul had warned the Ephesian elders that some of their number would become divisive. Later, Timothy was instructed to expose and publicly rebuke those elders. That was quite a task for the young evangelist — enough to keep his nervous stomach in turmoil! So, Paul prescribed a tranquilizer for him, urging, "Use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and for your frequent ailments" (1 Tim. 5:23). That is the use suggested for wine in Proverbs 31:6f. That is the same use we make of sedatives and tranquilizers today. It served them as a pain reliever. I have seen many persons on their death bed and, almost without exception, they were heavily sedated. For me to suggest that these good people died in a drunken stupor would be horrifying, but what is the difference in having senses dulled by alcohol or by some other chemical? These are in the realm of our liberty.

Is wine sinful? Sin is not in things, but in people. "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself ..." (Rom. 14:14). "To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted" (Titus 1:15).

The use of wine is a liberty of the disciple; however, this and all other liberties are limited by self-control and by expediency. Paul expressed it in this manner: "'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be enslaved by anything" (1 Cor. 6:12). Let us consider these limitations further.

By intemperance, we may become enslaved to most any good thing, whether it be coffee, cola, sweets, sports, television, peer pressure, or wine. It is the loss of self-control that is sinful rather

than the thing which is submitted to. The passages of scripture usually reviewed in support of abstinence all condemn the enslavement — drunkenness — rather than a temperate use of alcohol. Thus, Paul assures us that those who practice drunkenness shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21). He even warns us not to associate with a brother who is a drunkard (1 Cor. 5:11). “Do not get drunk with wine,” he demands (Eph. 5:18). The elder is to be no drunkard, nor should the deacon be addicted to wine (1 Tim. 3:3,8).

Some sincere people contend that any amount of drinking makes one drunk proportionately; that is, if you have one drink and it takes two drinks to make you intoxicated, then you are one-half drunk. By the same rule, if eating two steaks would make you sick and gluttonous, then one steak would make you half a glutton, and driving thirty miles an hour would make you half a violater of law.

Drinking wine, or any other practice, is not expedient or helpful if it causes someone else to sin. Concern for the weak brother constrained Paul to declare, “It is right not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble,” and “Only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.” Cause the weak to stumble, not the pious to grumble! Were the righteous men throughout Bible history who drank wine stumbling blocks or bad influences? Surely, concern for the weak did not take away liberty after the weak had been instructed and strengthened.

It is commonly urged that it is not expedient to drink any wine because it can become habit forming so easily. I respect that argument and the person who chooses to drink none. Some persons, because of their physical and psychological nature, must avoid all alcohol because they are alcoholics by nature even if not by practice. But most any good thing can lead to sin if we do not exercise self-control, whether it be eating, sleeping, talking, driving, taking sedatives, watching television, or most any other activity within our liberties. We cannot abstain from life!

“You lose your influence with others when you drink.” It is true that pious and judgmental persons will think less of you because you do not adhere to their scruples. Most unchurched people attach no stigma to you for moderate use of alcohol. The jibes we hear from them come when they see people drink who have so piously contended against it. They laugh at our hypocrisy, whether it relates to the use of alcohol, or anything else. The Protestant fundamentalists are the only Christian groups who have demanded total abstinence.

A factor of our modern times must be considered in determining expediency. Our mechanical age makes use of alcohol more dangerous for such activities as driving an automobile, operating heavy equipment, or performing work which demands finer precision and quicker reflexes.

This brief treatise does not touch on all areas relating to the use of wine. Usually, one who makes any defense of our Christian liberty is considered to be the Devil’s advocate; hence, we do not hear many lessons about it or see preachers’ names signed to any discussions of it. To preach on it is to commit suicide in the pulpit! The righteous spokesmen for God of old would be barred from our pulpits for repeating what they wrote on the subject, and Jesus would be thrown out of the church if he made wine there or drank it at a wedding reception in the fellowship room.

CHAPTER 9

REVOLUTION OR EVOLUTION

It's a typical catchall auditorium class with many who have been "studying" the Word for forty years. The lesson is 1 Timothy 6. I question, "Would it be sinful for me to own a slave?" As heads shake negatively, one answers, "No. Paul does not condemn slavery." "Then it would be proper for me to buy a slave," I propose. "Yes," with more agreeing nods. "If it is all right for me to purchase a person enslaved by others, then it would be in order for me to capture and enslave another human being," I argue. The class is quieter with fewer affirming nods. "Would it be acceptable for me to enslave you, Charlie?" I press. Good old legalistic Charlie boldly contends that I would be within my scriptural rights. "It would be sinful for me to own a slave," I counter. "Slavery is not condemned in the Bible," Charlie protests with flushing face, "and you can't pervert the Scriptures to make it wrong!"

Yes, for me, it would be sinful to own a slave. I make this assertion being fully aware of the teachings addressed to slaves and masters in the Scriptures. Let me explain my contention, and you will see that this is not just a revival of the slavery issue, which is no longer relevant. It involves something basic to the understanding of some other scriptural matters.

We often review and stress the stringent demands of discipleship which bring a sword instead of peace, and set a man at such variance from others that he must make a choice between Christ and others. Our emphasis that demands a clear-cut and immediate break from all that is inferior and wrong at the moment of repentance before baptism is a contention demanding maturity at birth. It would allow for no period of growth. It would condition salvation on our ability to become perfect in conduct rather than being a sinner saved by grace. And, more to the point of this discussion, it would make Jesus a revolutionist.

Revolution is a sudden, radical, or complete change and would be characterized by overthrow, renunciation, and revolt. While Jesus' teachings and demands were radical enough to arouse opposition in many instances, he avoided unnecessary opposition. His will was to be accomplished in a more evolutionary manner — a process of gradual and relatively peaceful social and religious change brought about by seed, leaven, and flavoring salt.

On Pentecost, if Peter had demanded that his Jewish audience renounce the Law of Moses as a condition of salvation, his "visible responses" would more likely have been 3,000 persons "coming forward" with stones to silence Peter and his crowd forever. But God gave time for change from the Law to be accomplished. Although Jesus declared that he did not come to destroy the Law, our traditional explanations about it meeting its end by being nailed to the cross sound more destructive and disruptive than fulfilling and evolutionary. Many years passed before the Law was growing old, obsolete, and ready to vanish away. Even when Paul returned to Jerusalem and was imprisoned, the Judean disciples were all zealous to keep the Law. It was not demanded that they all revolt against the Law, thus arousing undue opposition.

When Roman soldiers asked Jesus, “What shall we do?” (Lk. 3:14), he did not tell them that they must resign from or desert their military machine trained in killing, conquering, and subjugating. For that moment, he simply answered, “Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.” He did not mark himself as a political activist against Rome. Can even the most hawkish among us really believe that Jesus wants us to train to aggressively conquer, kill, and enslave? I think not. But he planted seeds of reformation in his answer. In time, the leaven of his word should eliminate such warfare, or make it sinful, to say the least. Unfortunately, the need for self-defense is still with us, and he would not deny us that right. But aggression is denied to any who would mature in the spirit of his teachings.

Paul urged the Corinthians, “Only, let everyone lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him” (1 Cor. 7:17). Whether it be marriage or lack of marriage, circumcision or lack of circumcision, or freedom or slavery, Paul did not demand a change in these social relationships. There were no shocking demands to upset the social order. He concludes, “So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God.” Yet we know that in other circumstances these conditions could be changed acceptably, for a person was permitted to marry, be circumcised, or become free.

Paul further warns the Corinthian disciples against brazen disregard of social customs, such as the veiling of women and their silence in public assemblies in Greece. However, these were not universal restrictions for times and places where such social traditions did not exist or were outgrown. These freedoms would come by evolution rather than by revolution.

The kiss was the customary greeting in the ancient world. Demand for disciples to replace this form of greeting would have forced a breach of the most common and sincere social customs, and it would have made them exclusivists unnecessarily. But advocating the use of the kiss did not bind a ritualistic procedure for all time to come.

Because of centuries of cultural conditioning, ancient peoples could hardly conceive of a person going through a period of emotional trauma or religious experience without fasting. For Jesus to have scoffed at fasting and to have disclaimed its value would have turned sincere people away from him needlessly. But acceptance of fasting by Jesus and his disciples did not elevate it to a legal demand in other times and societies. Growth in spiritual discernment would diminish the value of such a physical exercise. And we would view the traditional expression of hospitality through washing of feet from the same perspective as that of fasting and the kiss.

When Peter instructed, “Honor the king,” he was not binding the monarchical form of government upon people for all time. But, lest Christianity be considered as an anti-governmental force, disciples were urged to accept the political system in which they were called. Through the evolving of circumstances, however, we may rightly help to change or remove the officials over us. If Jesus had called for upheaval of tyrannical government, it would have marked him and his religion as revolutionary, and bent on social reform rather than individual salvation.

Now, let’s get back to our thoughts about slavery. Paul insists, “Do not become slaves of men” (1 Cor. 7:23). If it is wrong for me to become a slave, it is wrong for me to enslave someone

else. No amount of legalism or rationalization can harmonize the Golden Rule with slavery, for no person wants to be enslaved. Through the working of the Golden Rule, this great social change was to evolve. To have demanded that social change as a prerequisite of accepting Christ would have made for upheaval and revolution which would have been detrimental to the cause.

God wants change in all individuals and societies. He does not, however, demand or expect that change to be an immediate leap from depravity to perfection. He accepts the individual, as he is, where he is, when that person resolves to follow the Savior to a nobler life and commits himself to that life of faith and obedience. From then and there, he will evolve and grow, and outgrow many things of ignorance and immaturity that were once overlooked by a merciful Savior. Conduct of a mature disciple is not demanded of a newborn in Christ; neither is infancy an acceptable standard for those who have had time and opportunity to grow toward the fullness of Christ.

The foregoing discussion allows for flexibility in the requirements and restrictions of Jesus. The legalist cannot tolerate flexibility. But the legalist can still feel free to buy a slave for himself!

CHAPTER 10

I AM THAT DISCIPLE

Did Jesus really love John more than the other disciples? Since John identifies himself as “that disciple whom Jesus loved,” it is understood generally that Jesus loved him most. But I am raising 8 questions about that, and I am being bold to assert that I am that disciple whom Jesus loved also.

As the author of the fourth Gospel, we see John to be a man of such modesty that he never mentions his own name even though he was much involved in the events narrated. He includes himself as “the other disciple” a number of times. He was reclining close to Jesus’ breast at the Passover supper (John 13:23), but that would seem to be more an expression of John’s love for Jesus than of Jesus’ love for John. None of the other writers of sacred history point out John as being specially loved by Jesus. Were they unaware of such partiality or just too jealous to mention it?

Concerning Jesus’ indiscriminate love for all of the disciples, John wrote of him “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” — or, to the uttermost (John 13:1). In view of all this, how could John be so shameless as to claim to be Jesus’ favorite without his displaying unbecoming egotism and without tempting the other disciples to become alienated by jealousy?

Five times this unpretentious man identified himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. This seems to be a distinction that John claimed for himself long after the events of the narrative took place. As the years passed, he could relive by memory those experiences with his beloved Jesus. Perhaps, he remembered with some embarrassment his lack of faith, his faltering support, and his reluctance to express his love to him while with him. After a loved one is taken from us, we are inclined to recall our experiences together and to reproach ourselves for not having been kinder, more expressive of love, and more considerate of that loved one. The fact that the departed loved us in spite of our faults becomes more evident, causing us to contemplate deeply, “How he/she loved me!” So, in his own feelings of unworthiness, after witnessing and reflecting on the ultimate demonstration of Jesus’ love for all sinners, John could think of Jesus as giving himself for him in a very personal way. Then in humble praise of him who loved such an unworthy person, John could exalt Jesus by declaring, “I am the disciple whom Jesus loved!” There was nothing exclusive about such a claim.

When I reflect on how he loved me individually when I was a helpless offender, I also can declare, “I am that disciple whom Jesus loved!” So can you.

CHAPTER 11

WHEN PEOPLE DISAGREE

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Our favorite clichés and expressions are repeated because they seem to be such clear presentations of truth. One of my assertions repeated so often and with such confidence goes like this: When two people disagree on something, one may be right and the other wrong, or they may both be wrong, but both certainly cannot be right.

But how wrong I was! Legally, both could not be right. I was a legalist. Paul declared that believers may disagree on meats and days and both be right. God welcomes and upholds both and makes them to stand (Rom. 14:14).

Total agreement on all points is improbable, if not impossible. It is not so much a matter of when or if people disagree as it is a recognition of the fact that we all differ. How may differing people live in accord? Although that question may seem to hold a contradiction, the Scriptures encourage the practice. Let us review some helpful Scriptural examples of how harmony was produced or maintained in spite of disagreements.

Congregational Disagreement

There was disagreement about how a work was being done in the very first congregation. This was not a doctrinal issue, but discrimination was being charged in their caring for the widows (Acts 6). Any suspicion about the integrity of the apostles was erased by the respect and trust they showed toward the ones who brought the complaint. The apostles did not become defensive in protecting their pride or position. They did not make an issue out of it and let it develop into a power struggle. They simply turned the distribution program over to those who brought this just complaint. It was settled peacefully and beautifully, and we hear no more about it. Will not a similar loving spirit work today also in helping to work together in spite of disagreements?

Personal Dispute

Paul and Barnabas had a “sharp contention” concerning Mark (Acts 15:36f) . Here were personality clashes and difference in judgment with no doctrinal matter involved. Although they disagreed, they still loved, accepted, and respected each other. They could have felt compelled to demonstrate that saints can always get along together, and have made their tour together. But that could easily have made them miserable and ineffective and not really have proved their point. They were wise enough to put some distance between themselves so each could work more effectively. They did not let their difference be a cause of distrust, suspicion, disfellowship, or a campaign of slander against each other.

We need not serve in the same programs, congregations, or “brotherhoods” (a euphemism for “sects”!) in order to be in fellowship. Our fellowship is in Christ, not programs and congregations. Persons in the same congregation hold differing convictions and clash in personalities. They can be in harmony or disunited according to their spirit. A sectarian spirit may prevail between them in the same congregation, while an irenic spirit may cement the fellowship with those in other congregations even though they “rub us the wrong way.”

Doctrinal Differences

Now we come to the conditions of salvation, a doctrinal issue of greatest importance. “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). A conference met in Jerusalem to determine if this doctrinal conviction could be bound as a part of the Gospel. The Gospel must not be compromised, for it is the message of salvation.

The conference rendered the verdict that nothing of the Law of Moses could be bound as a condition of salvation. However, this conclusion by no means hinted that the Jewish disciples would discontinue circumcision and other ordinances of the Law. Judean believers continued to keep the Law (Acts 21:17-26).

Convictions about rituals, methods, and theories were not a basis or condition of becoming a disciple as long as they obeyed the Gospel. There is not even an example of an explanation of the meaning of baptism being made to the candidate. It was explained to disciples later (Rom. 6:3f; Col. 2:1 if). These different convictions and practices of the Jewish and Gentile saints were not allowed to hinder their acceptance and fellowship in Christ.

Personal Scruples

In this last segment, we will consider differing convictions and practices relating to our lives as disciples. Whereas, the Gospel is the faith, these scruples are matters of faith, such as are discussed by Paul in Romans 14. Their disagreement was about eating foods and observing days. Ours will be other issues of like principle.

Paul calls upon disagreeing parties, not to make forced conformity, but to accept and respect each other. The meat eater must not despise, disdain, or look down his nose at the scrupulous vegetarian, and the vegetarian must not condemn the meat eater. We have not learned that lesson yet, for the more cautious brother condemns the more accepting brother, and, although the more liberal does not condemn the more conservative, he looks condescendingly and impatiently upon him. If this spirit prevails, then both are wrong, not because of differing convictions, but because of lack of love and respect for each other as brothers.

Paul tantalizes the legalist by not telling which side was right in the matter of eating foods and keeping days! Instead, he shames us, “Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Master is able to make him stand.” On both sides of the issues people were serving and honoring the Lord sincerely. Let the Lord accept or reject. “Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you,

why do you despise your brother? Each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:10f). Fellowship must not be endangered by our efforts to decide or bind scruples.

Our sustained fellowship is not based on conformity, uniformity of convictions, or having all the right answers. It is based on being in Christ and our accepting one another as Christ accepts us. He accepted, and continues to accept, us while we are unloving, ignorant, misdirected, and immature sinners. Likewise, we must accept each other.

A disciple forfeits his fellowship only (a) when he denies any element of the Gospel, for that denies His saving power; (b) when he becomes impenitent and hardened in immoral conduct, and/or (c) when he develops a factious spirit.

No inspired writer advises disciples to leave a congregation, even the problem-filled churches in Corinth and Laodicea, in order to start a “true” or “loyal” church. They were called upon to reform, and that must be constant in each and every congregation. The Ephesians did not feel compelled to denounce or to disfellowship Corinth or Laodicea, as though one church can disfellowship another.

You are not held accountable for the sins of your brother if you disavow his sins. He cannot violate your conscience, for only you can do that.

Do different convictions and practices matter at all? Some, like circumcision, days, and meats do not, unless we try to bind our scruples about them on others. Some may be sinful, though their status is debated by sincere and studious saints. Different convictions on debatable issues may be held without disrupting fellowship. Each person answers only to his own conscience and to God. We are forbidden to judge our brother in this area.

May, or should, one discuss his convictions with another with whom he disagrees? Certainly! It becomes imperative to do so if he considers it to be life-threatening. But he must do this with love and respect without condemning his brother. We are not called upon to violate our convictions, but we are obligated to let others live by their own convictions even as we live by ours.

We can disagree without being sectarian. We may also meet and work separately while still recognizing brotherhood and oneness in the body of Christ. Sectarianism is a spirit, an attitude, which allows us to judge and condemn. We all disagree with other persons in our local fellowships without becoming judgmental and divisive. Why can't we extend that fellowship out beyond our own assemblies and buildings to others in Christ with whom we hold disagreements?

Even though other brothers are in error in some matters, we must not reject them, for the only brothers we have are brothers in error!

CHAPTER 12

IS UNITY BASED ON SEVEN DOCTRINES?

According to numerous lessons that I have heard and read, our platform for Christian unity has seven doctrinal planks; namely, one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God (Eph. 4:4). Unity, it is proposed, is based on our agreement on these seven doctrines. I question that interpretation and assert that such an approach not only reveals a part of our problem but also that it hinders the creation of the unity which we are called upon to maintain.

If our unity is dependent upon these seven items of faith, then conformity of belief immediately becomes the issue. All must believe these “seven ones” alike before we can be one. It makes doctrinal interpretations, rather than Christ, the focus of unity. It is the trap of unity by conformity in which our people have become ensnared. Having stumbled into the pitfall, we have struggled and fought against one another in the shadows of the pit instead of climbing toward the Light where the unity is centered.

Let me illustrate what I mean by using just one of the “seven ones” as an example. “There is one Lord.” That is a fact, a teaching that we can and must accept in simplicity. But since it is made to be a basis of our unity, we must be sure that we understand all the details. So we begin to interpret what “one Lord” means. Numerous questions begin to be raised. What was the nature of the one Lord? Was Jesus always God? The first six Ecumenical Councils, meeting from 325 A.D. to 680 A.D., debated this question. Finally, they declared that He was “born of the Father before all ages,” an interpretation that I question. Arius, who contended that He became the Son of God in time, was denounced and excommunicated. To have doctrinal unity, there can be no toleration of nonconformity of belief!

Must a person such as I was — a teenager from the cotton patch — have the correct answers to the questions about the one Lord, which the scholars and councils wrestled with for centuries? After forty years in the pulpit, I still don’t know all the answers about the one Lord. Fortunately, my salvation in Christ and His one body is not dependent upon knowing all the answers. The same can be said about the other six planks in the doctrinal platform of unity.

Are doctrines/teachings of any importance? Certainly. If we were not taught certain teachings, we could not know Christ and receive salvation. The question being raised is about the teachings that we are to be taught. A doctrine/teaching has no saving power. There are no efficacious tenets of faith to credalize. Jesus is our creed. He is the Gospel, the Good News. Generally, we think of the gospel being a message and, in a sense, it is a message, but its details of doctrine are good news only as they direct us to Christ. There is no saving power in the teachings of Jesus’ divinity, atonement, resurrection, ascension, and return. The saving power is in Jesus, and these teachings are valuable only as they lead us to Him. A full understanding of all facets of these teachings is not necessary for salvation and unity in the one body. To deny any one of those

teachings/facts, however, is to disclaim the saving power of Jesus. For example, belief in His resurrection cannot save us, but denial of it invalidates the entire basis of His claim to be our savior.

In apostolic times, the person who admitted belief in Jesus as the Christ, repented of his sins, and was baptized was initiated into Christ and His one body. Here is the point of unity, the unity of the Spirit: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13).

According to inspired history, to qualify to be united with all the saved in Christ and His one body, no person was questioned before his baptism to determine if he knew the answers to all questions about the son-ship, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and return of Jesus, or of the seven ones. Salvation and unity were not based on these doctrinal details but on a simple belief in, and acceptance of, Jesus as the Savior. Neither were candidates for baptism and the one body questioned about their understanding concerning women teachers, demon possession, healing, church organization, acts of worship, eating in the church building, or any other doctrinal or practical matter. These were not the basis of acceptance.

It is my understanding that Paul, in Ephesians 4:4, is urging that disciples maintain the unity which the Spirit created in Christ. They had no reason to be segmented as though they were led by different spirits, through different baptisms, to be in different bodies, with different hopes built on different systems of faith, directed by different lords and gods. There was no reason to justify their being divided.

They had different gifts for practical function, but that diversity only strengthened the united working of the body and helped them “to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and up-builds itself in love” (4:16). The unity was in their relationship in Christ; the diversity was in gifts and functions.

