

A Collection of Individual Sermons

by Ray C. Stedman

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THE SUPREME NEED FOR FRUITBEARING

by Ray C. Stedman

Probably no other passage of Scripture has been the battleground of controversy more often than the sixth chapter of Hebrews. Certainly it has sustained a greater variety of interpretations than any other passage. These range from the most rabid forms of Arminian self-determinism to the extreme of a purely hypothetical instance. But though good and great men may differ here in the final exposition, all sound scholars will agree on the following hermeneutical principles.

1. The Passage must be interpreted in the light of its immediate context.
2. The message of the book of Hebrews, as a whole, must not be disregarded.
3. Whatever the final result is, it will not be out of harmony with scriptural truth taught elsewhere.

With these general rules before us, we turn to the passage itself.

The touchstone which determines the final interpretation of these verses is the question: Are those described in verses 4-6 true Christian believers or only professors? The answer determines the outcome. For this reason we have chosen to limit this study to an exegesis of these three verses alone though the argument of the whole section must and will be traced.

In accordance with our first rule of interpretation it is essential to note that this whole warning section from 5:11 to 6:20 is parenthetical, coming in the midst of the writer's discussion of the Melchizedek priesthood of Christ. This discussion of Melchizedek is for the purpose of showing Christ's superiority to the Levitical line of priests, as elsewhere the writer has shown His superiority to angels, Moses, Joshua, and Aaron, and, after this parenthesis, he goes on to speak of a better covenant, a better worship, and a better fellowship than the old order provided. In Hebrews, then, we have the things of the old Jewish order set in constant contrast to the better things of Christ's priesthood, based on and stemming from His once-for-all sacrifice. It is important to see this in order to understand the passage before us. One has not read far in Hebrews before he is aware that one of the chief purposes of the writer is to urge those who yet dawdled with the things of the old order on into full possession of the better things in Christ. Under the Mosaic law they possessed certain rites and ceremonies which were the best God could give them while they were yet under a schoolmaster, and before the crucifixion and resurrection permitted Him to reveal the full glories of the risen Christ. Now that the better things were at hand, coming from the Great High Priest in the heavens, the shadows and types of the old Jewish order are become hindrances rather than blessings. It seems characteristic of the writer that so urgent is his desire to lead his readers on to better things that he is unable to expatiate on the splendors and glories of the new order in Christ without stopping in the middle (as here) to exhort with all earnestness unto the full possession of that of which he speaks. With this fully in mind we proceed to the actual exposition of the parenthetical exhortation.

I. REPROOF OF IMMATURITY, 5:11-14

Characteristics of babes. The immature condition of these Hebrews is evidenced in the title "babe" which the writer applies to them. These are said to be capable of feeding only on the milk of the word and are further designated as being inexperienced in the word of righteousness. There is no disgrace in this itself, but their shame lay in the length of time they had been in that condition (on account of the time).

Characteristics of full-grown men. Opposed to the spiritual condition of the Hebrews, the writer depicts what they should be, i.e. partakers of solid food who, because they make a habit of exercising their senses, are able to distinguish both good and evil. Had the Hebrews been such, they would not have required the solemn warning which followed.

II. EXHORTATION TO PROGRESS, 6:1-3

The terminus ad quem. The "wherefore" which begins chapter six connects with the characterization of babes and full-grown men which has preceded and introduces an urgent exhortation to further progress. The goal to which the writer urges is that which pertains to full-growth. This is not elucidated further, but it may be stated in anticipation that it is not what is described in verses 4-5. But we need not be in doubt as to just what is meant by "perfection", for in Hebrews this word always refers to the result of the work of Christ as High Priest (7:11, 7:19, 10:11-14).

The terminus a quo. More particular attention is paid to the starting point where these Hebrew Christians began. It is termed "the word of the beginning of Christ." It is essential to see that this is so called not in the sense of presenting elementary Christian truths as many seem to think, but rather foundational principles found in the Old Testament which pointed to Christ. Thus dead works as we are plainly told in 9:14 refer to the works of the Mosaic law. Also "faith in God", though true of the New Testament as well as the Old Testament saint, is usually found in the New Testament, "unto God". It is significant, too, that it does not read "faith in Christ"; that would be the New Testament position, but here it is evidently faith such as that of Abraham that is in view. The "teaching of baptisms" is also defined in 9:10 as the ceremonial ablutions of the Mosaic ordinances. The plural itself precludes Christian baptism as the subject, especially in view of Ephesians 4:5. The "laying on of hands" has reference to the Old Testament practice of identifying the sins of a sacrificer with the sacrifice (Leviticus 4:24). This cannot be the Christian practice of laying on of hands in ordination for service as it is here spoken of as connected with "the beginning of Christ" whereas ordination comes later in Christian life and is specifically prohibited to a "novice" (I Timothy 3:6). Of course, "resurrection of the dead" is a truth common to both Christian and Jewish faith, but that it was an important subject to the Jews, and even a ground of controversy, is seen in the formation of the party of the Sadducees, and our Lord's contention with them as recorded in Matthew 22 proves that resurrection was clearly a subject of Old Testament revelation (Job 19:26, Daniel 12:2, Isaiah 26:19). Likewise, "eternal judgment" was spoken of in many places in the Old Testament and formed a common subject in Jewish theology.