I knew a disciple who thought it was sinful to eat pork. Another person believed his departed wife returned in the form of a bird. One Christian told me that he had died and then returned to his body. Another says God spoke to him audibly telling him the day, month, and year when Jesus is to return. These four people are all in the one body. How shall we react to these unorthodox claims and beliefs? Must we expose them and take steps, as were taken against Arius, to denounce and excommunicate/disfellowship them? If unity is based on conformity of teaching/belief, then we must become the judges to denounce them. But that becomes sectarian in spirit and forces divisions over trivial matters. Paul calls for the spirit that will maintain unity — “lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:13). A loving spirit enables us to bear with those in Christ who differ in doctrinal and practical matters.

Really, we are not so intolerant of different beliefs as we are of diverse practices. In every fellowship there are individuals who hold some strange beliefs. Usually, we disregard them. But if someone practices something unorthodox, that becomes a big deal. A person won't get much attention for admitting belief in demon possession, but he stirs all kinds of excitement and opposition if he tries to exorcise demons. He gets little notice for belief in gifts of the Spirit but

is disfellowshipped for tongue speaking. We all say “amen” when one prays in the assembly for God to raise up the sick, but we denounce the person who claims he raised up a sick person through God’s power by prayer.

The New Testament writings lead us into accepting faith in Jesus. Then they direct the disciple into spiritual growth and endurance. They call for our responsible relationship with God and all men. Imperfect understanding of all the teachings may hinder the progress of the disciple, but God’s grace is not withheld due to lack of full understanding. Neither must we have all the doctrinal answers to be in the one body and to maintain the unity of the Spirit. Divisive sectarianism is a spirit, an attitude, rather than a lacking of uniformity of doctrinal scruples.

The concept of unity by doctrinal conformity is a part of legalism which demands that we be legally correct in all points in order to attain salvation and unity. The “seven ones” and all other Scriptural teachings nurture unity, but the unity is based on being in Christ rather than agreeing on all doctrinal interpretations.

CHAPTER 13

OUR SEVEN SACRAMENTS

In our eagerness to be seen as the scripturally produced, undenominational church, we in the Church of Christ have insisted that we are neither Catholic, Protestant, nor Jewish. While it is good to be classified as neither of these, it is unrealistic to claim that we have no theological inheritance from any of those sources.

Just as we can see marks of the parents in the child, we can identify various theological concepts formulated by our predecessors marking the Church of Christ. Perhaps, we are more kin to the Catholics than to the Protestants. One of the most influential non-scriptural concepts affecting our fundamental beliefs is sacramentalism. The Catholic theologians, who devised the sacramental system, teach that a sacrament is a visible ritual or ceremony through which grace is poured into the soul. They have instituted seven of them: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, Penance, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Extreme Unction.

Except in unusual circumstances, these ceremonies can be performed only by the clergy. The sacramental system binds the individual to the church, clergy, and hierarchy, for no spiritual grace can come outside the system. The development of the system of the sacraments established the power of the papacy and reinforced the authoritarian stance of the church. Only the church had the sacraments which were the avenues to God and salvation. The powers of excommunication and interdiction, which could withhold the sacraments from individuals and nations, demanded complete subservience to the one true church. All teaching and learning had to support this system or be denounced as heretical. It was a closed system allowing little individual freedom but offering security to all who had the spirit of bondage.

Sacramentalism is a reinforcement of legalism. Legal technicalities are emphasized in demanding that, to be effective rather than damning, the ritual must be done in a precise manner, by the right person, at the right time, etc. When we mix up the sequence of numbers in dialing the telephone, the call does not go through; likewise, one cannot get through to grace while ignoring the technicalities of the ritual. Following steps and patterns make it more a system of law keeping and less a saving relationship with Christ.

Sacramental religion is built upon the concept of infused grace, goodness, and righteousness. It is something accomplished in us which makes us good, pure, and Christ-like. A ritual does it! It ignores that righteousness is imputed on the basis of faith rather than infused through our ability to keep ceremonies and laws. It is works oriented.

Our sacramental concept alters the purpose and meaning of our performance. It makes our activities an effort to please God and to gain his grace through keeping legal details of commands. And it makes us fearfully cautious lest we slip up on some technicality which would make our sincere effort bring a curse instead of grace.

In the Church of Christ we have transferred much of the sacramental concept into our purposes for participation in assemblies, singing, praying, teaching, giving, communing, and baptism. We might say that these have become the seven sacraments of the Church of Christ. They have become the rigidly controlled route to heaven, binding the disciple to the one true church and its overseers. Being tediously correct in each detail of performance is of high importance lest we fall short of the grace of God and arouse his displeasure. Anyone who questions or seeks to change any of these well-defined steps or patterns is looked upon as a troublemaker and, if he persists, he is dealt with as a heretic. When you accept an authoritarian religion, only that one way can be right!

Now, let us look at the seven sacraments of the Church of Christ to see how our inheritance has prevailed in our thought and practice.

1. In assemblies, “let all things be done for edification.” God left it to us to conduct meetings that are relevant to the needs of those present so as to up-build them. The value derived from assemblies is the strength gained from them. Traditionally, that purpose and practice has been altered among us. Now assemblies emphasize worship done through rituals in specific detail so as to fulfill commands, please God, and thus be made righteous. Thus grace comes through our ceremonial works rather than our growing in grace through strengthening the inward man.
2. Singing is for the purpose of teaching and admonishing one another — a horizontal outreach. But we have sold ourselves on the idea that we sing because we are commanded to as a ritual of worship which, when done technically right, pleases God, who then checks us as righteous — a vertical approach. But if anyone attempts to teach and edify by means of a quartet or by using a guitar, the blessing is withheld and the worshippers are condemned. The value of the performance is in doing it as required rather than in the good that is accomplished in us.
3. Because we are “commanded” to pray, we must be sure to keep that command correctly so that we will be in the good grace of the Father, according to our sacramentalism. The sincere prayer is in vain if one forgets to say “in Jesus’ name” or if it is voiced by a woman in the presence of men! Such emphasizes the detail rather than the disciple being in a living, reconciled, communicating relationship with God.
4. Since we have classified teaching as an “act of worship” to please God, we have concluded that its performance satisfies God and credits a blessing whether it is relevant and uplifting or not. Even though the subject matter is learned, however, according to our contention, a blessing is not forthcoming if the teacher is of the wrong gender. The specifics of the performance must be correct for a sacrament to bless the soul!
5. Having made the giving of finances an “act of worship” also, we have given it sacramental value, if the specifics are met. But the blessing of giving is invalidated if it is not given on the first day of the week, or if the disciple has used his money to help others and has none left to “lay by in store” in the collection to support the system. He has robbed God of tithes and offerings! His offering must be “given to God” in worship rather than being used individually for the benefit of man.
6. What is the value of the Lord’s Supper? Its value is in causing us to remember and declare the basis of our hope. Participation blesses us only in what it causes us to think. If our faith has not been reaffirmed and strengthened by this object lesson, then the ritual

is fruitless. Sacramentalism expects mystical strength from the symbolic flesh and blood eaten and drunk just because Jesus said to do it. Such a concept allows one to “take communion” for a blessing and to be judged righteous without truly communing. It becomes a sort of magic ceremony that is effective when we work the right combination of unleavened bread, unfermented grape juice, the bread first, the cup second, separate prayers for each, separate serving, with no singing during the eating and the drinking, etc. But regardless of how vividly our participation might renew our memory and revive our faith, it becomes damning if any of the details are changed. That is sacramentalism in the truest sense of the definition.

7. Now, we consider baptism, our most emphasized sacrament. Isn't baptism a sacrament, a ritual or ceremony through which grace is conferred to the soul? Doesn't it change the soul from death to life, affecting a new birth in us? Most of our people have given affirmative answers to those questions. We have taught, and believe in, baptismal regeneration — that in baptism, divine action transforms and regenerates the soul in a new birth process.

Baptism symbolizes, finalizes, and confirms the change that the convert has undergone rather than accomplishing the change. The conversion process is similar to the birth process. There is an insemination, a conception, a period of gestation, and a parturition or birth. The birth finalizes what has been taking place in the womb rather than being the cause of the life developing process. The parturition is necessary, but not the cause of life. Life is not conferred, infused, or poured into the fetus at birth, yet the life-giving process is incomplete without it.

In similar manner, a sinner hears the gospel, develops faith, decides to submit his life to God in Christ, begins a process of reformation, and is baptized. Although baptism is necessary in this procedure, it is not the cause of life. Baptism confirms what has already been taking place in the person. The regeneration is a process finalized by baptism instead of being produced by it.

At the completion of this birth process, righteousness is imputed rather than the person having been made righteous by an act of grace in response to a sacramental rite. The person is pronounced innocent, not made innocent by an act of God. The convert is accounted as being a new person rather than a new soul being poured into the body.

Baptism imparts grace no more than belief, repentance, or confession does. These are all necessary for salvation. When baptism is said to save us, a part of the saving process is being put for the whole. That is a literary device known as a metonymy when the part is used for the whole.

The above is in harmony with the Baptist view: “Baptism, as taught in the New Testament, is a picture of death and burial to sin and resurrection to a new life, a picture of what has already taken place in the heart, not the means by which the spiritual change is wrought.” (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, V.1, p. 387). That is a scriptural and Protestant teaching which avoids the sacramental pitfall of Catholicism.

We see that this subject involves our understanding of how a person is justified at conversion and throughout life. Does God justify a man by accounting him innocent or by making him

innocent? Is a man justified by having Christ's perfection given to his credit, or by having Christ's perfection put into his heart? Does God account us as regenerated because of our faith and commitment, or are we justified by renovation within the heart produced by the Spirit? Does God accept us while sinners by accounting Jesus' goodness to us, or must he change us into persons pleasing to him to be accepted?

The latter choice of each of these questions attributes a sacramental effect to baptism through which a person is made clean, holy, and regenerated. It calls for justification by God's work of grace in man rather than justification by God's work of grace in Christ. This is a part of works salvation in which a person must cease to be a sinner before he is justified, instead of the sinner being justified by faith.

Since ours is a religion of purpose, it is no small thing that we have changed the purpose for our activities in our assemblies. Our expectation of imparted blessing as a result of our works has allowed us to neglect the area of sharing with, and up-building, each other in mutual edification. Countless disciples have fainted and fallen out because the spiritual diet consisted so much of learning doctrinal and practical correctness instead of meeting their daily needs. The chief security we have felt has been in performing rituals of "worship services" with increasing frequency, but we have never been sure if we are performing enough. By such discouraging efforts to achieve the grace of God, we seem to forget that salvation is free and that righteousness is a gift.

When we become able to abandon the sacramental ideas that we have inherited, we may then take more thought to minister to the needs of the body, both in the assemblies and in daily life, through caring service rather than rituals.

CHAPTER 14

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

The introduction of instrumental music in worship was one of the issues which caused us to distinguish ourselves in a separate body; hence, *a cappella* singing has been one of our identifying marks. To deal favorably with this subject in the Church of Christ is to stir emotions and to labor against strong conditioning.

As I was growing up, any “gospel meeting” included a lesson against the use of instrumental accompaniment in singing. Countless other lessons in the regular teaching program had points against such music thrown in. This was in reaction to the bitter disputes which had resulted in division, all of which was still fresh in the minds of that generation.

Now, much of the old animosity has subsided. The great grandchildren of the division cannot understand how such a matter could have been allowed to divide. So, this generation hears little teaching on the subject because there is lack of conviction against its use.

Condemnation of the use of instruments in worship has been one of the emphatic points of my “gospel” also. Relaxation of my former conviction about it has not come out of my desire, for I have had strong prejudice against its use, and I still am restrained by years of emotional conditioning. My change has come through my conviction that I must be intellectually honest in my approach to the scriptures. In this effort, I shall set forth some points that I formerly overlooked or evaded in my dealing with the subject.

For best effect, this essay should follow Chapters 14, 15, and 16 of my book, *Free In Christ*. Please read those chapters before you read this in order to better understand the content of this chapter.

Chapter 14 calls attention to the fact that the whole life of one committed to Christ is an offering / service / worship. Such a person is an indwelt temple whose whole function is a worship offering through acts of devotion addressed to God, through acts of service to his fellowman, and through all the more mundane activities of daily living which are necessary to the upkeep of the temple. These are all parts of the whole-life daily offering. One does not go to worship, but the whole life is worship.

In Chapter 15 we sought to emphasize that we do not serve a God who binds arbitrary whims, demanding exactness of his children, in order to satisfy a divine ego problem. We have turned our assemblies into vertical services in an effort to obey detailed commands rather than to accomplish the intended purpose of edifying disciples.

Then, in Chapter 16, we observed that persons gave homage to Jesus in ways that he had not authorized, specified, commanded, or even suggested. He did not reject this devotional worship but, rather, he openly accepted it and called attention to their loving, spontaneous acts.

After writing those chapters and subjecting them to the scrutiny of a private study group, I went through my old lessons, tracts, and other literature on the subject and made a list of the texts and arguments generally used against the use of instrumental music. Our study group found little relevance of those texts and arguments to the subject. For the remainder of this essay, I shall deal briefly with the chief texts and main points.

Proof-Texts

2 Peter 1:3: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness...” We have interpreted this to say that the *scriptures* have guided us into all matters of worship and, since they do not guide us to use instrumental music, it is sinful. Does Peter really say, or imply, that? The things that pertain to life and godliness are far more than “worship services.” These include all the blessings received “through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence” — his “precious and very great promises.”

2 John 9: “Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son.” The traditional argument is that, since Jesus did not authorize instrumental music in worship specifically, it is not the doctrine/teaching of Christ; hence, the person who uses it has not God.

Such an explanation ignores the contextual meaning of that passage inexcusably. Much of John’s writing warns against the prevalent Gnostic teaching/doctrine that Jesus did not come in the flesh. In verse 7, John identifies the offenders as “men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.” This doctrine/teaching of/concerning Christ is basic to the gospel. To deny that he became flesh is to undermine the basis of the gospel without which no one could have Christ or God. It is inexcusable to apply this text to the use of music.

Revelation 22:18-19: This passage warns against adding to the prophecies given to John and recorded in *Revelation*. It takes some artistic twisting to make that apply to instrumental music.

Galatians 1:6-9: I have quoted this (and the above passages) hundreds of times in an effort to condemn the use of mechanical music in worship. But in so doing, I was not only misusing the passage, but I was also jeopardizing myself by making a legal system out of the gospel, which very thing this text warns against! Even if instrumental music were wrong, its acceptance would not be a perversion of the gospel, or the preaching of another gospel. But efforts of justification by keeping details of law is such a violation.

1 Corinthians 4:6: Here Paul writes, “I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us to live according to scripture, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.”

Here Paul is dealing with the party spirit which was dividing the church in Corinth. Paul put his and Apollos’ names in place of the guilty, divisive leaders and applied the lesson in a figure as though they were the guilty ones. He did this to teach them not to violate the scriptural

admonitions to be united in purpose and judgment. It is farfetched to make this apply to practices of worship.

Matthew 15:9: Jesus was confronted about his violation of traditions. He responded by asking them why they kept tradition which evaded law in preference to keeping the law. He applied Isaiah 29:13 to them, “In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.” Continuing his comment, he explained that the heart is defiled by impure motives rather than by violation of traditions. It is difficult to see how this can apply to singing aided by instrumental accompaniment.

Colossians 3:17: To limit the concept of worship, this passage has been used countless times: “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.” I once applied that to our exercises in the assembly, and there alone, as a demand for specific authority for each activity. However, the context is about the kind of life we should lead, with special directives to wives, husbands, children, and slaves. Then, in verse 23, he sums up, “Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men.” He calls for whole-life honoring of our Lord as we wear his name. This is the context for instructions to teach and admonish one another in song. Compare Ephesians 5:15-20. Assemblies are not under consideration here.

Romans 14:23; 10:17: We have also coupled “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” with “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” in a misapplication of scripture to limit the concept of worship. In the first passage, Paul is speaking of a person violating his conscience by going against his conviction. In the second, Paul is arguing for the acceptance of the Gentiles and the universality of the offer of salvation proved by the fact that Christ sent his message and messengers to the Gentiles. Worship is not under consideration in those texts. We must not (mis)apply this to Abel’s offering.

2 Timothy 3:16-17: To see the context to this much quoted proof-text, let us begin with verse 14: “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired of God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Let us examine this passage a bit. It was directed to a “man of God,” an evangelist who spoke for God, not to all generally. The scriptures were to make him complete, equipped efficiently for every good work, not for worship as we traditionally apply it. These scriptures were the Old Testament writings which he had been taught from childhood, not the New Testament writings, which were nonexistent in his childhood and still very incomplete and uncollected. To say that this passage anticipates the completion of the New Testament scriptures puts them out of reach of Timothy. How, then can this be a proof-text against the use of instruments in praise of God?

A Call for Authority

Our great stress has been on the need for authority for all that we do *in worship*. We have emphasized the ritualistic worship aspect. But where is our authority for segmenting worship from our daily and constant offering of self in whole-life worship? Where do the scriptures say that our assemblies for edification are to be changed into “worship services”? Where do we read such expressions as “go to worship” (regarding Christian assemblies), “begin our worship service,” “after the worship is over,” and “missing worship”? Where do we read of the “five acts of worship” or a list of things specified for our assemblies? Where do we find a limitation of the means whereby we may praise God and edify one another, either in or out of assemblies? Has our privilege of praise been granted in only a few activities? Do we worship only in rituals? Are assemblies for the purpose of performance of rituals?

The Privilege of Praise

In various ages we see persons offering unspecified acts of worship that were accepted. All people of all ages have been granted *the privilege of praise*. God has expected, and accepted, sincere worship even from those who had no direct or written revelation. He has looked upon the heart of the worshipper more than the technique of his praise. Men have been permitted to worship in methods that expressed the feeling of the worshipper’s heart so long as it accomplished the purpose of praise while avoiding sacramental and idolatrous concepts and the veneration of objects. Let us look at some Biblical precedents that give basis to this premise. We usually overlook or misapply these.

There is no indication that God gave instruction to Cain and Abel about their worship. I, like many others, have long misapplied a combination of Hebrews 11:4 and Romans 10:17 in an effort to prove that Abel’s faith was by hearing instructions from God. But what the *Hebrews* passage reveals is that Abel, who was already righteous and a man of faith, offered a more acceptable sacrifice: “By faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts....” God bore witness to his faith and righteousness by accepting his offering.

Cain, it is implied by antithesis, was neither faithful nor righteous; hence, his rejection was due to the condition of his heart rather than what he offered. God bore witness of this by rejecting his offering. John urges that we be not “like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous” (1 John 3:12). By his subsequent actions, Cain demonstrated what God had witnessed as true, that his heart was evil. There is no record of God ever rejecting humble and sincere efforts of devotion and praise of anyone.

When it is stated that, in the time of Enosh, “men began to call upon the name of the Lord” (Gen. 4:26), and when Abram “built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord” (Gen. 12:8), there is no indication that they did this in response to a command or specification of God.

Jacob took the stone he had used for a pillow, made an altar of it, and poured an offering of oil on it in spontaneous worship without “authority” from God (Gen. 28:18).

Without instruction from the Law of Moses, the Jews had added wine to the Passover (Luke 22:14-18; Matt. 26:26-28), dancing before the Lord (2 Sam. 6:12f; Psalms 149:3), and the entire synagogue service. They were not condemned for those unauthorized activities of worship. They were privileged to serve/worship in those ways.

Nadab and Abihu were killed for offering strange fire, but they had been given complete instructions which they defied. In the other examples above, except for Cain, there was sincere effort to honor God rather than to defy him (Lev.10: 1f; 16: 12). Wholesale abandonment of God's specified law, rather than an innocent infraction concerning the Ark of the Covenant, brought Uzzah's death (2 Sam. 6:3).

Israel, in the time of Samuel, "gathered together at Mizpah, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord" (1 Sam. 7:6) as an act of homage. Even though the action was unspecified, it brought no disapproval from God.

In Chapter 1 of *Romans*, Paul declared that the Gentiles were without excuse because, having known God as revealed in nature, they "did not honor him as God or give thanks to him..." (v. 21), "and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (v. 25). How could they have properly honored God, given thanks of praise to him, and worshipped and served the Creator since they had no revealed law? *God has given all men, even the uninstructed, the privilege of praise and worship!*

Paul commended the Athenians, declaring, "For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23). Although their understanding of God's nature was very limited and they knew not any code of laws from him, they had the privilege of worship. Paul did not condemn their devotion to the "unknown god" but enlarged on their understanding about his identity.

In the New Covenant writings we see numerous "unauthorized" actions of worship which were undemanded, unrehearsed, spontaneous, and extravagant; yet they met with approval. Although these were not done in Christian assemblies, they were expressions of approved worship and they illustrate the principle of acceptable worship.

The Wise Men offered birthday gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus without instructions to do so (Matt. 2:1-11). It was their privilege to praise through that means.

Mary was neither rebuked for anointing Jesus without authorization nor considered presumptuous in using nard without instruction to do so (John 12:1f).

The sinful woman was not commanded to wash Jesus' feet with tears nor to use her hair as a towel (Luke 7:36-50). She was exercising her privilege of spontaneous worship.

According to the rules we have made, Paul sinned in cutting his hair in a ritual relating to a vow (Acts 21:23-26) and when he purified himself ritually and arranged for an offering in accordance

to the Law of Moses. We would also have to censor the Judean disciples who “are all zealous for the law” (Acts 21:23-26).

With the sacrifice of Jesus, God did not suddenly come to hate the worship rituals of the law. Disciples could still keep those rituals of worship so long as they did not seek justification by that means. Neither should we assume that, when Jesus died, God began to hate praise which was accompanied by instruments, which thing he had accepted for centuries.

We have contended that the silence of the New Covenant writers on the subject of instrumental accompaniment is evidence that God does not want us to use it. However, since singing was commonly accompanied in all societies, and since the Jews had used it under the law, the failure to mention it would only seem to indicate that it was of no matter with God.

In view of these examples, can we not say definitely that God has given the privilege of praise to all men at all times? Can we not agree that men offered acceptable worship without specific command or instruction in various instances? Have we not been authorized to glorify him in all things that we do and granted the privilege of using methods which utilize our talents in expressing it — through spiritually oriented art, drama, songs, literature, jewelry, plaques, bumper stickers, signs, and architecture?

The Law of Exclusion

Traditionally, we have argued strongly that, when a thing is specifically authorized, it excludes everything not specified. We have called that “the law of exclusion.” As with most man-made rules, we have applied that one very selectively. If we let someone else select the activities to be measured by our rule, we are devastated. Let me list some illustrations which should convince us that we don’t take our “law of exclusion” seriously.

1. Since the holy kiss is specifically “commanded” five times, that would eliminate the handshake as a greeting.
2. James tells the sick person to call the elders to his bedside. That would make it sinful to call the preacher or the doctor. They were told to use oil, not Ben Gay or penicillin, which would have been excluded by silence.
3. It is specified that elders were ordained with fasting, prayer, and laying on of hands. That would eliminate any other method, but I have never seen the exemplified method used!
4. In the assemblies of disciples, “let all things be done for edification” (1 Cor. 14:25). That chapter is emphatic on this point. Are we right in making it a “worship service” instead?
5. Applying the rule to our actions, when we baptize someone with the baptizer stating the purpose “for the remission of sins,” does that not exclude by silence all unspecified purposes — to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, to be born again, to be in the one body, etc.? (Actually, a man cannot baptize another for the remission of sins. He is told to baptize into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but not for the remission of sins. The person being baptized is

submitting to it for the remission of sins, but the purpose is in the one being baptized, not the baptizer. The baptizer might have that in mind, or say it, but it is ineffective unless it is the purpose of the one being baptized.)

6. In the communion, since the cup is specified, does that make the non-specified glass improper for use?

7. Women are excluded by the law of silence from participation in the Lord's Supper!

8. An evangelist was directed to appoint elders (Titus 1:5). In the only example of appointment, elders were appointed by evangelists (Acts 14:19-23). No church is instructed to appoint elders. Does that make appointment by persons other than evangelists unauthorized and illegal?

9. Paul specifies that the evangelist, Timothy, was to try offending elders and to rebuke those who would persist in sin (1 Tim. 5:17-20). Such a specification would exclude anyone besides an evangelist for that task.

These illustrations clearly reveal that we do not believe or follow our own formulated rule that, when a thing is authorized, it excludes every thing not specified. We use the law of exclusion only when it serves our prejudicial purpose.

Our old slogan insists that "we speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent." From this approach we have developed another law — "the law of silence." By this law we forbid anything that the scriptures do not authorize by command or example. This law overlaps the law of exclusion. Both laws are devices to enforce legal concepts. They are efforts to enforce ritualistic details more than to fulfill God's purposes.

Our first standard example relates to the Lord's Supper. Since bread and fruit of the vine are specified, milk and cookies are eliminated by the laws of silence and exclusion. If we disregard these two laws, we are warned, we could add/substitute milk and cookies to the Lord's Supper.

Most churches do not follow our laws of exclusion and silence, yet I have never heard of one adding milk and cookies to the Lord's Supper. Have you? That dulls the edge of our argument a bit. Why do none add other elements in the communion since they operate free of our two "laws"? It is because they seek to accomplish the purpose of the Lord's Supper, and they can see that milk, cookies, etc. have no representational value to remind one of the basis of our atonement and the oneness of the body.

There are those, however, in countries where rice is the staple food and bread is unknown, who have used rice instead of bread. Rice, in such a culture, would mean the same thing to them that bread means to us; hence, its representational value would fulfill the purpose of the Lord's Supper. The purpose of the Supper to remind us is to be accomplished rather than the performing of a ritual "well-pleasing in Thy sight." To demand the importing of matzos for the Supper would be to place sacramental value on the bread.

Nothing that would be venerated, or promote idolatrous or sacramental concepts, should be associated with the Lord's Supper or any other activity, either in or out of our assemblies.

Silence of the Scriptures

We have tried to reinforce "the law of silence" by use of the illustration of Noah building the ark. We have said that God's instruction to use gopher wood would have made it sinful to use any other kind of wood. Here our legalistic inclination becomes evident again.

Some scholars are suggesting that the mysterious *gopher* wood was a generic designation. That would really spoil our argument!

When God instructed Noah to make the ark of gopher wood, did he specify gopher wood (1) in order to test Noah's faith, (2) to test his willingness and ability to follow instructions, (3) because God hates all other kinds of wood, or (4) because it was the most practical material for the purpose?

Because of our legalistic orientation, we have usually gone with the first three options, thus making gopher wood an arbitrary choice of God intended to test Noah against any deviation. The "law of silence" would forbid so much as a peg for his raincoat made from the cedar in the yard of his old home place. It would reflect that God was more interested in testing Noah than in his building a seaworthy ship to save his family. But Noah had already met God's approval. If God instructed the use of gopher wood (maybe cypress) because it does not decay or weaken in water, then the use of more plentiful fir to make an interior stall for the goats would not have been out of order.

Did God specify dimensions for the ark for practical reasons or to test Noah's willingness to follow instructions? If Noah's foreman and work crew had miscalculated the expansion by swelling and found the finished ark to be 301 cubits long, would it have sunk because of that? A legalist would have feared to get on it! But for practical reasons, the extra cubit would have been of no consequence.

Let us imagine them approaching the ark building project with the same legalistic concept that we have had. Their arguments would have sounded like ours. Can't you imagine the whole project being delayed dangerously by their arguments? The two beams serving as brackets for the loading ramp extended over the side by half a cubit. Was that to be reckoned as a part of the 50cubit width or not? There was open disagreement as to whether an anchor, which God was silent about, could be allowed. And Noah's wife disrupted things by making a banner to fly over the ark which read: "Glory to God, Our Salvation!" Such a fly or inscription of praise was not specified.

Some members of the family wanted to use a few pieces of oak furniture from their homes in their cabins. This caused heated debate. Were they eliminated by silence? Were they parts of the ark or of the cargo?

Mrs. Shem created a storm of controversy. She wanted to hang a wind chime on the deck so that the same breezes that brought the rain would create beautiful musical tones as an expression of her praise to God. Ultimately, she was ruled out on this because such unauthorized praise would be too dangerous and might sink the ship. She was so hurt that she refused to get on board until the last moment.

By the time the ark was completed, because of so many disputes, some of Noah's family members were not speaking to the others.

You can see the point of my imaginative illustration without further preachment. If Noah and his family had been as legalistic as we have been, there would have been so many divisive disputes over incidentals, like we have had in the church, that the ark probably would never have been completed.

The question is: Did God give a list of arbitrary, legal specifications, or was he giving practical guidance to a man who had never built a boat before? I go with the practical. I do not serve a God who imposes arbitrary whims to test us.

Noah did not build an ark to attain or prove his righteousness by his ability to pass on a meritorious test. He was righteous when God called him. He built the ark because he was already righteous. The ark project was an effort to save Noah and his family, not to prove them unworthy because of their lack of merit in overcoming arbitrary tests.

By the way, Noah was not 120 years in constructing the ark. He was 500 years old before he had his three sons (Gen. 5:32), and he was 600 years old when the flood came (7:6). When Noah received his instructions about the ark, his sons already had wives (6:18), and Shem was 100 years old two years after the flood (11:10). So Shem was only 97 years old when the flood came and he was already married when the original instructions were given.

Now, back to our subject. Were activities of the assemblies of saints devised (1) to test our faith, (2) to test our willingness and ability to follow instructions, (3) because God hates other kinds of activities in our gatherings, or (4) because those activities are practical for strengthening us?

I go with the latter choice. God loves us and wants us to be strong in faith and endurance. Whatever builds man up accomplishes God's purpose. He is not trying to weed us out by arbitrary tests like an elite university making it hard on freshmen so as to weed them out. That would enable us to be saved only by our merit. We do not have merit — only praise for his grace. We do not serve to achieve righteousness but as a response to his grace by which we are accounted as righteous.

In no thought or action may we ever defy God without his disfavor. When instructions are given, they are not to be defied. However, generalized instructions give us freedom to exercise our best judgment to fulfill the purpose of the instructions. In areas where God has neither specified nor prohibited, he has given all men in all ages the privilege of spontaneous praise and sincere worship. Both in and out of our assemblies, he has given us freedom to involve ourselves in any activity that will build up one another in faith and endurance. This is whole-life

worship / service / offering. All activities of life become holy, dedicated to God, in our commitment to live according to his will and to accomplish his purposes.

This essay is not an attempt to convince you that you must sing with instrumental accompaniment. If you are convinced that that would be sinful, then you should not do it. You must not violate your conscience. Another brother, however, cannot violate your conscience, and you sin when you seek to bind your scruples on him and become divisive because of it. You are not compelled to sing with him as he uses an instrument, but you are compelled to respect him as your brother. It is not necessary for you to meet in the same assemblies with him, but it is necessary that you not be sectarian or divisive in attitude toward him. He is serving the same Father with the same sincerity that you feel, and neither can rightly afford to reject the other or conveniently blame the other for causing you to reject him.

Each person has his likes and dislikes, but we cannot bind these on others. I dislike hearing the “pounding on the piano” or “grinding away at the organ,” thus, “drowning out the singing” (prejudicial, disparaging expressions) which give little time for meditative silence. Other than for giving everyone the pitch, I do not see that instrumental music generally improves congregational singing. I agree that it would be helpful for solos, quartets, etc. But these are my opinions which you are not obligated to share. We must share a common Father and a respect for all his children.

I'm blessed to be your brother!

CHAPTER 15

THE MOOD OF WORSHIP

Various suggestions have been offered as to how we can prepare our minds for proper worship. If a proper mood is not created, we are warned, our efforts become only meaningless rituals done by rote. So, a special reverence should be felt on Sunday, a certain hallowedness should be sensed as we enter the meeting hall, and a gentle hush should prevail over the assembly because we are about to worship God “in Spirit and in truth.”

Before we become too entranced in this mood of worship, however, let us observe the worship of a Biblical character. Let us watch this man — let’s call him Shimron — as he offers worship to God as is specified in Leviticus 1: 1-9.

Shimron goes out to the pasture to get the bullock that he has been raising for a burnt offering. He, his two sons, and the dog herd it toward the corral, where it seems determined not to go. After much chasing and effort, a rope is secured around the neck of the animal and they start the trying journey to the Tent of Meeting. Because the reluctant bullock does not cooperate, there is much towing, pushing, and yelling accompanied by barking of the dog. As one of the boys gets too close, he receives a painful kick from the offering. He limps along, just thankful that he was not gored. They are all hot, sweaty, and tired, but are somewhat refreshed by a sudden thunder shower with its close lightning and thunder.

Finally having reached the door of the Tent of Meeting, Shimron kills the bullock by cutting its jugular vein so the priest can catch the gushing blood in a vessel. Having caught the blood, the priest sprinkles it round about and against the altar amidst the flies and stench caused by many previous offerings.

Now Shimron and the boys skin the sacrifice, cut it up, and wash the intestines. As the priest then burns the entire offering on the altar, the smell of burning hair and charring flesh, though obnoxious to Shimron’s nostrils, is “a pleasing odor to the Lord.”

From the feeding of that animal to the burning of it, was it not all worship pleasing to God? Now, describe the mood of worship!

Shimron had a consciousness of his sin which caused him to be submissive to God to receive mercy and grace. He offered the specified and acceptable expression of this attitude by sacrificing an animal to atone for his sins. This he did in sincerity but not in quietness or in some sort of meditative, mystical, emotional communion with God which we might presume to be the proper mood of worship.

Perhaps, you are countering in your mind that we do not worship as Shimron did — that we worship “in Spirit and in truth.” Yes, there is a difference. While he worshipped in types and shadows fulfilling legal specifications, we worship in fulfillment of them — the truth. He worshipped at specific localities and times, through prescribed rituals, through a special

priesthood offering specified offerings sanctified (holy) for that purpose. Our worship, being spiritual, has no such limitations.

Instead of offering objects, we give ourselves in constant whole-life offering. We do not offer through a priest (other than Christ, our high priest) for we are priests. A trip to a temple of the Presence of God is not necessary, for we are temples with his Spirit dwelling in us. There is no specified time for our worship/service for all we do is in his service. There are no holy actions or rituals, for the living sacrifice is sanctified/holy to the Lord. Whatever we do in our Spirit-directed life — and that really means *whatever is* done in the name of the Lord, being directed by and to him. We are not part secular and part holy, but are totally sanctified as an acceptable sacrifice. That is worship in Spirit and in truth.

Now, what is this mood of worship that we should strive for? I question that *spirit is* ever used in the scriptures to mean a mood.

CHAPTER 16

JUSTIFIED, THEN SANCTIFIED

You have seen the tracts and heard the lessons which declare that anyone can understand the Bible for "... the wayfaring men, yea fools, shall not err therein" (Isa. 35:8). Frankly, I find it to be extremely perplexing that we are still in such confusion about how we are justified. This essay will not lift all the fog of confusion, either, but perhaps it may help a bit.

God, being holy and just, cannot violate his own nature by overlooking sin. For him to remain holy, the penalty, which is death, must be met for every sin.

There are two ways that the penalty for sin may be met. You may pay it yourself by spending eternity separated from God in hell. Or, it may be paid by another who would be qualified to pay it for you. In either case, God can deal with sin without compromising his uprightness.

God does justify offenders in his righteousness. We must not think of this as a parole. A parole would mean that the punishment is suspended on the condition that we sin no more. Another infraction would bring the whole penalty upon us. There would be no forgiveness, or remission. None could benefit from parole for none can live without infraction.

We are in double jeopardy because we cannot perform any work that has the quality to justify us and we will always be sinning. When a person is justified, it means that, though he is a sinner, he is accepted as though he were not. This justification is the opposite of condemnation. Because a man will always be a sinner, he will always need justification. Since he cannot pay the penalty for his sin by doing meritorious works, how can he be justified? If he is called upon to keep law to accomplish this, he is no better off, for inability to keep law is his problem in the first place, and law has no quality of grace to forgive. Even promising to sin no more cannot pay for sins already committed any more than promising to pay cash in the future will cancel an old debt.

God is not obligated to forgive our trespasses, but he loves us and wants us in his fellowship and presence. Since we can do absolutely nothing to merit the erasure of guilt, our salvation must be wholly by grace. Through his wonderful provision, both grace and righteousness are offered to us as free gifts (Rom. 5:15-17).

Through God's mercy, we are justified by Christ's blood (Rom. 5:6-11). He died in our place, paying the penalty so we might be free of it. He satisfied our account so we can be received by a holy God.

Knowing that we cannot keep law perfectly or perform works to merit forgiveness, what could God require of us that we might receive his grace? If he demands law keeping, sin will ever have dominion over us for we violate law, and law has no quality to forgive. To put us under a system of law for justification would seal our doom in hopelessness. "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14).

God still could not be holy while justifying persons who would neither believe in him or desire to be forgiven. So God will reckon our faith as righteousness, or justification, as Paul illustrated through God's dealing with Abraham: "For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Now to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due. And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness. So also David pronounces a blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin.'" (Rom. 4:38).

Concerning this acceptance by faith, Paul further states: "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe ... For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Rom. 3:21-28). This faith leads us to accept the atonement of Christ by identifying with him in obeying the gospel and to live in him in a sanctified life.

Is this a once-for-all-time justification? Yes, it is provided; we have only to claim it. "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). This is not supporting the teaching of the impossibility of apostasy nor giving license to sin. Those who are sanctified are perfected as far as the guilt of sin is concerned for they are walking in the light, sanctified in fellowship with Christ. In 1 John 1:7f2:2, John assures us that "if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." The one sacrifice is still effective, cleansing our sins of weakness and ignorance. This perfection is not in us, for "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." By this means God can be faithful to his covenant, promises, and nature of justice and holiness while accounting us sinners as righteous. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Then John urges us not to sin, but he assures us that if we do sin, we still have the one who stands in our place and that his expiation of our sins is still effective. This is a great consolation and it allows us to realize that the perfection is in the sacrifice instead of our having to achieve it.

Are morality, good works, and rituals of worship necessary for justification? No, for they have no merit to justify. But these are fruits of sanctification in response to justification. We are justified, then sanctified. Justification is an act of God and sanctification is our responsive action.

To be sanctified is to be separated, set apart, made holy. Without this holiness, no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). Peter emphasizes this saintliness in us, exhorting, "... as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15f). Many other references call for us to lead saintly lives; yet we cannot be holy enough to merit justification which is accounted to us because of our faith.

Our sanctification is the committing of our lives in an effort to conform to the will of God. It begins when we obey the gospel. One will never be more justified than at that time, but he should grow in sanctification toward more maturity in knowledge, understanding, and conduct.

He can never reach perfection in these, but he is perfected in his justification while walking in the light. If spiritual immaturity necessarily prevents our salvation, then none can be saved. None can merit such an award.

Neither justification nor sanctification are attained through keeping of a legal code. The concept of law keeping for righteousness, or justification, makes merit its very center. This concept gets a strangle hold on the sincere disciple who is struggling to be worthy of salvation when he knows all along that he cannot be worthy. Law demands perfect obedience. When the struggler admits his weakness in keeping law, he is urged to try harder. That does not give him much encouragement, for he knows the futility of it. He is not sure that he knows what is sin in each instance, so he lives in doubt and insecurity due to his lack of understanding. Law is a grievous yoke to bear, but Jesus said that his yoke is easy, that his burden is light, and that his commandments are not grievous.

God perfects those who are sanctified and gives us many encouraging promises. He won't let Satan overpower us. He urges us to exercise ourselves in activities which will give us spiritual strength. He urges continued consecration through his teachings, commands, exhortations, and promises. He cherishes our fellowship and wants to glorify us with him.

The blood continues to cleanse the ignorant and stumbling disciple as he walks in the light, but he can abandon that walk and renounce the source of justification. If unbelief rules his heart, it cannot be reckoned for righteousness, nor can he be justified by faith. "Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day; as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:12f). The believer can change his mind, become an unbeliever, and harden himself against any further positive response.

If a person renounces Christ and hardens himself beyond any approach, then he is no longer saved. "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt" (Heb. 6:~6). This is not being said of the sincere disciple who is wrestling with doubts and weaknesses, but it is speaking of one who has known and experienced what Christ has to give and then knowingly and willingly renounces it all.

This same thought prevails in these words: "For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries. A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. 10:26-29). The basis for justification and sanctification is rejected; there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin. This apostate must pay his own debt for his sins in hell. For this person, it will be "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (v. 31) who must exact the penalty for sin in order to remain holy.

This fear does not rule in the heart of one who is walking in the light, however, for his heart is ruled by the peace and comfort of fellowship with God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and all other believers. “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God” (Rom. 5:1f).

“Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23). “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life” (Rom. 6:22).

Neither our justification nor sanctification are based upon the keeping of law — other than the law of love. The service of our dedicated life is in loving God and man. Assemblies and the activities in them are for our up-building so that we will continue in faith. There are no rituals to sanctify us, no quotas to prove our consecration, no level of Bible knowledge to make our grade of holiness, nor program of work to do to achieve worthiness. Our love for one another will lead us to conduct ourselves in moral uprightness and our love for God will constrain us to make him Lord of our lives. None of this sanctification, however, will be an effort to gain justification, for we are first justified, then sanctified.

Sanctification simply keeps us walking in the light so that we will not forfeit our justification.

CHAPTER 17

IS *CHRISTIAN* OUR NAME?

A person may be known by character or by name, or by both. Jesus wants us to be recognized by character with love being the identifying trait. Since he did not give us a name as a mark of identity, we should not invent this easy route to recognition. It is much more convenient to tell people that we are Christians, to wear a button, or to display a bumper sticker proclaiming our discipleship than to be known by our fruits. The disciples are given no proper name to wear, either individually or collectively.

My reaching the conclusion that Jesus gave us no name to wear has ruined some of my once-favored lessons concerning our new name “which the mouth of Jehovah shall name” (See Isa. 62:1-5; 56:5). I interpreted those passages to be prophecies of the name *Christian*. To support such a contention, they must be taken out of their context. In fact, in the first reference, the very text tells that the new name would be Hephzibah! The latter reference promises that their name, or heritage, would not be cut off.

The very fact that *Christian is* used only three times in the Scriptures should be enough to arouse some skepticism about it being a new, God-given, proper name for God’s people. Also, it was about ten years after the beginning of the church before anyone was ever called a Christian. Furthermore, there is no record of any disciple calling another believer a Christian or of applying that designation to himself. Luke writes that “the disciples were called Christians,” not “the disciples called themselves Christians.”

The first appearance of the word *Christian is* in Acts 11:25-26 where Luke informs us, “So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church, and taught a large company of people; and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians.” In Antioch they were disciples who were called Christians. *Disciples is* what they were; *Christians is* what somebody began to call them. From this point in historical record, Luke did not begin to refer to them as Christians, but he continued to refer to them as disciples.

Matthew uses disciples 72 times, Mark 44 times, Luke in his Gospel 38 times, John 77 times, and Luke in Acts 30 times. However, in the remaining 22 portions of the New Testament writings, the word is not used at all, which would indicate that *disciple* was no proper name either.

The self-designations used by inspired writers were believers (or those that believe, etc.); brothers 132 times; saints 50 times; church 85 times; and other such designations as elect, servants, and those “that call upon the name of the Lord.” There is no indication, however, that any of these self-designations were to be considered as a proper name for Jesus’ followers.

From the writings of those times, it is seen that the adjectival ending *-ianos* denoted the adherents of an individual or party. So, adherents to the Christ were called *Christianos*,

Christians. It is a Roman ending which would not likely originate among the Jews, especially in Judea. It is evident that the name did not originate with the disciples themselves, but it was applied by those outside their community, either in derision or as a sort of nickname, a common folk designation. Certainly, the unbelieving Jews would not use the name of their Messiah to apply to those whom they considered as adherents to a false messiah. So, we had to wait about ten years for the church to spread among the pagan Gentiles for such a popular designation to come into use. Among the unbelieving Jews, disciples were scorned as “the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5).