But all these were to be forsaken on "departed from," not in the sense of a denial but in the sense of going on to new and greater truths. It was when they "repented from" or changed their minds about these things that they came on to Christian ground. But what was it that brought them to this place of repentance? It was those blessings from the risen Christ which are so clearly described in verses 4 and 5.

III. WARNING AGAINST REGRESSION, 6:4-8

In this section we come to the heart of this passage and to that which shall more fully engage our attention. These verses are an explanation of the words "if permits God", as the "for" of verse 4 indicates. Why does the writer say concerning the need of pressing on, "this will we do, if God permit"? It is because, in the case of some, it is impossible that they should thus press on!

The solemn statement. The words "impossible to renew" are final. No good purpose is served by any attempts to water down their force. Some would render "impossible" as "difficult", but this, too is impossible, in view of 6:18 and 11:6. Neither is this merely an hypothetical instance, for the structure of the passage shows that renewal is out of the question, not simply because it is impossible to fall, as the devotees of the hypothesis theory argue, but because of the terrible results of falling given in verse 6. Such an interpretation as that this is

an hypothesis vitiates all the warning force of the passage, and in effect, construes "impossible" with the participle, "having fallen away".

Let us, however, look first at the blessings received, and then at the resultant actions. Five spiritual privileges are here described which we shall examine in detail.

1. "Those once enlightened." The accusative case here is due to the infinitive which follows later. Whoever is spoken of here, they have been once for all enlightened. Unquestionably, this enlightenment is the knowledge of the gospel. The same word is used in 2 Corinthians 4:4 and 6 where the phrase "light of the gospel" appears. It is used also in Hebrews 10:32 which speaks of the "early days" of a Christian's experience. This passage, in turn, refers back to 10:26 where a "full knowledge of truth" is spoken of on the part of an evident apostate. The same root occurs in John 1:9, "the true light that lighteth every man coming into the world". It is evident, therefore, that the word may be used of either a Christian or an apostate. It is certainly true of both that in each case both received a knowledge of the gospel, even a full knowledge, but only one, the Christian, went on to actual possession of salvation. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" is the true order of salvation in every Christian's experience, but this does not guarantee that all who hear will be saved.

2. "Having tasted of the heavenly gift". The aorist tense suggests a single event in the past which no longer necessarily continues. This thought is true of all the aorist participles here employed. Some have attempted to find support for viewing these as apostates in the thought of mere tasting as opposed to thorough partaking, as one may sip a liquid but not really imbibe it. This is rendered untenable, however, by 2:9, where it is said of Christ "on behalf of all he tasted death". What is this heavenly gift? It is evidently that gift which came from heaven, in short, the Lord Jesus Himself. The writer of Hebrews may well be speaking to many who heard the Lord in the days of His flesh. Of all who thus heard the matchless words of grace that fell from His lips and saw His mighty deeds, it could be well said that they had "tasted of the heavenly gift". Further, there is a real sense, even today, in which men may be said to taste of the heavenly gift through a knowledge of the historic person of Christ. Witness the numerous books on Christ written by unbelievers. Thus this phrase, though it may describe a Christian, also just as fully describes one who was almost a Christian.

3. "Partakers become of the Holy Spirit". This phrase is regarded as conclusive by those who hold that true believers are in view in these verses. This probably arises from the thought that the partaking of the Holy Spirit refers to His indwelling, which is true only of believers. But is such the case? The noun "partakers" occurs but six times in the New Testament, five of these in Hebrews. These are 1:9, 3:1, 3:14, 6:4 and 12:8. In every case except the last, it has the thought of companionship with no necessary implication of unity. In 12:8, the word expresses the thought of being subject to (chastisement). Again the aorist suggests an action in the past not now continuing. Had the perfect participle been used, we would have been required to view these as true believers but in view of "having fallen away" it was impossible to use the perfect. We have here then the thought of going along for a brief time with the Holy Spirit, subject to His influence. What is this but conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment as described in John 16:8! Certainly, it is true of every Christian, but it is also true of every apostate as well.

4. "Having tasted the good word of God." "Word" here refers not so much to the word spoken but the thought expressed in the word. Thayer says "a declaration of one's mind made in word". What is this declaration of the mind of God? We do not think we will be far astray if we take it as that spoken of in the first verse of Hebrews, "God...hath spoken unto us in [His] Son". Here it is not the person of Christ so much as the message He spoke which is in view. In Hebrews, this is the message of assurance based on the unchanging priesthood of Christ (7:25). It is the answer to the question that troubles many convicted souls. "If I accept Christ, can I really live a Christian life?" The "good word" of God declares, "He is able to save unto the uttermost."