No doubt, the pagans of Antioch were familiar with the Jewish religion in the local synagogues. Now, a new religion had separated itself from the synagogue proclaiming salvation through one Jesus, the Christ. So, the people began to distinguish them from the Jews as adherents of Christ — *Christianos*, Christians. Groups may protest a designation given by outsiders but later accept it, as was the case with Lutherans, Protestants, and Mormons. Secular history reveals that the disciples later gave universal acceptance to this name since it honors Christ. Like the cross of shame, which became a venerated symbol of God’s love, this name rose from its unlikely beginning to the highest place of honor.

Let us consider the three mentions of *Christian* in the Scriptures. In Acts 11:26, as we have noted already, the first use of the designation was evidently by the pagan populace of Antioch in Syria rather than by the disciples themselves.

In its second mention, we hear the time-honored exclamation of King Agrippa in King James Version language, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28). This has been interpreted by common people as a sincere admission by Agrippa. But if he were so sincere, why did he break off Paul’s discourse? Being King, he could call for, as a command performance, the continuation of Paul’s speech. Evidently, he was making no admission of being almost converted to Jesus.

Instead of seeing a convicted king, we see a man who is being put on the spot by a religious zealot. His dignity is being insulted; so he scoffs at Paul, “In a short time you think to make me a Christian!” (RSV). In other words, Agrippa was saying, “Paul, you think that in one short presentation of your fanatical claims you can make a Christian of me,” and the inflection of his voice as he sneered the word Christian must have been insulting. Notice, too, that Paul avoided using the name as applying to himself in his reply to Agrippa.

For the third use of *Christian*, we look to 1 Peter 4:16, but the entire chapter serves as a context. Believers were suffering fiery ordeals of persecution for Christ. They were being accused of various wrong-doings, and listed among them was that of being a Christian. To encourage these persecuted saints, Peter wrote, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker; yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God.” Being called Christians in a derogatory manner was a part of the reproach heaped upon them. Peter urged that they glorify God under that name of reproach which they had not chosen. Righteous persons have always received taunting and derisive appellations from those who oppose them. Their worth is proved by being unashamed to wear those disparaging names.

In spite of all of this which I have brought to your attention, I do not object to being called a Christian, for I am an adherent of Christ. I just refuse to accept it as a proper name given for us to wear to distinguish us in our religion. And, by the way, I do object to deliberate failure to capitalize *Christian*. Adjectives formed from proper nouns should be capitalized in correct grammar. *Christ* is a proper noun; hence, *Christian* should not be written as christian.

Now, I come to a more important point of this treatise. This name *Christian* has become a mental and emotional block to prevent our acceptance of others who follow Christ.

We define who is a Christian and how to become a Christian, but the Scriptures do not accommodate our definitions. In telling how to become a Christian, we use the examples of the conversion of those on Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian treasurer, Cornelius, and Saul. Their acceptance of Jesus made them believers and disciples, but not Christians, for no one had ever been called a Christian at the time of their conversion.

After defining a Christian as one who hears, believes, repents, confesses faith, and is baptized, we have consistently refused any acceptance of, or fellowship with, any who have not measured up to our scruples about those actions of obedience. We have drawn a convenient line there that excludes most of the Christian world as being unbelievers and non-Christians.

When we think of a person as a believer or disciple, that convenient sectarian line disappears. While a believer/disciple will obey the “five steps” as he learns and is convinced of the need, he will also continue to learn and obey all the Scriptural directives for his discipleship as long as he lives. He will never cross the line into the ultimate. At what point can we say that he became a believer/disciple whom we may accept? Is it not when his faith is initiated causing him to take his first feeble steps to follow? He is then a believer and follower and, hopefully, he will continue to grow and advance in his relationship with Christ. I can accept him as a believer/disciple even though I might consider him to be at a less advanced stage than I enjoy. We can grow together. I am not to become his judge, especially to judge him by the artificial standard that I have made by defining when a person becomes a Christian. He is a believer and disciple — learner, follower, adherent — at every point on the road of his spiritual progress. The concept that I am rejecting is that he becomes a Christian, whom I can accept, only at one point in his spiritual journey, and that, thereafter, he is a Christian whether he progresses as a learner and follower or not.

Jesus told us to make disciples, not Christians. There may be no difference in the two, but we have made one to accommodate our sectarian distinctions.

(References: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, V. 1, p. 621f; *Commentary on Acts* by Coffman, p. 232f; *Restoration Review*, V. 25, No. 9, p. 166; *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, W. E. Vine, p. 191)

CHAPTER 18

THE LORD'S TABLE

Paul mentions the “Lord’s table” (1 Cor. 10:21 KJV). What is the Lord’s table? Surely, all of us have seen the Lord’s Table, a piece of furniture located between the pulpit and the pews, engraved with “In Remembrance of Me,” on which “the communion” is set — as though communion is something that can be put on a table.

If that is the Lord’s table, what and where is the table of devils that Paul refers to in the same passage?

You surely agree that the table of the Lord is not a piece of furniture. Everybody knows that it is the Lord’s Supper — well, everybody except a few heretics like me who are always troubling the waters by asking foolish questions. Let’s investigate a bit.

In an effort to make an interpretation consistent with Scripture, let us look back to the Old Testament writings. Perhaps, this is going too far for a context, but it does give some Biblical background.

Adonibezek said that seventy conquered kings “used to pick up scraps under my table” (Judges 1:7). Rather than being under his dining table literally, these subjected kings had to survive on his meager dole.

When David became king, he promised Mephibosheth, “you shall eat at my table always,” which he did, being provided for “like one of the king’s sons” (2 Sam. 9:7, 10, 11, 13). A similar provision of sustenance was made for Barzillai because of his loyalty to David (2 Sam. 19:31-40; 1 Kings 2:7).

The daily grocery list for those who ate at Solomon’s table included ten fat oxen, twenty pasture-fed cattle, and a hundred sheep (1 Kings 4:22-28). Those who ate at Solomon’s table were persons on government upkeep.

Those “who ate at Jezebel’s table” were the 850 prophets of Asherah and Baal who were sustained at government expense while she was queen.

Nehemiah informs us that “there were at my table a hundred and fifty men, Jews and officials, etc.” and gives an impressive list of daily supplies that were required (Neh. 5:17f). These were people whose needs were supplied by the government through Nehemiah.

In Psalms 23, the table prepared for David was not a dining table, but the total provision of blessing with which God enriched his life, even in times of stress, so that he could say, “I shall not want.”

When Israel murmured, asking, “Can God spread a table in the wilderness?” they were questioning God’s ability or willingness to care for their needs in the wilderness (Psalms 78:17f).

From these references, we can rightly conclude that to eat at the king’s table meant to be kept, sustained, and provided for by the king or other ruler at his, or his government’s expense. Thus they were honored as sons of the king.

Paul had been dealing with the matter of eating meats offered to idols. Then he gave a warning against idolatry in 1 Corinthians 10:1-22. He points to participation in the communion, involving the cup and the bread, as indicating oneness with Christ, even as the eating of the Levitical sacrifices made Israelites partners in the altar. From these two illustrations of sharing and partnership, he seems to go beyond reference to the Lord’s supper by alluding to their traditional concept of what it meant to eat at one’s table. A seat at the table was a reward for loyalty and oneness of purpose. The expression, “to sit at one’s table,” meant to give honor and distinction by providing for the upkeep of the person.

A similar expression of sustenance is seen in Acts 6:2 where “the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.’” Those widows were being provided for and sustained by the church, which program was to be administered by the seven deacons. In view of this, we can say that the children in our church-supported homes are eating at the church’s table and that church-supported ministers eat at the table of the church. In like manner, the Lord’s table is his provision for us rather than being either the communion or a piece of furniture.

When we accept Christ, and are accepted by him, we are honored to sit at his table “like one of the king’s sons!” Every spiritual blessing is supplied in him and, concerning physical needs, he promises “all these things shall be yours as well.” “And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8). He will never leave us or forsake us.

We cannot eat at two tables, expressing loyalty and partnership with, and being sustained by, both the Lord and demons at the same time. There is no double-dipping.

What a blessing, honor, and security it is to sit and eat at the Lord’s table like sons of the King — and like the apostles of Christ (Luke 22:30).

CHAPTER 19

RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT EXCEEDS

We are all familiar with Jesus' admonition, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). Let us discover the basis of the Pharisee's claim for rightness with God. In Jesus' comments upon points of the law in question, we will observe that Jesus was explaining the original intent of each law rather than giving new Christian regulations in contrast to the Law of Moses. Then we will be able to understand how our righteousness may exceed theirs.

The Pharisees are to be commended for their desire to call the Jews back to true adherence to the law. They were reformers. In their zeal to be strictly orthodox, however, they drew many lines and split many hairs. Sometimes these definitions allowed them to be legally correct while evading the real spirit and intention of the law. Thus, for example, they could consider themselves righteous by strict tithing while overlooking justice, mercy, and faith (Matt. 23:23).

Many times we have heard the explanation that the Pharisees gave a tithe of all and, since our righteousness must exceed theirs, we must give more than a tithe. That out-Pharisees the Pharisees, but it does not exceed them in righteousness.

Of what did the Pharisee's righteousness consist, and how may ours surpass his? Let us look at the context. As a preface to his remarks about the law, Jesus explained his attitude toward it in Matthew 5:17-20. He called for a deeper respect for it than was being demonstrated by the Pharisees. Then he begins to illustrate what he means.

"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill...'" A man might consider himself righteous in keeping this law as long as he refrained from killing. That would give license to smoldering anger, insults, and scolding so long as there was no murder. God is not defining by this commandment how hateful, mean, and ugly a person can be without sinning. This commandment was intended to prevent the violation of love. The non-murdering Pharisee could worship God with a feeling of rightness while alienating his brother. Jesus explained that a person cannot worship God rightly while being the cause of alienation. Jesus is not changing the Law of Moses. He is explaining it. Our righteousness is no better if we seek to worship ever so correctly while holding ill will toward another or while being the cause of alienation.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'" Haven't you heard Bible teachers say that the Law of Moses did not prohibit lust when it forbade the act of adultery? Was Jesus changing, or adding to, the law when he declared that lust was adultery in the heart? He was explaining the meaning of it. Pharisaic rightness conformed to the outward requirement. True righteousness begins in the heart.

"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'" In Matthew 19:3-10 the Pharisees, evidently uncertain on this point, were trying to get a list of causes for lawful divorce. Jesus' answer indicated that God did not give a man a checklist of

fouls to keep against his wife so he could throw her out. “From the beginning it was not so.” God made an exception under Moses because of the hardness of man’s heart. Sexual unchastity destroys the basis of marriage. Jesus recognized that. But from the beginning God intended that “the two shall become one flesh.” The righteous in heart seek to preserve that.

“You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.” That was clear enough, but the Pharisee could swear falsely by heaven, the earth, Jerusalem, or his life and feel righteous because he had not performed the oath to God. Jesus’ words indicate that God was not concerned about some specific kind of oath. He was concerned about honesty. They were keeping their interpretation of the legal requirement while being dishonest. To exceed in righteousness, one must look for no loopholes in the law of honesty.

When God gave the “eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” provision, he was not suggesting that a person could be on the lookout for all the infringements on his rights so he could retaliate in like kind. That law was no license for revenge. Vengeance was forbidden. “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:17-18).

This law was intended to discourage violations since the offender would be brought before the judges and tried, then repaid “an eye for an eye” for his crime. So, Jesus explains that, instead of looking for evil to repay to others, one should look for the good he can do — the kind and peaceful responses he can exhibit to create peace and show love. So it is with the righteousness that exceeds.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’” This was not a quotation from the law but, evidently, it was a Pharisaic interpretation. By identifying one’s neighbors, he had a whole outside world that he could hate and vent his wrath upon. No law was ever given to identify whom one might hate. God intends that we love and pray for all men. By keeping their legal interpretations of the law with hairsplitting strictness, they felt that they were righteous while disrespecting their fellowman. Our rightness must come from a better claim. Again, Jesus was giving no new law, but he was telling the true meaning of the old one.

There is evident need for us to apply this lesson to ourselves in many areas. A person may be very scrupulous about tithing, for example, or he may give more than a tithe, satisfying his legal interpretation of what is required, while still failing to recognize that all his talents and what he has earned by them are entrusted to him in stewardship. God has set no legal quota that, when met, allows him to fail to show love by serving the needs of his fellowman with what he has. Rightness with God cannot be attained through meeting legal requirements.

A person may think to Bet his check mark in the heavenly ledger of righteousness by his participation in the Lord’s Supper each week. He may be very correct in all details — right elements, right time, right procedure, right purpose, right people — while partaking with bitterness, resentment, alienation, and condemnation of others. To exceed in righteousness, we must go beyond rightness in outward forms and be righteous in the heart.

In the points of the law that Jesus discussed, he was not abolishing or changing a jot or a tittle of the law. He was making it clear that God, through his commandments, was calling for true righteousness in the heart.

CHAPTER 20

NEITHER DESTROYED NOR NAILED TO THE CROSS

The Law of Moses was neither destroyed/abolished nor nailed to the cross.

Jesus had been criticized early for his conduct on the Sabbath. As he prefaced his discussion of some points of the law, he explained his attitude toward the law in Matthew 5:17-19: “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus expressed a respect for the law that we have not always appreciated.

The law delivered through Moses was not some sort of mistake or undeveloped concept. It was unique in that it combined political and religious laws. When a Jew paid his tithe, he was paying his taxes and supporting religion at the same time. Some have described this system as an inferior arrangement that would permit vengeance by a person repaying in like kind. That is a gross misunderstanding. The “eye for an eye” provision did not permit personal retaliation or vengeance, but it spoke of the justice to be provided by due process of law before the judges, guaranteeing that punishment would not be too severe or too lenient. The punishment was to fit the crime.

“It was just a carnal law,” we hear. Is that right? Paul wrote, “So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (Rom. 7:12). In verse 14 he continues, “We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin.” The defect of carnality is in man. Man cannot keep law perfectly. He sins. Law cannot remove guilt, neither the Law of Moses nor any other law.

The loftiest concepts of Jesus’ teachings were not new to him. They were from the law. There he found the two greatest commandments. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut. 6:4-5). “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:17f). There is nothing carnal or inferior about those commandments. Of his Golden Rule, Jesus said, “for this is the law and the prophets.”

Did Jesus destroy the law? Let us consider three facets: (1) The Old Testament Scriptures were not destroyed, (2) the moral law did not cease, and (3) the ceremonial law was not abolished.

1. **The Old Testament Scriptures Were Not Destroyed.** The early disciples were not called upon to scrap their Bible. They searched the Scriptures and they preached from them. The Scriptures spoke to them and they still speak to us. Timothy was urged to “attend to the public reading of the Scripture.” Even in his last epistle, Paul exhorted Timothy, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:14-17). We misapply this text. Paul is not referring to New Testament writings. None had been written in Timothy’s childhood, and no collection of sacred writings to the disciples had been made when this letter was written. The Old Testament writings are a great support to Christian faith.

2. **The Moral Law Was Not Abolished.** Jesus warned that whoever would relax the least of the commandments would be called least in the kingdom of heaven. These laws projected into the realm of the kingdom.

The rabbis, scribes, and Pharisees expounded the traditional interpretations which relaxed some laws and made others more stringent. When Jesus would say, “You have heard that it was said... but I say...,” he was not giving new Christian regulations so much as explaining what the law meant originally. “Everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” is but an explanation of the original intent of “You shall not commit adultery.”

Moral law existed before Moses and apart from Moses. All men have been accountable to moral law. That’s true now. A Gentile was not a sinner because he did not keep Jewish rituals, but because he had violated moral law. An alien today is not a sinner because he does not keep Christian rituals, but because he has violated moral law. He finds his forgiveness in Christ.

That the moral law, even as contained in the Law of Moses, is still in effect is evident from many passages such as Romans 13:8-10.

Didn’t Jesus nail the law to the cross? No. That would have destroyed it. He didn’t destroy it. But what of Colossians 2:13f? Let’s look at this favorite proof-text. Paul speaks of God “having forgiven all our trespasses.” By what means? “Having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands, nailing it to the cross.” The thing canceled was our sins — that list of violations of laws — which bond was nailed to the cross. The context reveals that Paul is addressing the uncircumcised Gentile. He had not been under the Law of Moses and he had no need for its removal. But his sins were nailed to the cross.

The *New Easy to Read New Testament* renders it simply, “We owed a debt because we broke God’s laws. That debt listed all the rules we failed to follow. But God forgave us of that debt. God took away that debt and nailed it to the cross.”

With this interpretation, there is still a problem in harmonizing Ephesians 2:14f in which Paul explains: “For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing

wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in the place of two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.” The outer court of the temple in Jerusalem had a barrier beyond which a Gentile was not permitted to go. Metaphorically, this represented the law. When Jews and Gentiles were baptized into Christ, that wall was destroyed metaphorically in the body of Christ — “in his flesh.”

“You have died to the law through the body of Christ,” Paul assures, and he adds: “But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit” (Rom. 7:4,6).

The law which distinguished between Jew and Gentile was made ineffective because neither came to Jesus through it, but through faith. The law was no longer a barrier to exclude the Gentile though it was still kept by Jewish disciples. In this setting (Romans 7), Paul expresses his respect for the law and reveals his continued struggle with it.

3. The Ceremonial Law Was Not Destroyed. The Jewish disciples continued to keep rituals of the law. They circumcised. At the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15), it was agreed that circumcision or the law could not be bound on the Gentiles. But the decision expressed no intention of stopping the Jewish practice, assuring that Moses was continually preached. Later, Paul took Timothy and circumcised him (Acts 16:3). After many years of preaching, on his way to Jerusalem before his arrest, Paul cut his hair, for he had a vow (Acts 18:18).

When Paul arrived at Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-26), James and the elders said to him, “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed; they are all zealous for the law...” They then requested that Paul involve himself in ceremonies and offerings of purification to convince all that he kept the law. He complied.

Without question, the law was being kept by disciples. These rituals did not disqualify them from the grace of Christ. However, if they performed them as an effort toward justification, they would fall short of grace, because grace and forgiveness did not come through the law. Grace must come through Christ. These religious rituals were expressions of devotion but they were not efforts of justification.

Jesus said that he would fulfill the law. That’s what he did. Being fulfilled, the ceremonies would become irrelevant and fade from practice. All of the ritual offerings would find their fulfillment in Christ — the Passover, scapegoat, atonement, firstfruits. peace offering, sin offering, trespass offering. No longer would the Temple visit bring the disciple into the Presence, for he is a temple himself. The Temple priest is not needed, for the disciple is a priest. The real thing will replace that which foreshadowed it. The law was not destroyed, but it was fulfilled.

A man might be in service overseas. Each night his wife lovingly studies his portrait and kisses it before going to sleep. But when he returns home, she will not kiss his picture any longer though she will keep and cherish it. While doing no violence to his picture, the kissing of it will give way to his embrace and kisses. Marriage does not abolish courtship, but fulfills it.

Adulthood does not destroy childhood, but fulfills its purpose. So, Jesus did not destroy the law, but he accomplished its purpose.

God's final message to Israel is in the epistle to the Hebrews. As it was being written, the old order was "growing old and is ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13). With the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., when the Jews were scattered, the Jewish political-religious system was finally dissolved and it became impractical to keep that system of law which had created and regulated it. It had fulfilled its purpose.

CHAPTER 21

THE RIGHT OF SELF-PROTECTION

This will be a study of certain rights of disciples. Does being disciples require that we be socially passive, nonresistant, and non-violent? Do we have any recourse against injustice and tyranny? Does a society have the right of self-protection? Many perplexing questions call for answers. Some we may answer definitely; others may be left to the judgment of each individual in his particular circumstance.

The sixth Commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” is the fundamental law protecting the sanctity of life. The very need for such a commandment is regrettable. The Golden Rule is the fundamental law to govern all social relationships. If it were practiced by all, this study would be unnecessary. The problem arises because the disciple must practice it even when others are not.

In order to have a proper basis for many of our conclusions, we will consider both Mosaic and Christian teachings, principles, prohibitions, and regulations concerning our social conduct and the taking of life.

The sixth Commandment warns, “Thou shalt not kill” (Ex. 20:13). Capital punishment was the penalty prescribed for violation of this commandment: “He that smiteth a man, so that he dieth, shall surely be put to death” (Ex. 21:12; cf. Lev. 24:17; Num. 35:16f; Deut. 19:1 if). The killer was to be killed. Would the executioner be violating “Thou shalt not kill” in killing the killer? He would not be in violation because there are different definitions of killing, and execution of the criminal is not the type condemned.

There are at least four kinds of killing which were not considered as murder; hence, they did not incur the capital penalty. These would be identified as manslaughter, but not murder. The sixth Commandment is more understandably translated, “You shall do no murder.” Let us review these four types of manslaughter.

1. Accidental: “Ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer that killeth a person unwittingly may flee thither” (Num. 35:11; read all of ch. 35). He was not considered to be a murderer.
2. Protective: “If a thief be found breaking in, and he be smitten so that he dieth, there shall be no bloodguiltiness for him” (Ex. 22:2).
3. Punitive: Capital punishment was prescribed for those who blasphemed the name of Jehovah (Lev. 24: 16), those who disregarded the Sabbath (Num. 15:32f), one who cursed or struck his parents (Lev. 20:13; Ex. 21:15, 17), and other offenses.
4. Warfare: God directed Israel into warfare on different occasions. In Deuteronomy 20, Moses sets forth regulations concerning battle.

Some persons reject these Mosaic regulations on the grounds that the Jews were permitted to hate and to take vengeance. But such objections come from a gross misunderstanding. God has never permitted man to hate his fellowman and to take vengeance. Rather, the law stated, “Thou

shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart: Thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am Jehovah” (Lev. 19:17). Love was to be demonstrated to one’s enemy, for “If thou meet shine enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again” (Ex. 23:4; cf. Deut. 22:1-4). Both Jesus and Paul go back to the law for their highest principles.

Another misunderstanding perpetuated is: “Under the law, it was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. If someone knocked your tooth out, you could knock one of his out.” But that is not a provision of the law. It did not permit personal retribution for crimes. Then who took action against injustices? This is a very crucial point which is so commonly overlooked.

To avenge is to inflict punishment for just retribution. God avenges. To take vengeance is to inflict pain or injury in resentful or malicious retaliation. Injustices were avenged, but not on a personal basis. It was through due process of law involving witnesses and trials before judges. “And if men strive together and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart, and yet no harm follow; he shall be surely fined, according as the woman’s husband shall lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe” (Ex. 21:22f; cf. Lev. 24:19f).

Injustice was avenged by due process of law in the court rather than individual retaliation. “Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which Jehovah thy God giveth thee, according to thy tribes; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment” (Deut. 16:18). Difficult cases could be appealed to a higher court: “If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates; then shalt thou arise, and get thee up unto the place which Jehovah thy God shall choose; and thou shalt come unto the priests and the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days: and thou shalt inquire; and they shall show thee the sentence of judgment” (Deut. 17:8f). A person could not be convicted without sufficient evidence: “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall a matter be established” (Deut. 19:15f).

Was not the next of kin to a murdered person called “the avenger of blood?” Wasn’t the avenger of blood given the right to avenge his kin by killing the murderer? Yes, there were circumstances where this was permitted, but there was a reason for it which is often overlooked. There were no police among Israel, so “citizen’s arrests” were made by the complainant and he brought charges against the offender. Ordinarily, a person pressed his own charges, but a slain man could not perform such a thing. Someone else must do it for him, so the next of kin became the avenger of blood for the dead.

Ordinarily, this was a legal procedure for punishment of a murderer. The citizen was the complainant, witness, and executioner: “At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is to die be put to death; at the mouth of one witness shall he not be put to death. The

hand of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people” (Deut. 17:6f).

When a person killed another, he could run to the nearest city of refuge, surrender himself for protection, and wait for proper trial. “Assign you the cities of refuge whereof I spake unto you by Moses, that the manslayer that killeth any person unwittingly and unawares may nee thither: and they shall be unto you for a refuge from the avenger of blood. And he shall nee unto one of those cities, and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city, and declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city; and they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver up the manslayer into his hand; because he smote his neighbor unawares, and hated him not beforetime. And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days: then shall the manslayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled” (Josh. 20:2f). If, however, the man was guilty of murder, he was delivered to the avenger for execution: “If any man hate his neighbor, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally so that he dieth, and flee into one of these cities; then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die” (Deut. 19:11f).

If the manslayer did not surrender himself at the city of refuge, “The avenger of blood shall himself put the murderer to death: when he meeteth him, he shall put him to death” (Num. 35:18f). In this action, the avenger would be acting as an agent of the law — and of God’s wrath — avenging injustice against society, rather than seeking personal revenge.

Some object to the taking of life under any circumstances, declaring that such is “playing God.” They only betray their ignorance of Biblical teaching. Do we play God when we bring a new life into the world, or remove an appendix? God has put life and death in our hands and wants us to deal with both discreetly. Who can contend that it is more praiseworthy to bring life into existence without honorable purpose than to destroy life with honorable purpose?

We should now be ready to answer these questions: Could a righteous person fill the capacity prescribed under the Law of Moses as a judge, a soldier, or an executioner in capital cases? Would death rendered by these persons be justified? Could they perform these actions with love for their neighbor, without malice or personal vengeance? May we conclude that God gave the Jewish society and its members the right of self-protection? All these questions demand an affirmative answer.

Do not reject the foregoing on the ground that we are not under the Law of Moses. In it we have a context in which to interpret “Thou shalt not kill.” That command was interpreted with the same love and lack of vengeance as that enjoined upon us. Our principle of self-protection is established.

Jesus and his Spiritled apostles added little, if anything, new to the meaning of “Thou shalt not kill” of Moses’ law. They taught, “Thou shalt not kill” (Matt. 5:21), and “Let none of you suffer as a murderer” (1 Pet. 4:15). Jesus taught, “Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute

you” (Matt. 5:44). He took his greatest commandment and the second to it from Moses. When Paul warned, “Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place to the wrath of God; for it is written, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord,” he was referring back to the law (Rom. 12:19i cf. Lev. 19:17f).

Paul assures us that God will avenge for us. How and when does God avenge the injustices against us? In the judgment and hell? Yes, but that is of little comfort to us now. We don’t have to wait until eternity for avenging. God uses due process of law to avenge today even as he did under Moses.

God has always provided for social order through government to protect the rights of the individual and the society. In Romans 13:1-7, Paul orders that we submit to civil government because it is ordained of God. Rulers, he says, are ministers of God who do not bear the sword — the instrument of capital punishment — in vain, but they are avengers for wrath. The “powers that be” are ordained for avenging, and God works through them for protection of both the individual and the society. Each person is a part of the society; hence, he is a part of the powers that be. As such, his aid in punishing the lawbreaker is avenging injustice and upholding God’s ministry. To exonerate the offender is to violate justice and to jeopardize the innocent.

If someone steals your automobile, you avenge this wrong by reporting it to the police, bringing charges against the thief, and testifying against him in court. This process may be followed in avenging various wrongs. Even the slanderer may be sued in order to avenge, but not for revenge. “As much as in you lieth” (Rom. 12:18), we should seek to live in peace, but we cannot always do so because others will not allow us. As an individual disciple, one may have an offender arrested and brought to trial. As a part of society, the disciple may serve as a policeman, juror, judge, jailer, or executioner. The disciple may do any and all of these things without malice, hatred, or personal vengeance, still loving the offender and praying for him.

Let us suppose that someone is attempting to kill a member of your family. What can you do? You may call the police, but there is not time to call them. You may then wound or kill the attacker, acting in behalf of the powers that be. Both God and governments give an innocent person the right of self-protection. The action would be motivated without malice or desire for vengeance. To fail to protect the family would show more concern for the violator than for the violated.

Can one punish or kill an offender while keeping the Golden Rule? I am to love him always, and to do good to him as far as justice allows. Both the criminal and the victim must be considered. Shall I love the criminal more than the victim? The victim actually represents society which must be protected and avenged. If there is no avenging, law becomes meaningless, and the innocent lose their protection. Mercy may be shown a violator if it does not make law ineffective.

Governments do not bear the sword in vain in action against the individual criminal or the criminal nation when their actions are for self-protection and avenging. There is no justification for aggressive warfare, but a nation can no more rightly ignore injustice done against a weak nation than the neighbor can rightly ignore the aged widow next door as she is being attacked. It

is true that these matters present a problem to the conscience because, due to our lack of accurate information, we cannot always be sure that we are supporting a just cause.

The “powers that be” are more than rulers; they are a system of government. We are parts of that system. As such, we pay taxes, obey laws, pray for the rulers, and honor our rulers. Each constructive action as a citizen aids the government in its role as protector and avenger, whether in peace or war. Jesus taught his disciples to pay taxes to Caesar even though they would be supporting a government which carried on extensive warfare and had a tax-supported pagan religion. Jesus did not demand that the soldier in the Roman army of occupation resign from, or desert, the army (Luke 3:14). God must expect each citizen to share as avengers of his wrath, while making allowance for his inability to know all the complex details which motivate the government and his inability to control all of its actions.

To some who study this issue, the non-violence and lack of self-defense of Jesus have been considered as sufficient evidence to show that no disciple should ever be violent or defend himself. Let us look at this further.

Although Jesus was generally nonviolent in character, he did some aggressive, forceful, and destructive things. “And he found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and he made a scourge of cords, and cast all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen; and he poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew their tables;” (John 2:14f). Also, Jesus caused the death of about two thousand hogs when he cast the demons into them (Mark 5:1f).

While on trial before Pilate, Jesus declared, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight” (John 18:36). There we have it plainly stated that his servants do not fight. But, is that really what Jesus was declaring? The remainder of that sentence qualifies the first part: “...that I should not be delivered to the Jews.” He was actually saying that, if his kingdom were earthly, he would not allow the Jews to kill him. He had already told Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Put up the sword into the sheath: the cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink of it?” (John 18: 11). Self defense would have frustrated his whole purpose in coming. He was giving himself willingly to the Jews to be crucified, thus fulfilling the scriptures. “Or thinkest thou that I cannot beseech my Father, and he shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? How then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” (Matt. 26:53f).

These statements of Jesus have nothing to do with the rights of his disciples through the centuries. His kingdom was not promoted or supported by military power, but the Kingdom of Heaven and the “powers that be” are not identical. He speaks of his avoiding the cross by use of help from the Father or the disciples.

We have dealt with the right of the individual and the society. Now, does a minority within a society have that right also? Is civil disobedience ever justified? “He that resisteth the power, withstands the ordinance of God” (Rom. 13:2).

Generally, we are under obligation to obey the laws of the land, but, when there is conflict between the spiritual and the civil, we have the words and example of Peter and John: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard” (Acts 4:19f). “But Peter and the apostles answered and said, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

Christianity was not disruptive of such social conditions as slavery, but the slave was not hopelessly bound. “Every one should remain in the state in which he was called. Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity” (1 Cor. 7:20f RSV).

May a part of a society revolt against the whole? Did our forefathers sin in revolting against England? May a disciple rightly hold membership in a labor union which depends upon coercion to gain its purposes? Is it ever proper to take part in violent demonstrations of civil disobedience? While we uphold the right of self-protection for both the individual and the society, these questions concerning minority activities have no easy answers.

In searching for answers to these questions, we must ask and answer many more questions. How severe is the injustice needing correction? May the action being taken be expected reasonably to lead to the solution? Are our motives truly unselfish? Is greed involved? Are we motivated by prejudice against a race, a religion, the wealthy, or a regime? Are we simply taking by force what we are not willing to earn, buy, or negotiate honorably? Are we motivated by political preference? When a minority deals conscientiously with these questions, it should be rather peaceful.

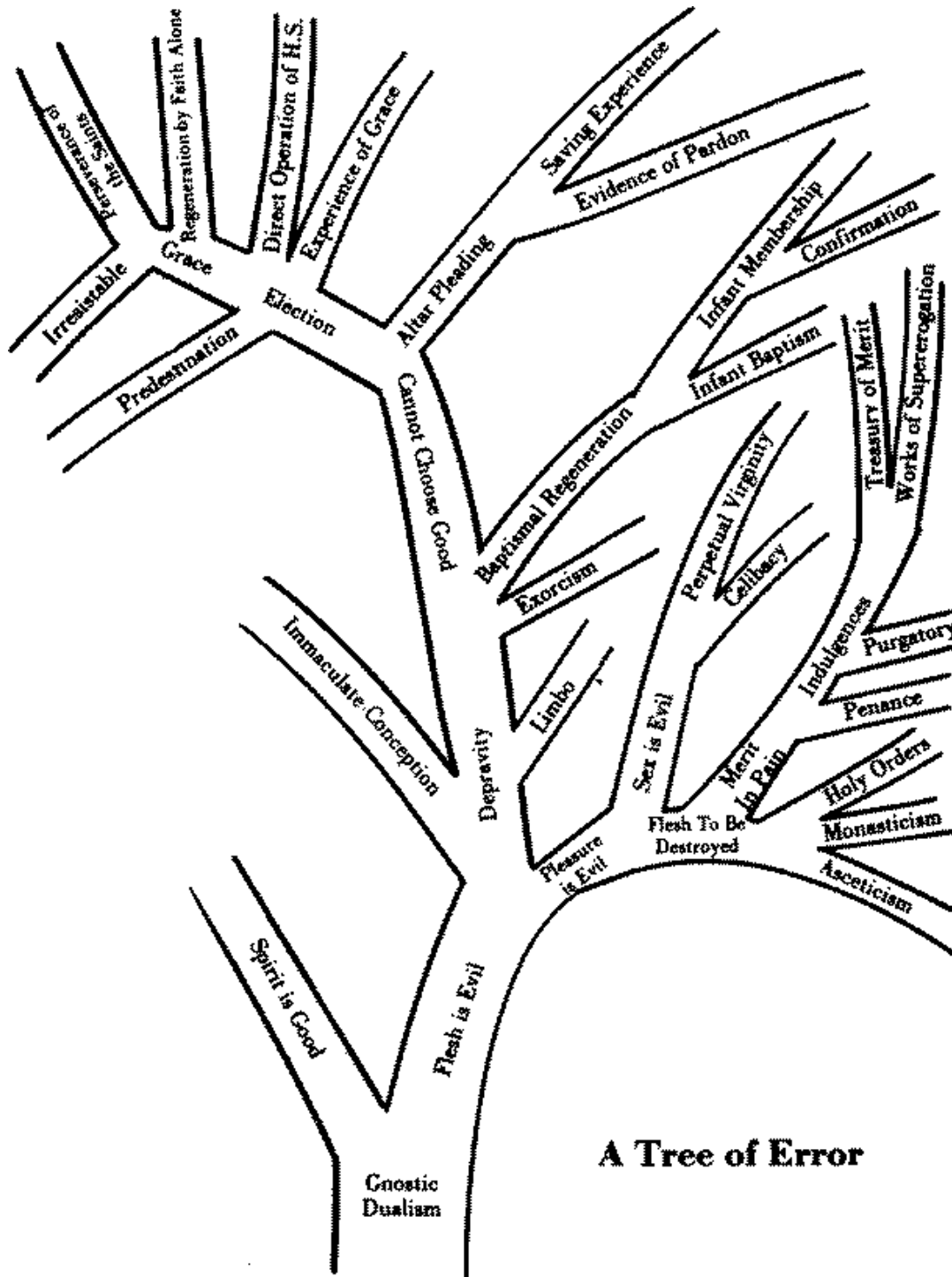
In this treatise, I have not answered all pertinent questions. The conclusions that I have put forth have not all come easily. From my earliest childhood, I was taught that, not only would it be sinful to serve in armed forces, but it would be wrong also for a disciple to serve in any governmental capacity, or even to vote for those who serve. This concept had been instilled in my mind and conscience so deeply that, in agonizing sincerity, I registered in the World War 11 draft as a conscientious objector. It was not made into a real test, however, because I was deferred as a minister of the gospel. But I have written these things in all good feeling toward, and sympathy with, those who are conscientiously opposed to serving in the military. I only hope that this discourse may make decisions less agonizing for someone else than they were for me.

“Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with you all” (2 Thes. 3:16).

A TREE OF ERROR

In our consideration of the distinctive teachings of various churches, we may at first think of each erroneous doctrine as having developed independently out of some mistaken scriptural interpretation. But that is not the case with most of the debatable issues through the centuries.

Doctrines have developed. One error has called for another either for its support, as a consequence, or in reaction to it. In the accompanying graphic illustration to this essay, I have



A Tree of Error

pictured a tree of error. In simplistic manner, it shows the relationship of many distinctive doctrines. One developed out of the other just as each twig or branch of a tree grows out of another.

The trunk of the tree, or the beginning of error as far as this lesson is concerned, was Gnosticism. Gnosticism was the greatest philosophical threat to the revealed truth in the latter part of New Testament history. The epistles of John cannot be understood without an awareness of the Gnostic philosophy and influence. Paul seems to be countering some of their prevalent ideas in his letters to Timothy, the Ephesians, and the Colossians.

In this brief survey, I am only setting forth an outline of development with no pretense of giving detailed investigation or refutation of any one facet. And I am pruning off the branch concerning spirit in contrast to the flesh. You may be challenged to develop that part of the tree.

There were many aspects to the Gnostic teachings, but the key proposition was that matter, the flesh, and all that pertains to either are evil and that spirit, the opposing reality, is good. To the Gnostic, sin is not what man has done, but the nature of man in the body, and redemption is man's effort to secure emancipation from the flesh.

Since the flesh was considered to be evil, to accommodate the flesh with pleasure would be contamination, but to destroy the flesh through privation, pain, and discipline would be purifying. As the ascetic life was considered as a way of purifying, many accepted asceticism as a holier way of life.

Some devout men separated themselves from society in this ascetic life, becoming hermits. In more organized form, this developed into monasticism, a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience secluded from society. Not only were people separated physically in monasteries, but also a system of holy orders separated many of the pious into special groups. In holy orders they were thought to have a more sure reach of heaven because they deprived themselves of physical and social pleasures, including marriage and sexual fulfillment.

The concept of merit in pain developed through this view of fleshly purging. Persons were called upon to do some act of penance as a payment, or fine, to relieve temporal punishment for their sins. The Sacrament of Penance was supposed to remove the eternal punishment, but not the debt of temporal punishment. If, however, a person should die still guilty of venial sin, he would necessarily endure a period of purging by suffering in purgatory until satisfaction for his temporal sin was met.

A way of avoidance of that purgatorial cleansing was devised, however. One could do works of merit or acts of contrition by which he could obtain either partial or plenary indulgence. The indulgence was not a license to sin, but it was a means of storing up indulgences to be effective after death or to draw upon the merit of others. Some persons, supposedly, lived such meritorious lives that they had credits, as it were, to spare. These works of supererogation allowed their credits to be stored in the treasury of merit for disposal by the church. From this treasury, the contrite soul, by his acts of contrition, might receive indulgence to shorten his suffering in purgatory.

Since sexual fulfillment was considered as a part of the evil nature of the flesh, celibacy came to be considered as the higher road to holiness, particularly through the holy orders. From this grew the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, for it would have been profane to think of the Mother of God as having been sullied by the taint of sin — even through motherhood as a wife.

If sin was the nature of man, then there could be no question about original sin. All were supposed to be born guilty of Adam's sin. But an exception had to be made. How could the sinless Jesus be born of a mother who bore the guilt of Adam? The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception became a necessary explanation. She was not conceived in sin, they concluded, but was "full of grace" so as to avoid the possibility of passing original sin on to her Son.

Another accommodation had to be made. For God to consign an unbaptized infant to everlasting torment for no fault of its own would seem to be unjust. So, a bordering place to heaven, limbo, was conceived. There the infant supposedly enjoys a state of natural happiness although not allowed to see the presence of God.

Ordinarily, the infant was to be baptized. The priest received the infant brought for baptism at the door of the church, breathed upon its face, and exorcised the evil spirit. This exorcism, according to Augustine, was because of the existence of original sin. Baptism was for the remission of sins; so, it was thought necessary to baptize the infant. This baptism was thought to accomplish more than just the forgiveness of sins, however. The sinful nature of the child had to be changed; so, the concept of baptismal regeneration was devised. Since baptism makes one a part of the church, infant membership was accepted in a conditional manner though it was not of the child's own will. Full membership came only after the rite of confirmation.

In time, others, accepting the premise of original sin, reasoned that a person is born totally depraved, unable to change his own state. Such persons would plead at the altar for God to send down his regenerating spirit to save them. Thus they had a saving experience by the direct operation of God on the heart. Since this was a work of the Spirit, a person would not know when he was saved except that he was given a feeling as evidence of pardon.

Still others, accepting the premise of original sin and total depravity, declared that the unregenerated person could not even choose to do good or to take a step toward God. He had to depend upon God's election. God chose those he predestined. Only those of his predestination received his grace. Since it was an act of God, it was irresistible. It was an irresistible experience of grace through the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of the unregenerated one. Faith was considered as a gift, so, as far as man's part was concerned, it was regeneration by faith alone.

If God predestined persons of his own election and his grace was irresistible, then nothing could prevent the ultimate salvation of that chosen one. Thus came the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, otherwise spoken of as the impossibility of apostasy and once saved-always saved.

Thus we have seen the tree of error grow from the trunk of Gnostic dualism through branches and twigs. No doubt, you recognized doctrinal errors in this tree which are the distinctive

teachings of various churches. Yet each of these doctrines derived from a wrong premise. Complicated systems of teaching involving various combinations of these errors have produced and perpetuated historic churches.

From the Genesis account of creation, we learn that every plant brings forth after its kind. Jesus reaffirmed that in a spiritual context: “So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit” (Matt. 7:18f). Isn’t it time for us to dig up this old tree of error, go back to the original seed which is the word of God, and let the True Vine and the branches flourish again from its planting?

We have complicated the gospel and the requirements of the Lord. Honest men and women are going back to the Bible for a new, unbiased look. They are discovering old treasures of truth long tarnished and obscured by the accumulated rubbish of centuries of interpretations and pronouncements. They, being more loyal to truth than their systems, are discovering a new freedom in the grace of Christ. Renewal is on the march! Don’t let it pass you by, leaving you in the empty shell of a lifeless system.

CHAPTER 23

GOD IS LIMITED

God is all powerful, all knowing, and present everywhere. Yet God is limited. Unless we are willing to admit that everything in the world is in harmony with His desires, we must think of Him as being limited.

Limitation may be through inherent weakness or by self-restraint. Any boundaries of God are self-imposed. We will notice some of His self-limitations.

1. **Angels and Men.** Angels sinned. This could occur only because God gave them freedom of choice and then withheld forceful domination over their wills. Evidently, Satan is a fallen angel permitted to operate, not through the inferior power of God, but by the sufferance of God. And man was given a will and the power to choose to work contrary to the desires of God. Is man stronger than God? God has restrained his dominion over man's will. The overpowering will of God could have made man as responsible and as non-moral as a robot. God's limitation gave liberty to angels and to man.

2. **Knowledge and Foreknowledge.** Conceivably, God could know all things past, present, and future. But to declare that God knows all things that man will ever think or do in the future presents some problems. It would mean that God, from the "beginning of eternity," knowing all things that would come to pass, chose to create man and to put him in a circumstance where most of his kind would ultimately endure eternal torment. How, then, could God repent that He made man when He saw man's perverseness? Would God's sorrow for man not have been felt even before He made man?

God must have chosen to limit His foreknowledge in order to give man power to choose. God's restraint is man's liberty and glory. Otherwise, man is ruled by determining forces which negate his will and choice. If this prevails, man's life is as though it were programmed into a computer, pre-set for a predetermined response. His career would be as a Rube Goldberg contraption of cause and effect.

3. **God's Patience.** In his omnipotence God could destroy the evildoer and his evil at once. Mercy brings restraint. The long-suffering of God waits. In this instance, God's limitation is man's opportunity for salvation.

4. **His Limitation of Flesh.** The Word was God. The Word became flesh. When born of the Holy Spirit and Mary, He became the Son of God and the Son of Man. Any thought that He was all powerful, all knowing, and everywhere at the moment of His conception, at his birth, or at the age of twelve is incredible and contrary to the Scriptures. In His humiliation He divested himself of these infinite traits. He limited Himself in strength, wisdom, and locality. Taking the limitations of flesh, he was dependent upon his mother's milk and tender care. He could hunger, thirst, grow tired, and suffer pain. It was needful that he increase in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. Although the unlimited God cannot be tempted, Jesus found an appeal

in sin. His infinite powers were so restrained that he was abandoned to Satan for a while to suffer spiritual death, which is separation from God, in our place. After His resurrection He received all power and infinite glorification again. Love moved Him to become weak for us.

5. **Evangelism.** Surely the Almighty could save a man without the feeble help of his fellowman. But God has withheld himself in order to give man this honor of working to help save. The message was put in earthen vessels and is now being proclaimed by those whom He is glorifying.

These observations should inspire deeper appreciation in us for the glorious place God has given us in His creation. He not only shared his life with us, but He has also shared His powers of intellectual reason and the will to act by them. Thanks to God's limitations, we share some of the liberties of divinity.

CHAPTER 24

“YOU ARE HERE”

In some of the rest areas of our great highway system in Texas, a map of the state is provided. To help the traveler get his bearings, an indicator points to the local spot with: “You are here.” The traveler may study the map, not only to see where he is, but to see where he has come from, what he has passed on either side, and what lies before him.

Some concerned researchers in the Church of Christ have made statistical studies in recent years to try to locate our position on the progress map. All have made discouraging observations. Some have expressed alarm that our conversions have declined to, or below, zero-growth rate.

Learning that “we are here” far short of our destination, we desire to know the cause and remedy for our lack of current progress. Many helpful observations have been made. It is a complex problem, so we must be suspicious of any simplistic causes or cures which may be offered. There is a factor affecting our slow-down, however, which seems to me to make our involved and expensive evangelistic efforts ineffective. This cause is not usually pointed out by our statisticians, possibly because it would hurt our self-image to make such admissions about the Church of Christ. It would admit that we have not followed our map closely enough and have traveled some erroneous, muddy side roads.

The Stone-Campbell Movement, which sought to unite the Christians in all the sects, was the most exciting thing to happen in religion in early America. The plea to sweep away the complexity of creeds, organizations, and traditions was something the common citizen could grasp. It was a thrilling plea spread with great evangelistic fervor. In the Nineteenth Century it became the fourth largest religious group on America and was the largest indigenous movement. But that was too good to be true.

Division diverted much of the attention and energy into in-fighting. The unity plea was dulled, having become compromised and perverted. The argumentation that brought and justified division brought legalism. Legalism and doctrinal division developed together. We can hardly have one without the other. Legalistic interpretations foster divisions for they demand conformity, and divisions foster legalistic interpretations to justify their existence.

The Church of Christ became a separate body and began to splinter into other fellowships (a euphemism for sects). These divisions began to proclaim that they were the one true church restored and that unity could be had only by conformity with them. They became exclusivists, claiming to be the only Christians. Now the public was called upon, not just to decide against denominations in general, but also to judge between different exclusivistic groups, who each claimed to be the undenominational church.

In spite of the change of message, the division of the Movement, and the divisive in-fightings, the Church of Christ regained momentum in growth. How could this be, since the message had changed in its appeal?

When a group has an unappealing, authoritarian, and demanding message, it spreads in proportion to the militancy and fervor of its adherents. The cults, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses are examples of what zeal can do. So, convinced that all people must be in the Church of Christ in order to be saved, our zeal made us the fastest growing group in America for a time in this century.

Now there is a recession in the Church of Christ. A factor at work among us which is quite different from those causing previous slow-downs is: Our message has come to have an uncertain sound. We have become an educated, sophisticated, upper-middleclass segment of our society. Both the preachers and the members are beginning to see through our simplistic stance. Many are admitting that we are not the only ones with a chance of heaven, that we are a sectarian division, and that restoration of an extinct church is invalid. They have replaced militant zeal with an irenic, non-judgmental spirit.

These people are greatly frustrated because they are still held in the congregational systems built upon the former concepts. They cannot speak out without suffering recriminations within the fellowship. Preachers dare not utter their more enlightened thoughts lest they rock the boat and lose their positions. The structures are still held in check by the exclusivistic thinkers. So a stalemate has resulted from those conditions.

Being in this state of change, the Church of Christ is in its adolescence, seeking its identity and direction. Some congregations have been excited by this new enlightenment. Some are more ecumenical, not sure now just who needs converting. Searching for direction, some are emphasizing the servant church; some consider unstructured fellowship and individuality as more important; others place the Holy Spirit at the center; and some just want to preach Jesus, whatever they mean by that.

In the final analysis, we have outgrown our simplistic message and direction which we have confided in for much of this century. Developing from that more childish era, we are in the midst of the uncertainties of adolescence. Our aims and goals are not yet clearly defined, so our message is somewhat ambiguous. At the moment, doctrinal lessons are giving way to more Christ-centered teaching along with much amateur psychology, personal dynamics, cheerleading, and program building. We have not settled on a clear, appealing message distinctive to the Church of Christ which we can proclaim with enthusiasm.

And we may never settle on that distinctive message. Since there is only one body, why should we seek for a message distinctive to us — unless we want to continue being sectarian exclusivists?

The Lord's church will continue unshaken. The Church of Christ segment of it needs to study the map, see where we are, and determine what change in route is in order.

CHAPTER 25

GOD IS IN CHARGE AND HE KNOWS HIS OWN

How can a person possibly experience the peace and joy which Jesus has promised while burdened with concern for billions of lost souls? We will have concern as long as one person is lost. So, it seems that our joy is smothered out by the burden of the unsaved. How can we keep both our sanity and our concern?

This treatise may seem to be an effort to justify my lack of zeal. It is intended to be an effort to discover that “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

The burden of the whole world does not rest on me. I am not to blame for its dire condition. It is my Father’s world. He did not bring the evil, but he did permit it. He has not abdicated. When the whole world went sour in the time of Noah, God demonstrated that he was still in charge. In the time when his chosen people were in captivity because of idolatry, God reminded that “the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will, and sets over it the lowliest of men,” and that he “changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings” (Daniel 4:17; 2:21).

When we are tested to the limit, it is easy for us to feel that God has abdicated and left us as hapless victims of evil. The Israelites cried out in despair as the Egyptian cavalry trapped them at the Red Sea. Moses urged them to stand still long enough to see that God was still in charge. David calms our bewildered hearts with, “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the Lord!” (Psalm 27:14). And Isaiah tells us, “They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” (Isa. 40:31). John Milton, on accepting his blindness, learned that “They also serve who only stand and wait.” God knows the evil condition. That peace that passes understanding can come only to those who have learned to wait for the Lord.

One of the most intriguing thoughts in the Bible is expressed by Paul: “When the fullness of time came...” (Gal. 4:4). “It came to pass” is used many times. God plans and guides with infinite love and wisdom. In our impatience, we may not want to wait for God to fulfill his purposes.

God promised a son to Abraham and Sarah. Time passed. No son. Sarah suggested that they help God out by letting Abraham bear her a son through Hagar. Ishmael came. Years passed. Now, Abraham tried to help God out by suggesting that Ishmael be his heir. God had other plans. It was not yet the fullness of time.

Moses accepted the role of deliverer. He did not wait for the Lord. He killed the Egyptian, thinking that the Israelites would rally to the cause. But he had to run for his life, and he waited another forty years for God’s timetable.

I heard this story. A young man just out of high school was being urged by a Christian educator to attend college. The young man felt the urgency of lost souls in Africa and wanted to go there immediately. The educator insisted that he needed to get his education first. The young man insisted, "I can't afford to waste four years in school because people are dying unsaved." To this the seasoned educator replied with compassion, "Young man, God knows there are souls dying unsaved in Africa, and he could have had you born four years earlier."

Why did God wait so long to send Jesus? Why not send him in the time of Moses or Elijah? "But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth his Son..."

Jesus said, "Go preach." For more than forty years I have been trying to do that. My big burden has been in converting. But that is God's task. If I will preach, he will take care of the converting. The power is in his Word, not in me. Maybe we try to help God out in disappointing ways also. We give crash courses to make soul-winning specialists, teaching the psychology of salesmanship, the latest soul-winning techniques, and the refined interpretations of the Church of Christ in order to convert the reluctant soul by overpowering him by our personality and techniques. These same tactics would sell vacuum cleaners as easily, and the reluctant buyer may not be too happy about his purchase after the salesman is gone.

Do we really believe in the power of the Word and that God will work through it? Why are we not leading all others in distributing Bibles? There are countless millions of literate people. It is much easier to send Bibles than persons. But we seem convinced that persons cannot find salvation and the Church of Christ in the Bible by themselves. There is doubt that God can save through his Word without our explanations and tactics.

World Bible School, initiated by our beloved Jimmie Lovell, has been successful by depending more on the power of God to convert. Thousands in America have spread the message by mail and have sent Bibles. These teachings have not been altogether without our guidance, but we have depended more on God for the converting. There is no way of knowing, but I would guess that more souls have been saved overseas by this method in our generation than by all our missionaries combined. This is not meant to discourage missionaries. God forbid. But even missionaries must trust God more than their skills. Isaiah reminds us, "So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10f). God is still in charge of it.

In the parable of the soils, Jesus taught us that all will not be saved. God knows the stony ground. It may be America. You cannot make garden soil with a jack hammer, someone has observed. He knows the good soil. It may be India or Nigeria. Stony soil has frustrated many mission efforts and killed the spirit of many missionaries.

God knows the soil. He knows his own. He made it possible for the man from Ethiopia to learn the gospel. He directed Paul to a new continent to reach Lydia. He directed Paul through Thessalonica, Beroea, and Athens until he came to Corinth. There God assured Paul, "I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:10).

A certain elder began to accept a more intimate working of God in his life. His new ideas were not readily acceptable in his congregation. He resigned. After several years passed in which I had no communication with him, he visited me. He was a changed man. He seemed to have it all together, being totally at peace. He told me of the pressures and frustrations he had felt formerly in his harried efforts to achieve for the Lord. Now, he explained, the pressure is gone because God sends the people to him, or him to the people, to whom he wishes him to minister. He believes that God knows his own and still fills those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

It was dark in Israel in the days of Elijah. The prophets of God were slain. Altars of God were replaced by altars of Baal. Jezebel kept 450 prophets of Baal at government expense. However, with Elijah's help, God began to change things at Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal were killed, but now Jezebel vows to kill Elijah. He runs for his life, all the way down to Beer-Sheba. This weary and depressed man sat down under a broom tree and asked to die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4). This poor man had felt the burden of the world on his shoulders too long. Evil was winning, it seemed. Loneliness sapped his spirit. He had had it!

God gave that despondent man food, for he still had traveling to do. Forty days later he was hiding in a cave in Horeb. God called, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He lamented in answer, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away."

God called Elijah to the mouth of the cave to observe an awesome demonstration of God's power. There was a wind that broke rocks, followed by an earthquake, and then a fire. Now Elijah hears the still small voice! God again asked him why he was there and Elijah repeated the same despondent wail of an answer. He was the only one left and they were after him! God told him to go and anoint Hazeel to be king of Syria, Jehu to be king of Israel, and Elisha to take his place. And God concluded, "And him who escapes from the sword of Hazeel shall Jehu slay; and him who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal."

God was saying to that great prophet, "You have 'psyched' yourself out! You have tried to carry the world, but I, the Almighty One, am still in charge. You did not wait for me or listen for the still small voice. You judged yourself to be the only faithful and righteous person, but I am the judge. Had your judgments not been so narrowed, you would have had the strength of seven thousand people to aid you and to dispel your loneliness. I am still in charge and I know who are my own. Wait for me!"

Jesus did not call us to bear heavier burdens and to wear more galling yokes. Jesus still invites, "Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

CHAPTER 26

HOOK'S POINTS

I Love You

It seems strange and sad to me that there is no record of anyone telling Jesus that he or she loved him during his ministry. After the resurrection, Jesus coaxed Peter into admitting, first, his affection, then his intentional devotion.

Were their expressions just overlooked by the biographers? Had he not taught them that love was the great commandment? How can we explain their reluctance to affirm their love? Was it just too awesome or presumptuous? These questions come to my mind when I hear people gushy with, "I love you, Jesus!"

Shared Expressions

Some of us are timid and awkward about expressing sentiment to ones we love. The words fail to come out. But the greeting card comes to our rescue. Using words of someone else, the sentimentality becomes less embarrassing.

Those of us who cannot satisfactorily compose a song and sing it to the object of our love can identify with musical expressions on television, radio, and records, and thus communicate our emotions.

Many persons find it very difficult to pray alone or to offer a personal testimony of their feelings toward God. Timidity conquers them. Such persons, however, can identify fully with prayers worded by others and can join boldly in praise to God in group singing. They express feelings best through and with other persons.

This must be one of the reasons we are instructed to worship in assemblies as well as in private. The muteness of your private devotions should make you even more aware of your need to meet with others regularly for shared expression.

Love By Command

I have just come from hearing another message about love. That is great, for we have need of it. This man, however, used the same approach which I have heard, and used, for many years. We must love because we are commanded to do it. Love becomes a legal requirement, according to that approach.

All of us know that we should love, but love can hardly be initiated and nurtured by law or command. That would be a nice trick, wouldn't it, if we could command people to love us and bring it into being by that means?

The scriptures tell us to provoke/stir up one another to love and good works/active goodness. Here is where the emphasis should be. We should love others so they will respond in kind. We should continually remind one another of what God has done for us and the response of love will follow.

Through the years, I have given very few lessons on the “command to give,” but many needs have been brought to the church’s attention from the pulpit and a loving response would meet the need. Let’s remind people of the needs of the lost, poor, orphans, prisoners, hurting, etc. Good works will come as a response to the need. out of love rather than a command.

Let’s talk about things that stir a loving response rather than trying to enforce love as a part of a legal code.

To Glorify God?

Some unidentified person in the dim past seems to have come up with a cliché answer which is heard everywhere. When we ask what our purpose on earth is, the answer always comes: To glorify God.

That is pious, but unappealing! If we believe that God put us in this existence of pain, sorrow, and death just to add to his glory, it becomes easy for us to resent God as a selfish deity. That concept has characterized God as having a colossal ego problem which would cause him to demand our flattery to satisfy his vanity, to require depriving gifts to feed his pride, and to bind arbitrary oppressive whims to build up his sense of power.

God must have created man because he wanted man’s fellowship, for, as soon as man separated himself from the Father, he initiated plans to bring man back to him He loves man like a man loves his children. He sent his Son in an effort to reconcile us back into his presence to enjoy eternal fellowship with him.

God wants us to glorify him — to hold him in high opinion — so we will want to return to him. He wants us to glorify him — to present him to others in favorable aspect — so others will want to come to him.

He loves us! He wants us back! He begs for our cooperation to accomplish that.

One Body

There is one body, one church. We speak of dividing the church. People cannot divide the church so that there is a multiplicity of churches, or even two half-churches.

All who have been baptized into Christ are in that one body. They may alienate themselves from each other, but they are still in the same body, just as brothers and sisters may fight while still in their father’s family. None can cast others out of it. They only become judgmental and divisive.

That sounds simple, doesn’t it?

Purifying the Church

Keeping the church pure has been a big thing with us, and it should be. How do we accomplish it? We don't. There has never been a pure one for it is composed of erring people.

In our efforts to purify, we have pressed our interpretations and scruples to the point of dividing. So we attempt to purify the church by division, by separating from, or driving out, those who disagree. By this method we start another pure church (?) each decade or so.

Wonder why Paul did not recommend that for the problem-filled church in Corinth?

I'll Examine You Also

I do not know whether we practice open closed communion or closed open communion!

Without examining others, we invite anyone in our assemblies to partake of the Lord's Supper with us. But we draw the line against communing with them in their services.

Communion is sharing, mutual participation, or fellowship. We enjoy this fellowship with any who attend our services. They are encouraged to sing, pray, and to eat the Lord's Supper, and we do not refuse their money. But they cannot get on our church roll because we do not admit that they are disciples. We examine, judge, and condemn them while having fellowship with them!

The communion emphasizes the oneness of the body. Paul said, "We are one loaf (bread)." The loaf depicts his one body. Anyone eating or drinking without discerning the oneness of that body eats and drinks damnation. Examine yourself, Paul urges, not the other person.

If I can eat with him in our building, why can't I eat with him in his building? If I am in fellowship with him in the communion, why am I not in fellowship with him all the time?

Diminishing Returns

In our zeal to achieve, we have operated on the concept that, if a little is good, more is better.

You run the carpet sweeper throughout your house. Now, the carpet is cleaner and looks better. It helped so much that you do it again, and again, and again, and again! At some time you passed the point of profitability. The law of diminishing returns nullifies the concept that, if a little is good, more is better. To continue sweeping the carpet would be a foolish waste of time and energy, and it would be destructive to the carpet.

We must apply the law of diminishing returns to all activities, whether attending services, singing, praying, giving, or whatever.

That sounds simple, doesn't it?

What He Does Not Say

How long has it been since you heard a pulpit lesson against instrumental music? Years? What does that tell you? If the preacher were convinced that it is sinful, he would be warning against it. On this, and other subjects, listen for what he does not say. You may learn some interesting lessons about change among us.

Kill It!

On the farm there were various kinds of creatures that could get sick

and die. When a fowl or animal became hopelessly sick, we would kill it before it went through the agonies of death.

When I was a child, the church had assemblies only on Sunday morning, and I assumed that folks were going to heaven that way.

As time went on, classes were added, then evening services, to be followed later by Wednesday evening assemblies. Ladies' Bible Class and the Young People's Meeting were added as time progressed, along with Vacation Bible School.

As each new activity was added to the program, it became a necessary function for the faithful. Some of these programs grow purposeless, tired, unfulfilling, burdensome, and sick. Wise leaders will recognize that their programs are not sacred and, when they cease to serve their purpose, they will kill them before they die.

Cheating Ourselves

Our neurotic aversion to solos and other special singing in our assemblies has caused us to sing the same songs until they lose their appeal. Having no time to introduce current songs except in our assemblies, and being tied down to the hymn book, we have limited ourselves to the old familiar songs. The old songs are not objectionable except that they tend to date our religion with the past and they become threadbare. Current songs can be introduced by singing groups, thus allowing our fresh poetic expressions to be in line with modern thought and music. We have cheated ourselves by this self-imposed limitation.

We can hardly say that we are teaching one another in song if each person present knows its message and is singing it.

We have interpreted "each one has a hymn" to mean that each, or one of you, has a hymn to lead.

When we do have a singing group, it is always necessarily after the "worship service" is dismissed! Is the teaching and admonition in song by the group worship or entertainment? And who laid down all those rules for us anyway?

Long Play Album Without Commercials

Why can't our song leaders, or someone else, introduce songs with some scripture reading or thought to make them more relevant and to avoid the ritualistic number-song, number-song, number-song routine, like a long play album without commercials?

Rather than choosing songs on a theme, sometimes to emphasize the sermon, I have always tried to choose a variety of expressions — praise, prayer, aspiration, hope, assurance, exhortation, comfort, etc. — so as to touch on some specific need of each person present.

Distinctions

We have always been very cautious not to use elevating titles, for we are brethren. But when we call everybody by his first name, whether Joe, Roger, Kevin, or Don, but we call the preacher Brother Hook, haven't we made that into an elevating title?

ACU In 2006

While I was a student in the classes of Charles H. Roberson in ACC, many times I heard him remark that no institution of higher learning in our country that was 100 years old still stood for the principles that it was founded to promote. It couldn't happen to good old ACC, I thought confidently.

Now I am rather confident that by 2006 one will never hear a defense of “verbal” inspiration at ACU, condemnation of instrumental music, lessons about the “falling away and the restoration of the church” — reaffirming the validity of the “Restoration Movement” — nor contention that the Church of Christ is the non-sectarian, non-denominational, exclusive, one true church.

I cannot hope to live until that time, but I just might live long enough to see most of that change. And ACU, which has been so dear to me, may be much better for the change.

Historical Perspective

Although we have our roots in the Stone-Campbell Movement of the early Nineteenth Century, we passed milestones of distinction in 1889 and 1906 which made us into a separate church.

In 1889 at a gathering of about 6000 conservative disciples in Sand Creek, Illinois, under the leadership of Daniel Somner, a document was read that declared that those who accepted choirs, societies, preacher-pastors, “and other objectionable and unauthorized things” could not be regarded as brethren. Thus he led in the making of the Church of Christ into a distinct body, the first division of the Movement.

In 1906, at the direction of certain leaders in the Church of Christ, we were listed in the government census as a separate group for the first time.

Although I had no awareness of it, as I was growing up, undoubtedly, I saw and heard numerous people who were disciples before 1906 and 1889. A late member of the church here, Lizabeth

Heywood, was 103 years old on July 26, 1981. She had been baptized at the age of twelve, the year after Sand Creek and sixteen years before our separate listing.

Could the Lord's church be of such recent development? And at what point did the Church of Christ become the one true church?

As Often

By the direction of God, Israel kept the annual feast of the Passover. It was a memorial of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. It was during the eating of this memorial that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. He gave new meaning to it. As often as they ate the Passover, they remembered their deliverance; now, as often as they shall eat of the Lord's Supper, they will remember their deliverance from sin.

Following in the context of the Jewish practice, the disciples would understand "as often" to mean annually. We have ignored this contextual meaning, and there is insufficient evidence to prove that the early disciples ate the Lord's Supper weekly.

We, in our legalistic inclinations, have sought to bind weekly communion. The Lord could have specified certain times for it, but he didn't. The "as often" is left to our discretion.

Our weekly communion has been reduced to a bare, formal ritual in too many cases. I think that it would serve its purpose better if we communed less often but made it a rich experience each time — like the Passover.

The Individual and The System

A few years ago a man was baptized into our congregation who had many beliefs that were unorthodox to our Church of Christ people. But he became very zealous and started a jail ministry of his own, proclaiming the simple gospel. I remained in part-time with the church and another pulpit minister was employed. This young man proposed to do great wonders in converting our city. The new convert began to bring prisoners to our building to baptize them, and I would report the news in the bulletin. But I got word from the elders that, since we really, did not know what the man was teaching at the jail, it would be best not to mention these baptisms. During the year, our congregation of 325 members and its flamboyant preacher baptized fourteen persons while the new convert alone baptized eighteen. But don't mention it in the bulletin for he doesn't fit with the system.

Hang In There!

After experiencing the freedom that grace gives, various persons have left the Church of Christ in favor of a less dogmatic, more accepting, and Spirit filled group. They found their former associations based upon exclusive dogmatism to be intolerable. I sympathize with such persons but, generally speaking, I would not advise one to leave his heritage.

When you leave, you can no longer be of any influence to bring about reformation in the Church of Christ.

When you leave, you discourage others who are taking their first steps toward the road to freedom. They need your support and leadership.

When you leave, you face an identity crisis which may not be handled easily.

When you leave, you trade familiar problems for unfamiliar ones. There are no groups without problems.

In some instances a situation may become intolerable and a change is necessary for survival, but in most circumstances I would say, "Hang in there!" Wait for the Spirit to work.

Unfortunately, concessions in order to make and keep peace must be made by the more grace oriented disciples. Don't expect concessions from the dogmatic, authoritarian exclusivists because, when you are right on everything, to give an inch is to compromise truth.

Bloody Concepts

The New Testament scriptures make frequent reference to the blood of Christ. We are accustomed to the bloody concepts expressed there and in the Old Testament writings also, but I wonder how they impress the uninitiated.

In the animal sacrifices common to the Israelites and the pagans in ancient times, the blood represented the life of the animal. They understood that the animal's life was given as a substitute for the life of the person. They were familiar with the concept of blood having power of atonement and forgiveness.

In the Twentieth Century, the blood offering of animal sacrifices is remote from our culture and thinking. Our society is so far removed from nature that blood is abhorrent to us.

Because of our cultural concepts, it seems that we would do well to speak more plainly about Jesus giving his life as a substitute for ours and of his dying in our stead rather than using the allusive and anachronistic language of his shedding his blood and the power of salvation being in the blood.

Corporate Prayers

One thoughtful, relevant prayer can add much value to an otherwise dull assembly. But we hear so few of them! Generally, we have not taken public praying seriously. We call on whoever is next on the membership roll whether he is capable or not. We would do well to use only those men who are intimate with the Father and who can lead others into a deeper experience in prayer.

Our avoidance of written prayers has deprived us of much richness. It is commendable that a person write out his prayer at home as he meditates and studies the need of those to pray with

him. A prayer read in the assembly is still a prayer, if we truly pray it, just as prayers in our songs are appropriate, if we sincerely pray them in song.

No person, leading a prayer in the assembly, should pray a private prayer there, like we are hearing these days. Let personal prayers be prayed in private, not on the street corner. If it cannot be prayed with “we” rather than “I”, let it be secret.

Sinful Sensations

Is arousal of bodily sensations sinful? Due to our conditioning on misinformation, many of us will answer that question affirmatively.

Is it sinful to arouse feelings of hunger within our bodies? Is sexual arousal a sin but appetite arousal all right? Maybe you say that sexual arousal may lead to fornication. That is true, but appetite arousal can lead to over-eating or the stealing of food.

Sexual arousal is not lust, but it is used by the Lord to help us form the home and hold it together. It becomes lust only when one gives consent of his mind to satisfy that sensation out of wedlock. In like manner, desire to murder is not murder in the heart unless consent of the mind is given to perform the act.

Desire may be temptation, but temptation is not sin or lust unless one gives consent of the mind, whether the act is performed or not.

Modest Clothing

Regardless of the amount of coverage that women’s clothing affords, it is not enough! At least, that is what the preachers have been insisting since I was a teenager before I knew that women had knees or dreamed of wearing slacks.

The texts used to induce guilt are referring to over-dress in finery and prideful extravagance (1 Tim. 2:9f; 1 Peter 3:1f). Pretentious dress is immodest — shocking to the sense of appropriateness — because loving disciples do not flaunt riches, make the poor uncomfortable by their demeanor, display finery instead of character, or use their stewardship selfishly.

Whether certain areas of the body may be exposed decently depends upon the culture. I can recall when women would not expose a knee but would nurse their babies in the assembly. Missionaries, because the native dress was shocking to themselves, have labored to Westernize the native style when the native attire, or lack of it, was not immodest to the native. It is a relative thing.

Paul’s instruction to the Corinthian women about veils and length of hair (1 Cor. 11) would forbid that a saintly woman emulate the styles of immoral women which would identify them as immoral also. That rule applies today. But when the veil and hair style lost their immoral connotation in Corinth, the disciples would be free in that regard. It would no longer be indecorous.

The human body is no secret any longer. A fully and appropriately clothed woman can be very stimulating to a man simply because she is female. With no woman within a hundred miles, a man still has sexual arousal simply because he is male. Whether by clothing or demeanor, if a woman makes it appear that she is sexually available, that would have overtones of immorality, and it would be unduly arousing to a man.

If a man lusts after a woman who dresses in harmony with the customs of her society, it is not her fault. It is the man's problem. If a person is guilty of inducing lust in following usual customs of decency, then we would have to forbid the sharing of restrooms, dressing rooms, showers, etc. of persons of the same sex for we must recognize that a great percent of people are homosexual, and you would be tempting those homosexuals to lust by exposing your body to them. We can paint ourselves into corners by our own rules.

So You Are Smart!

Some fellows claim that there are no gray areas of truth, that truth is obtainable on all spiritual matters, and that they have it all pretty well wrapped up. I'm not that smart. I get all tangled up just trying to put a TRUE or FALSE before each statement in the rectangle below.

- | |
|---|
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> There are four statements in this rectangle.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Every statement in this rectangle is true.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Every statement in this rectangle is false.</p> |
|---|

Those Signs

Somehow I get the idea that somebody does not trust my powers of comprehension when I see a sign on a church building which reads: "The Church of Christ Meets Here."

Lest someone should be misled to think that barbecue is a building, do you suppose the big "BARBECUE" sign should be made to read: "Barbecue Is Prepared and Sold Here?"

To protect the unwary from further misconception of the sign, "The Church of Christ Meets Here," maybe it should be revised to read: "Some Members of the Church of Christ Meet Inside Sometimes."

Although my father's name was on his rural mail box for nearly fifty years, no one ever hollered "Howdy" to it in passing or offered it a chew of tobacco, thinking it was Dad.

New Thoughts

*Some minds are like a spring trap;
Once sprung, that's all they'll hold.*

*Some minds are like a museum place,
Still holding on to what is old.*

*Some minds are like a ship in storm,
By old and new tossed back and forth.*

*Let mine be like a treasure vault,
Accepting all that has true worth.*

-CH

Evident Truths

Until a few years ago, I thought that water was a most effective conductor of electricity. But an engineer friend explained to me that an electric current simply cannot be made to pass through pure water.

I always thought that it was light in outer space. It is very evident, however, if that were true, we would have no darkness at night.

Again, I thought that sound traveled without resistance through the vacuum of space, not observing the obvious truth that, if that were true, we would be continually bombarded by thunderous noises of the explosions among the heavenly bodies.

We have often spoken of this heavy damp air. But if moist air were heavier than dry air, the clouds would shroud the earth instead of floating in the sky.

So easily can we overlook the very evident truths about us that it is becoming in none of us to be too dogmatic about what we think we know.

Faith and Opinion

We can hold different opinions without sin, but we must be united on matters of faith. We have repeated some such simplistic expression long enough and often enough that it has a fundamental sound. But nobody seems to have the same conviction as to what are matters of faith and what are matters of opinion.

The answer is simple: my opinions are matters of faith and yours, when they differ from mine, are not matters of faith but merely opinions.

Were convictions about circumcision faith or opinion (Acts 15)? Were scruples about meats and days opinion or faith (Rom. 14)?

The truth is: any opinion/interpretation/understanding that one has about any spiritual matter becomes a matter of faith, and one sins when he acts contrary to that belief (Rom. 14).

Truth or Half-Truth

Which is the shortest verse in the Bible?

Everybody knows that. Since childhood you have known that John 11:35, “Jesus wept,” is the shortest. This is a point that no one raises any question about. It is something that we know for sure.

But wait a moment. Look in my New Testament. In it the shortest verse is 1 Thessalonians 5:16, “Rejoice always!” Mine is a Greek New Testament.

All truth is not considered in the traditional answer. Only one viewpoint is considered. Looking at it from the Greek viewpoint, the English claim is wrong, and vice-versa.

Some conclusions which we consider as dead-set truth prove to be half-truths, or error, when we see the total situation. Considering traditionally disregarded factors will change many of our opinions if we are honest.

*“He thought he most judiciously
Weighed all the data pro and con.
But he hand-picked the facts he chose
To bias his opinion on.” (Gail B. Burket)*

Dogmatism which ignores factors of truth is both inconsistent and erroneous.

Saved By The Gospel

We are not saved by teachings/doctrines, by facts, by truth, by a message called “the gospel,” or tenets of faith.

We are saved by Jesus Christ. He is the Good News, the Gospel. What we call the gospel is a message about the Good News. “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” Jesus said, but he also assures us that “I am the Truth!” The word is the message of salvation, but Jesus is the Word. Truth makes us free, but Jesus told us, “If the Son shall make you free, then you shall be free indeed.” We are saved by a Person, not a message. I believe the message, but not in the message.

We have become a doctrine oriented people more than a Christ related people. We find people who are already converted to Christ and then convert them to a different set of teachings as though the teachings saved.

While it is true that we cannot find Christ without teachings, these teachings, truths, and facts are of importance only as they lead us to establish our relationship in Christ and to sustain that relationship. Complete knowledge and understanding of all teachings are not necessary for that saving relationship, else none would be saved.

Our righteousness is not in our being right in all things, but in being in Him who is right and gives us the gift of righteousness. Yes, Brother Legalist, both grace and righteousness are gifts (Rom. 5:15-17)!

Relieving The Insecure

Kristi's grades are not up to her parents' standards. Knowing that, her tensions build. So her solicitous parents say to her, "We don't want you to be upset about your grades. If a C in math and a B in grammar are the best that you can do, then that is all right. We just expect you to do the best you can do." How relieving!

Do you think she sleeps better after that, going to bed each night reproaching herself because she probably didn't do her best that day? It actually puts her under more pressure. Wonder if her parents do their best about everything?

A certain preacher continued to make little jabs about cheap grace, relying on grace too much, and the danger of overconfidence about God's mercy and forgiveness. So he would emphasize, "You must do your very best to be saved!"

Who can go to sleep at night thinking confidently, "I did my very best today?" That adds guilt and pressure and puts rightness with God on a meritorious basis. Nobody does his best all the time and, if he could, it would not make grace more deserved. None can be saved by doing his best, but by being in Christ who is our righteousness.

Study, Study, Study

That is a favorite word in the Church of Christ. I have tried to eliminate the word from my vocabulary. Why? Am I opposed to learning? No. What connotation does that word hold for you? Doesn't it mean something difficult, laborious, tiring, exacting, and motivated by pressure? The word turns us off.

God forbid that we should prejudice people against the beauty of the Bible, the excitement of its stories, the simplicity of its overall message, and the strength, hope, cheer, and fellowship of the Spirit that comes through companionship with the Book!

Legalism demands a detailed study so one can be sure he is right on all points of law. Legalism depends upon proof-tests. A misapplication of the word *study* in 2 Timothy 2:15 is the proof-text for the emphasis on study. The word *study* used in the KJV has nothing to do with gaining knowledge, and Timothy was not being urged to read the New Testament Scriptures because they had not been written and collected then.

"You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness of me," was a rebuke of Jesus to the Jews. We can search the scriptures for legal justification and miss Jesus whom the scriptures direct us to.

Funerals

Aside from being a formal recognition of the passing of a loved one, a funeral is appropriate as a time for friends to have fellowship in sorrow with the family. By our presence, words, touch, or embrace we express a common feeling which is assuring.

Why, then, do we separate the family from those who come to share those feelings? At funeral chapels the family is hidden from view of those who would give them comfort. To me, it seems that such an arrangement is contrary to the purpose of a funeral.

It is sad to see only a handful! of people at a funeral, but our industrial life limits our attendance. Would it not be better to have these memorial services in the evening so that people can attend them?

Spreading The Truth

In efforts to stir our evangelistic fervor, we are often reminded of cities and countries who have never heard the gospel, and we are urged to take the truth to them.

Do we mean that those cities and nations do not have Bibles? Or do we mean that people cannot find the gospel or truth in the Bible without someone from the Church of Christ instructing them?

When I mail someone a Bible, I am sending that person the source of all revealed truth. When I open my mouth to start explaining it to him, there is danger that the truth is becoming contaminated by my adding my erroneous ideas. I surely cannot reveal additional truth to him.

Sending Bibles is cheaper and it guarantees purity.

The Tithe

It seems strange to me that churches that deny legalistic tendencies will still almost make a law of tithing. Tithing is a very legalistic effort to attain righteousness through meritorious works.

Of course, tithing has no new covenant roots. It was a tax for a combined religious-political system through which God dealt with Israel. The tithe financed the government as well as the priesthood. Preachers don't tell you that, for you might lessen your contribution!

Helping Beggars

This is a thorn in the preacher's side. Even though a deacon may be in charge, the beggar comes to the preacher. They are smart. Men seldom come in for they get less sympathy. So they send the woman, and a little under-clothed child or two helps to touch the heart. Most of them are transient professionals.

An elderly lady came one Sunday morning in Port Neches, Texas. Of course we could not send a poor old lady away empty-handed. I moved to Fort Worth. Ditto. Then I moved to Dallas. Ditto. Even though I exposed her scheme to the elders, they helped her anyway! Do you suppose she would stop such a profitable operation?

Many times I have offered this help, especially to the more polished salesman type beggar. I offer to let him use the phone to call someone who knows him so they can wire money in a few minutes time. I haven't had one to accept my offer yet.

Once I read of the policy used by one preacher, written in jest, which very well describes the problem. He said that he helps every other one. A beggar asks for help, is considered unworthy, and is refused. After he leaves, the preacher's conscience hurts him so that when the next one comes, he helps him. When the beggar is gone, the preacher becomes vexed with himself for falling for such a tricky story, and he refuses the next one who comes. And so the cycle repeats itself over and over.

The Pastors Are My Stewards

Through the years we have been urged to give all of our "contribution" through the church so the elders can use it to glorify God. Individual use of "contribution" money became a sin of rebellion against the elders.

As a matter of loyalty to your congregation, you will want to support it, but you are the judge as to the extent. If you wish to help some other worthy cause, that is your business. If you wish to use some of your "contribution" to distribute these books, for instance, that is between you and God, not the elders.

A Dove Or A Hawk?

Let us imagine a beautiful, isolated, uninhabited island that becomes open for homesteading. A hundred families are apportioned land according to the size of each household. Seven of the families, including yours, have thirty members each but other households are much fewer in number. One old man alone, two younger widows, a widow and four children, five teenagers whose parents are dead, etc.

In planning this new community, all agreed to prohibit guns and weapons of any sort so they could live together in peace. It is an ideal arrangement and all goes smoothly for a while.

One of the larger families, however, begins to force the orphaned teenagers to work its fields without pay. Your family is disturbed, but that is really none of your business. They steal chickens and cattle from the lonely old man continually. They seize the land of an elderly couple and drive them off the property. Sorry about that. Men from this large family continually force themselves on the two young widows who are helpless to repel their sexual attacks. Your heart goes out to them, but you cannot afford to become entangled in the affairs of others. The offenses grow in frequency and in their ruthlessness.

Members of other larger families come to you suggesting that you band together and stop the aggressive injustices. But a committee is formed and appointed to negotiate with the offending family. You urge them to stop their atrocities, but they only scorn the committee and increase their lawless tyranny. You negotiate again and again. No change for the better.

Now, what are you going to do? Can a person be an isolationist in the brotherhood of men?

Who is the dove and who is the hawk?

Pet Rocks

We are not God's pet rocks. Pet rocks cannot feel, think, choose, love, or hate.

We are not God's robots, programmed to do his bidding without accountability.

Pet rocks or robots could not hurt God. We can. God made himself vulnerable to hurt because he loves us. He is capable of being wounded by our rejection and rebellion.

When we love someone, we become vulnerable because that person can choose not to requite our love. God gave us that choice. He loves us. He hurts.

Belief and Doubt

No one, I assume, has undiluted faith or total unbelief. We learn to live with a mixture of assurance and doubt.

I can ask scores of perplexing questions that would seem to explode the idea of a caring, omnipresent Creator. Why does he not reveal himself to us directly? If he is to hold us accountable to him, why should he be so hidden from us? Why would he make the scriptures so difficult to understand? Why would he make the eternal salvation of one person dependent upon the evangelistic efforts of another? Why would he allow most persons to be born into this life as a result of the sexual instincts rather than through purposeful planning? Why would he permit pain, heartache, evil, etc., etc.? Such questions rise like thunderheads and are allowed often to accumulate into a massive storm of destructive doubt.

On the other side, I can ask scores of questions about my doubts. How can we have existing matter without beginning, or without an intelligent originator? Can something come from nothing? Does intelligence come from inanimate matter? How could male and female roles in different species just develop? Who taught the setting hen to turn her eggs twice daily? Who taught the newborn mammal to search for its mother's nipple? How were newborn mammals nourished during the ages needed by evolution for the female to develop mammary glands? Who put the hormones in the female body that tell her body when to start and stop producing milk? The questions are endless!

How should we handle this mixture of faith and doubt? If I have ten parts of doubt to each part of faith, I will still hold to the faith. Doubt can add nothing to one's life. It promises nothing. It

is like playing Russian rouletteDa game in which one has nothing to gain and all to lose. Faith, weak as it may be, offers something. Something is better than nothing.

So, believe your beliefs and doubt your doubts instead of doubting your beliefs and believing your doubts.

Eternity

Eternity! What a word! Can anything really be unending? Or is the idea of eternity just a fantasy?

Astronomers have discovered that we live in an exploding universe. The galaxies are moving away from us and from one another at speeds up to 100 million miles an hour. And the farther they go, the faster they travel.

Will these galaxies reach an outer limit of space? If so, what would be beyond that to contain space? To think of this is mind-boggling. Space, however, is but an illustration of eternity. It is a physical proof of eternity's of unending endurance. Our point in time is but a moment separating two eternities.

God is the ever existing, Great I AM. He has always existed, hence, like space has no beginning or end. God gave us of his undying spirit.

Although we have become alienated from God by sin, he wants us to be with him eternally and has provided that eternal life through Jesus.

Painful Benevolence

Our little fuzzy, black handful of affection, Midget, our poodle, was our constant companion for nearly twelve years. She became totally blind and almost totally deaf. Arthritis made her joints stiff and her body ache, and her teeth hardly allowed for chewing. Life for her had little quality of enjoyment. So we considered it best to have her put to sleep.

She had a horror of veterinarians, always trembling with fear as we approached the clinic. Although I had taken her numerous times, she still trembled. But on this last trip, I held her and talked reassuringly to her all the way, and she did not seem to fear. As we started into the clinic, she gave one of her faint little puppy whimpers, but she did not shrink back. While giving her loving assurance, I delivered her to death.

All of this brought some emotional feelings of guilt for it seemed that I had betrayed her loving confidence. But I kept assuring myself that I knew what was best for her and was doing the loving thing even though it was painful for me.

When God sees that our quality of life is such that a change would be better, he takes us close to him and dispels our fears by his loving assurances. It must pain him to see our family ties broken, but he knows what is best. He hasn't betrayed us.

CHAPTER 27

LAMENTATIONS OF A MEDIOCRE PREACHER

Introduction

If, in reading this book to this point, you have come to resent me, please skip this portion, for you would only see me as an egotistical, soured, less-than-mediocre, old preacher with a self-pitying complex.

The following paragraphs are partly serious and partly playful, written in hope of giving you some insights that may enable you to understand the preacher's predicament better and to point to correction of some hurtful traditional practices.

Let me make it clear here that, in spite of my complaints, no one forced me to be a preacher. I could have "quit preaching and gone to work" at any time. I remained in the profession because I wanted to, in spite of mixed feelings about it.

Let me explain another thing also. I think that I understand fairly well the Scriptural difference between a preacher (evangelist) and a minister (servant) of the church. In these paragraphs I am using those terms interchangeably as is commonly done among our people. We look upon him as a professional preacher/minister.

The Mediocre

The talented preacher has no problems, or he is too sophisticated to admit it. I can't speak for him and can hardly relate to him, for I was a mediocre preacher. Literally, mediocre means halfway up a mountain. Even halfway up, I always felt dizzy sad insecure. Perhaps these lamentations will speak for others also who have clung to mediocrity.

I was moved to "enter the ministry" and serve there professionally by an idealism reinforced by determination rather than by talent. My accomplishments were by main strength and awkwardness. I wasn't the sought after type. I was never high in our brotherhood draft system as a prize to the highest bidding church. So, rather than being in a bargaining position with a congregation, I was insecure continually. I fit Thoreau's observation that most men live lives of quiet desperation.

Maybe I didn't preach in the worst places, for they never had difficulty in replacing me! I did climb to a 450-member congregation for a few years, but then I slid back down into my league again.

Keeping Us Humble

The ministry, as we have made it, is a profession in which one must admit failure often. Although some churches are keeping their ministers longer now, formerly they had to move at least every three years. If he is dismissed, he must admit failure. If he moves on to greener pastures — up the ladder — he is admitting that he is not doing too well where he is. So, it is demoralizing either way.

Preaching Contests

According to our tradition, if a preacher applies to a congregation for the ministry, he must “try out.” That church has numerous other applications. In order to select the best one, the church has a preaching contest! I read recently that a church’s quartet won second place in a gospel singing contest. The kids have Bible knowledge contests. That gives me a great idea. Why not start a spiritual pentathlon! We could determine the champions in preaching, singing, praying, communing, and giving. You can help me think of appropriate prizes for the winners. Second place in a preaching contest doesn’t win the prize.

How horrendous — the very thought of competing against a fellow preacher for a ministry! Can’t you picture Timothy, Titus, Luke, and Apollos “trying out” for the pulpit in Ephesus with Timothy being so pleased at winning out over them? This points to only one feature of an undesirable system that we have developed.

Hiring and Firing

I detest those terms relating to a preacher. I never considered myself a hireling. I was dedicated to a cause and the church supported me so I could give myself more fully to it.

Suppose that you apply for a different job and your prospective employer required that you take off from your present job and work for a few days or a week to see if he likes you? “That’s unfair!” you would protest. You wouldn’t want your present boss to know you were applying for a different job. Yet that’s exactly what churches require of preachers.

Sometimes a congregation will give the preacher a few, or several, months in which to find a new pulpit. So he begins a search. There is no want-ad section to help him. He must start “asking around” among friends who might know of other churches who are playing this game of musical chairs — non-instrumental, of course. He hears of one; he calls and is told that they already have a number of applications with several tryouts scheduled and that they are really in no hurry because they have capable men available to fill in. After hearing some such story for a few weeks, the preacher is about ready for the panic button. He is fortunate if he accomplishes a move in three months. And during that interval more than once, I went weeks without support and was actually penniless before being on a payroll again. But that just happens to mediocre preachers.

Two good brothers helped move my furniture in a rental truck on one occasion. They stopped for Cokes, and I didn’t even have the thirty cents to pay for three drinks. The church folks, bless them, seeing the condition of the preacher’s home, repainted the interior before we arrived. They splotched one coat of the cheapest paint over walls, ceilings, woodwork, and switch plates alike.

The interior of our new residence looked like the interior of a grocery bag. There was no range, so we cooked in an electric skillet for a while. But how great it was to be having income again!

One church in Central Texas contracted for me to work with it. The next Sunday, I resigned from the church where I was. The next day an elder called from the new church and canceled the contract. They had heard some gossip about my teaching but did not consult me. Then one of the elders where I had resigned would not consider letting me stay there long enough to find other work. So there I was, out in the cold, strung up by the heels. But that only happens to mediocre preachers.

If we must have hired ministers, I hope that they will never receive salaries comparable to those earned in other professions. God forbid that any man be attracted to the pulpit or ministry by the salary offered. Let his message always be reinforced by self-denial.

The Honeymoon

This “fruit basket turnover” is one of the most humiliating and discouraging aspects of the mediocre preacher’s life. How the tensions build in those last weeks before moving. What a relief when the van pulls away with the furniture! How the spirits are revived by the welcome of the new friends who are so relieved because their preacher finally relocated and a new one has come. Now the preacher and his family can look forward from three months to a year of honeymoon when the various elements of the congregation are courting them. But as each special interest group begins to see that the new minister is not taking its side, the tensions begin to build and he starts hearing the increasing volume of the horrid strains from the musical chairs again. Only we mediocre preachers know about that, though.

The Agony

Suppose that you worked in a company where you had to please everybody in the company.

Suppose you had to clear it with your company every time you wanted to be out of town overnight.

Suppose that you studied to learn things that would make money for your company and then no one would allow you to put those things into practice. Our emphasis on Bible learning is a farce. If the preacher learns something new, he is shot out of the saddle for teaching it.

Being out of the pulpit now, it is a wonderful relief to hear special meetings of the elders called without asking inwardly, “What have I done now?”

Nobody hurts the preacher like the brethren. He is so vulnerable to hurt because he is dedicated to a cause, not just holding a job for a paycheck.

In specific cases preachers have given themselves so unsparingly that they have become drained like an old battery, and then, instead of the congregations helping to recharge them, they dismiss them because they have become dull and ineffective.

Each person who talks with the preacher will reveal his or her hang-up. Before he became acquainted with the congregation, he could teach about those various pet peeves without offending. But now that he is aware of them, each time he teaches on most any subject, it can be interpreted that he is giving a conscious gouge to some person. That is one of the reasons that churches like to have new preachers.

People don't listen and, when they do, they don't always hear. They think you said one thing when you said something else. At least, that is the way it is with us mediocre preachers who are such poor communicators.

It Comes With The Job

One lady bought a pair of new shoes which hurt her feet. She asked Lea if she would wear them and break them in for her.

Once a poor fellow's wife became a raving, uncontrollable maniac. He came to us and asked us to keep her overnight so she would not have to go to the jail, the only available place of safe keeping.

A man whom I had never heard of called at two o'clock in the morning to ask me to come and sit with him as he was having postoperative gas pains.

A certain sweet and gentle lady had periods of mental disorientation during which she would call me in the wee hours of the morning to talk.

During the first half of my ministry, no church that I served had any program of relief to aid people who came by for help. I had either to deprive my family to help them or to send them away with "be ye warmed and filled." And I have had brethren present when I was approached for help, only to see those brothers walk away and leave me.

Wrong Number

I have never been described as having the "gift of gab." My soul winning techniques have not won me any ribbons. But the Lord once spoke through a dumb donkey, and at times he has used mediocre preachers. Once, in New Iberia, Louisiana, my phone rang and it was determined that the lady calling had the wrong number. She did not hang up on learning of her mistake, but she entered into a conversation with me. To make the story short, we entered into a discussion of religion which led to her baptism a few days later.

Prime Time

Churches want preachers between the ages of 30 and 45. Jesus might be encouraged to apply, but not the aged Paul. Of course, neither could qualify without a wife. By the time I was fifty, I began to notice that often I was the oldest preacher at preachers' meetings. Can you imagine the company that you work for firing all personnel when they reach fifty? You can be of greatest effectiveness as you gain age and experience. But, catering to childish whims, the church

exploits the zeal of dedicated men and then turns them out to provide for their own retirement. Our lawmakers try to enforce a better employment ethic than that, but what has that to do with church people?

Burn Out

You don't have to ride the roller-coaster forty years to begin to lose some of your childish fascination for them. Decade after decade of the same efforts and failure, rituals and functions, songs and prayers, questions and explanations, zealots and stragglers, and simplicity and hypocrisy tends to burn the minister's flame down low. He must get more oil for his lamp, but he cannot depend upon the congregation for it. He must get it from the Lord with the aid of a few intimate friends who are not afraid to think.

A Chosen Few

Too long there has been an unreal expectation that the preacher be friends on equal basis with all in the congregation. You don't. Why should he? He cannot spread himself so thin as to be intimate with all. And why put himself in such tension trying to be intimate with those whose personalities don't fit with his? You don't. He should show concern and respect for all, but each person knows only a few with whom he can truly be at ease. I suppose that most preachers are a bit lonely. They make few close friends because they have been hurt by so many, and they know they will have to move away and leave them.

Favors

Persons who have received an organ transplant such as a kidney from a living donor sometimes come to resent the donor. We dislike being patronized and being obligated. Sometimes it is with mixed feelings that preachers receive favors continually, such as tickets, meals out, and gifts. Pride can get in the way very easily. The preacher prefers to be honored with sufficient salary so that he can take his turn at doing the favors. Few really like to have to master the shell-out factor.

Work Load

I think I understand why raising children and the ministry were meant for younger people. Only they can handle the work load. For over eight years in New Iberia, Louisiana, I had from fifteen to eighteen sermons and lessons each week. For six years that included a fifteen minute radio broadcast Monday through Saturday with thirty minutes on Sunday. For two years it included two broadcasts daily. Most broadcasts were done live from the station. The church never supplied me a recorder or tape. Added to this work load were visitation, preaching in meetings, leading singing in meetings, weddings, funerals, mowing the church yard, janitorial work, doing my part in all painting and repair jobs, and keeping all visiting preachers. Whew! I'm tired. I think I'll stop for a siesta.

Don't Smile

As the people were leaving the church building for the reception after a wedding, one good lady who lacked some of the social advantages approached Lea and drawled out, "Sister Hook, where's the conception gonna be?"

One fellow, teaching a class, read from the unfamiliar American Standard Version from Acts 17:22: "And Paul stood in the midst of the asparagus...."

Some things just don't sound right, like when Lambert Pharmaceutical Company formulated their antiseptic mouthwash and wanted to name it to honor Joseph Lister, who discovered the antiseptic principle. Somehow, it just would not have sounded right to have called it Josephine. And it didn't sound right to hear an elder repeatedly refer to the sin of evil concupiscence with the accent on the third syllable.

I've had no problem with Lea about mother-in-laws. Early in our marriage I solved that in one generous gesture by assuring her that I loved her mother-in-law better than my own. (She didn't catch that, either.)

A picture is as good as a thousand words. Sometimes, more. A high school class will never forget what circumcision is, for the young man teaching the class drew them a diagram on the blackboard to illustrate it.

A certain preacher of slight stature told of baptizing a large framed woman in a river. They waded out into a proper depth and, as he prepared to immerse her, she looked down at him and growled, "You had better not drown me, you little devil!"

Uncertain Sounds

Although I worked a team of mules on the farm, I never developed a very strong voice. In earlier years it was always a problem to make people hear above the cries of babies and the buzzing of fans. Then came the age of technology with wonderful public address systems. But for some reason, our brethren either do not install them properly or else have no one controlling the volume. So, throughout my whole career, I have always felt uneasy in the pulpit about making people hear me.

Seminary

A bad word in the Church of Christ. We deny having seminaries. The term comes from the word *semen* which means seed. A seminary is an institution for the training of candidates for the priesthood, ministry, or rabbinate, according to the dictionary. We have lots of them.

So You Want To Preach

A fine young man came by to tell me that he was thinking of quitting his job so he could enroll in a preacher training school and become a preacher. He wanted my advice, and he probably expected my hearty approval. I advised him, “If you want to give your life to taking the gospel to the unevangelized, that’s wonderful. If you want to start a church where there is none or settle with a little group and spend your life there as a pillar in both the church and community while making your own living, power to you. But if you want to prepare yourself to compete for a pulpit in our congregations, forget it!” I see no reason to change that advice.

Credibility

Preachers do not enjoy a high credibility rating. If people believed the preachers, they would have already converted the world!

Some zealous preachers are caught in the “Wolf! Wolf!” syndrome. Each lesson and each point he deals with is projected as a life-or-death issue. The current lesson is the most important thing in your life. I mused about one preacher, that he could deliver a lesson on each of the Ten Commandments and make each commandment the most important and most violated of the ten. If a speaker has only one hammer — a sledge — which he uses to drive spikes, nails, sprigs, and tacks alike, he will soon beat his listeners into insensitivity and incredibility. When everything is painted the same color, legitimate distinctions are lost.

The preacher may stack the deck. So often we recognize that he has taken advantage of his familiarity with the scriptures to select only those texts which will support his premise in a one-way communication. Even though he might support the right conclusion, he has insulted the intelligence of his hearers by his failure to present matters honestly. This is a form of prejudice even though it is slanted to the right conclusion. Truth does not need the help of prejudice. We become skeptical of imposed interpretations, conclusions, and verdicts.

A preacher’s audience expects him to know the scriptures better than they do. Although they may not understand his argumentation, they may be intimidated by his conclusions. Often preachers have taken advantage of this situation and have used uncertainties to induce guilt and fear. After people learn enough to recognize the guilt-inducing techniques of the preacher, they lose confidence in him.

People may be manipulated by inflaming their prejudices, arousing them emotionally, appealing to their vanity, applying undue peer pressure, involving all in a group response, or other such means. Speaking skills and aptitude in dealing with people should never be prostituted to manipulate people to do what they would not do after sober reflection. In time, such manipulating will lower the preacher’s credibility rating. This is not a problem for us mediocre preachers, though, for we have no manipulative skills.

Tender Mercies

Religious people can be cruel and feel proud of it, for the cause of “defending the truth” can give them great satisfaction in inflicting pain and violating justice.

Because of a mere slip of the tongue, an unguarded statement, or a heartfelt expression of truth by a preacher baring his soul, preachers have been dismissed without the batting of an eye. Others, and I, have been tried and sentenced without the opportunity to face their accusers or judges. Some have found notes of dismissal on their desks with no explanation from the elders who were too cowardly to face the minister.

All of you preachers who have returned from vacation to find that you were dismissed holler “I”.

We mediocre preachers get some gentle hints. Many times I have heard statements in my presence like, “What we need is a preacher who will ...,” and they insert what they consider my failure to have been.

Regardless of how efficient the preacher is, the church brings in other men to revive them at various intervals. How would you feel if your employer brought in other persons at times to do part of your work which he thinks you are not doing well enough?

Most of my two-week vacations have been short-changed to thirteen days. That meant that I came back after one Sunday’s absence from the pulpit with two sermons ready the day after my vacation time was over. When was I supposed to prepare those masterpieces?

Greek

My claim to fame as a Greek scholar is that I was in some of Charles H. Roberson’s classes with J. W. Roberts and Jack Lewis. That is the limit of my claim, however, for they became scholars while I can hardly read the Greek alphabet. I lacked in aptitude for that sort of thing but, if you are preparing to become a mediocre preacher, Greek isn’t too high on the list.

I also lacked in money to buy a Greek New Testament or a textbook for my second year classes. Working six hours or more daily, seven days each week, at the Hilton Hotel (now, the Windsor), I also lacked in time. But I was paid well — ten dollars per month with meals! Other ACC boys worked there too as dish washers and scrubbers in those days of the Great Depression. Those fellows can understand when I say that I went through four years of college without buying a Coke, a hamburger, a movie ticket, or any other such luxury. All of my travel to and from Abilene was by a common mode of public transportation of that time — hitch-hiking. Churches did not pay the way for preacher trainees in those times.

Put Down

So many times I have heard prayers before the sermon that the preacher “shun not to declare the *whole* counsel of God,” to be followed in the dismissal prayer with: “We thank you that we have been able to study a *portion* of your word!” The first prayer never seems to be effective!

Before the lesson, the song leader may be heard to announce, “Our song of encouragement after the lesson will be Number 681.” He is expecting such a depressing lesson that the folks will need encouragement!

The Baptistry

The first indoor baptistry that I ever saw was in Sewell Auditorium at Abilene Christian College when I enrolled there. We had a large concrete baptistry where I grew up at Rochester, Texas, but it was outside. It was only filled for our summer meetings. The fire department filled it for us. The church did not have piped water. No plumbing. One out-house for both sexes. Modern!

My first baptism was in a surface tank (a pond to you outsiders) at Milnesand, New Mexico. It had about two feet of water and one foot of mud.

Many of my early baptisms were in watering troughs for cattle and storage tanks at windmills. One man to be baptized was much taller and larger than I. But it looked easy enough because the water in the tank came almost to my chin. However, when I tried to submerge him, I learned almost in panic that I had very little weight to counter his buoyancy. I almost had to climb on top of him to cause him to sink.

Retirement Plan

The Church of Christ retirement plan for preachers traditionally has been: “Old preachers never die; they just move away!”

Don’t Emulate Paul

Quite a number of years ago, the church in Commerce, Texas was “looking for a preacher.” The elders granted me an interview one weekday evening. An elder inquired as to what my degree major was. When I told him that it was in secondary education, he commented that their last preacher had not majored in Bible; hence, he was weak in the pulpit. I replied that I had followed Paul’s example who was also prepared to make tents. He got in the last word with, “Don’t you think that showed a lack of faith?” The interview went downhill from there.

Toot Your Own Horn

Preachers have great ego and much pride. Quite a number of them through the years have told me, “I always go to churches that are having trouble and help them settle their problems.” Mr. Nice Guy! “The church over in Podunk was having trouble and called me to come and get them back together again!” What really happened was that nobody else would go to such a rotten place and it was the only place that would accept him!

Trading Problems

A preacher moves because he has problems in the church where he is. His new church has problems that caused its preacher to move. Etc. It is an endless syndrome. But when he gets to the new church and hears all the ugly complaints that caused them to fire the previous preacher, he can agree that such a rogue should have been fired. He thinks that he will be loved, accepted, and successful because he is not like the former preacher. Hope springs eternal. But usually the very ones who sent the former preacher walking will also send him walking. Give them a little time.

Pitfalls

In dealing with the plight of the mediocre preacher, I will have to admit that often he is a big part of the problem. He wears thin. He may not continue to grow so as to lead and challenge to new heights. A busy minister has little time to study. It is hard for him to keep a proper balance in spirituality, personality, organizational and administrative ability, gravity, humor, and practicality. Negativism and bitterness can steal into his expressions unawares. He may become hung-up on an issue. Unless he is cautious, he may use the pulpit to air grievances or to lash out at certain persons. He may grow insensitive to the needs of people. Being snake bitten before, he may become aloof. He may forget that there is open season on leaders at all seasons and that he will always be shot at. He can easily become over-bearing toward non-conformists. He becomes repetitious in his expressions and mannerism, for no one can avoid these things completely when serving the same people year after year. He is dependent upon the good will of others who will allow for his humanity.

Choosing A Subject

Most of us who have attempted to preach have agonized in trying to decide what subject to preach on in our next effort. We even work up lessons and, at the latest hour, change them because our heart is not in them.

Why is choosing a subject such a hard choice? I think of three main reasons. First, we are not in tune with the needs of the people who will be hearing us. Second, we have not kept in touch with God's message closely enough to discern what he would want us to tell his people. Third, few of us have the ability to create two relevant masterpieces each week, week after week, year after year. At least, not us mediocres.

I often recall the words of Red Skelton when he played the "Mean Little Kid" on his radio show. His mother was taking him to the movies. When he learned that it would be a double feature, he recited: "Roses is red, and violets is pink; if it's a double feature, one will stink!"

The Mediocre Preacher's Wife

Can you imagine having to sit through my attempts at preaching most every Sunday, morning and evening, for forty years? Poor Lea! That's enough to give her ulcers, hypertension, dandruff, depression, insomnia, and all the ailments listed on a patent medicine bottle.

Lea has been my advisor, consultant, and encourager without which I would probably have given up long ago. Working by my side, she has been a teacher, an organizer, a leader in women's activities, and a hostess and she has made hundreds of visits with me in my ministry. While I could always sleep in spite of hurts and tensions, they were much more damaging to her.

She has been a housewife, doing very little work outside the home, and I have liked it that way. She is a communicator and has used that talent effectively with our children. Particularly because of her training and leading, our children have always brought us honor.

In our earlier married life, it was still almost sinful for a woman to work outside the home. Few churches would consider using a preacher whose wife had a job. However, as I look on it now, most preachers' effectiveness probably would be improved by their wives following a profession. There would be something else to talk about at home besides church. She would have an identity of her own. Being less involved in the tension producing elements of church work, it would help to balance the perspective of the family. And it would give the family a bit of financial security. I am convinced that any preacher can be more effective if he has a few thousands of dollars in a savings account or has a second income as a shock absorber.

Lea has always been an exceptionally beautiful woman and has loved beautiful things. On a mediocre preacher's salary, that has been frustrating for her. She has had to look for the sales, accept secondhand and hand-me-down stuff, make the best of what she had, and do without. She has always done a marvelous job in using what was available in the most artistic way. This is a part of what she has given to my, and our, ministry. Even now, she does janitorial work enabling others to have our book *Free In Christ* without charge. And she doesn't enjoy cleaning toilets any more than you do.

It's a pity that the preacher gets the attention and credit when his wife, who is kept in silence publicly, is an equal partner in all his work.

A woman can't lead singing, it says somewhere, but on hundreds of occasions Lea has had to lead from the audience when we had men trying to lead who couldn't pitch a song with a pitchfork — or a tuning fork either.

Surely, the Lord has some special peaceful spot reserved in heaven for mediocre preachers' wives!

The Ecstasy

Preachers get to work with and associate with the nicest people on, earth in the greatest endeavor that can challenge man. They are showered with compliments and words of encouragement. They receive preferential treatment in many ways. Doctors are especially sympathetic and nice to us and they usually want to treat us for stress.

We receive expressions of gratitude from the nobodies to whom we are courteous and attentive. The sick, bereaved, and troubled to whom we minister are always grateful. With many families I

have a special attachment because of the baptisms, weddings, and funerals involving various members of the family.

Persons sometimes recall a lesson taught years ago which helped to save them from defeat or despair. The preacher and his family are mentioned to the Lord in public and private prayers. He meets leaders in the church who ask, "Do you remember teaching me when I was a child?"

I can go to most any congregation anywhere and find someone who either knows me or knows of me. I think of the hundreds of homes where we have eaten the choicest of meals prepared in love by a charming hostess. Others have taken us out to eat, often in places we could never afford to eat. Sometimes we are given discounts on purchases, and I have been relieved a few times to receive a warning instead of a ticket for a traffic violation.

People seem eager to introduce us to their friends and seem honored to be seen in public with us — in spite of the fact that I am only a mediocre preacher. And there are those, bless their hearts, who come by to say some nice thing about the lesson because they know you bombed out and they know that you know it! These are beautiful people. They all make it worth the agony.

RETIREMENT

I retire... but I do not rest.
My spirit still strives restlessly
It wanders back through the years
among those it sought to serve...
wondering...
In whose life does mine remain?
Who had love without hypocrisy?
Has my outpouring of thought
only flowed into the abyss?
Have gardens of life been seeded
or watered?
Has the flow only evaporated to
thicken the haze?
Have the sympathetic word...
the outstretched hand...
only been virtuous gestures
prostituted by a hireling
easily bargained from another?
The past gives not the answers...
Only questions.
The future holds the answers.
Trust perceives an eternal scheme
and sees the Eternal Hand
write it good.

... *Cecil Hook*