5. "Having tasted of the powers of the coming age". Wherever "power" appears in the plural, it is translated "miracles," "mighty works," "powers (of the heavens)," or "authorities." The thought of supernatural works is in the forefront and we may then translate this phrase, "miracles of the coming age". When we remember that these words were addressed to many who had seen Christ and the apostles open blind eyes, heal the sick, restore the lame, and raise the dead, the phrase is understandable. These mighty works were a fore-gleam of the days when the curse should be lifted from the earth and all creation which now groans in bondage will be freed from the blight of sin. Although these await the coming kingdom age for full manifestation, yet it may be truly said of all, both saved and unsaved, who witnessed the miracles of the apostolic age that they had tasted of the wonders of the coming age. These mighty works were in themselves a guarantee of the ultimate restoration of creation and their testimony remains yet to this day the earnest of God's purpose in days to come.

To summarize our study, we believe we have in these five spiritual privileges the following factors:

1. A knowledge of the gospel.
2. Influenced by the person of Christ.
3. Convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit.
4. Assured of keeping power.
5. Convinced of an ultimate restoration.

Are these descriptive of a Christian? Unquestionably, yes! But not exclusively so, for they are also descriptive of one who came to the point of becoming a Christian but turned back.

Now, before we give a final answer to the question of whether these are spoken of as true believers or apostates, let us look at the actions which ensue upon receipt of these five blessings. Does it say they accepted Christ? Does it say they showed forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives? Does it say they continued in the faith? No, none of these. The next word is "and having fallen away". We cannot regard this as a conditional participle, "if they shall fall away", for two reasons: (1) Such a rendering does not make good sense. The evident argument is that it is impossible to renew these, not "if they shall fall away" but, "because they have fallen away"; (2) the presence of the "and" relates this word indivisibly to the whole series of actions expressed by the aorist participles preceding. They are all viewed as one accomplished event. A conditional participle here would require a slight change of thought and would omit the "and."

This falling away is characterized by two things: (1) those who fall away are thereby crucifying on their part the Son of God again; and (2) are putting Him to open ignominy. Are these things the normal results to be expected from the blessings received? Quite the contrary, they are clearly not a result of the blessings but reveal something drastically wrong in the ones being thus blessed.

Let us now review our ground briefly. We find listed in verses 1-3 a number of things pertaining to the old Jewish order which once represented the highest form of true religion. How those whom the writer addresses have come to a place where they have changed their minds (repented) concerning the value of these Jewish things. What brought them to this place of repentance? It was the new truths which they had heard as outlined in verses 4-5. But note, repentance is called the "foundation" of the word of Christ, i.e. the place of beginning, and the five blessings of verses 4-5 but bring one to the threshold of a true Christian experience. Some among them had stood at that place and then fallen away from it. This is evident from the use of "again". Evidently they had once been to the place where they were ready to change their minds about Jewish things, but had fallen back into these now useless practices. The phrase "again to renew unto repentance" of verse 6 thus answers to the "again foundation to lay of repentance" of verse 1. Obviously, then, the five privileges of 4-5 are not what is termed "that which belongs to full growth" but are the truths which bring one to the place of turning from the old, useless religious rites to face the decision of going on to be Christian. The ones spoken of here are not Christians, however, for though they once stood at the place of decision, they fell back into their old practices.

Now the solemn sentence is pronounced: "It is impossible to renew them again to repentance." Why? Because

God has already expended upon them His total persuasive powers and it was not sufficient. What more can He do? Even the most conclusive evidence, sufficient even to obtain full mental assent, is not enough to move their hardened and obdurate will. If that does not suffice, what can? But not only is there no possibility of saving them; they cannot even be brought as far as they once were. This need not be the ground of despair to those who perhaps in their youth rejected the claims of the gospel but still feel at times the urging of the Holy Spirit to receive Christ. It is evident such have not yet been brought to the full knowledge of the truth. It may take a lifetime before God is able to bring one to that place, but when once it is reached we have the solemn assurance of God that he who then rejects has sealed his doom forever. This agrees exactly with the words of 10:26. "For if we sin willfully after receiving the knowledge [full knowledge] of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation". This word "full knowledge" appears again in 2 Peter 2:20 which also speaks of apostates, showing that it is only when that stage is reached and rejected that the divine rejection follows.

The severity of such a sentence is rendered understandable by the closing phrases of verse 6. Those who, in the blazing light of grace streaming down from the great King-Priest in the glory, reject the claims and promises of Christ, and turn back to Jewish rites are thereby crucifying Christ again, and openly despising Him. We take "crucifying for themselves" as a dative of advantage, "crucifying for themselves" or on their part. Each Jewish lamb slain after Calvary is still a type of the death of God's Lamb but after the real has come, in effect denies the efficacy of it. Hence those who turn from Christ to Judaism are really saying, "This little lamb here is the true sacrifice; that One on yonder hill was of no value, and simply marks the deserved death of an imposter." To thus speak is to publicly put to shame Him whom God had exalted to the highest heights of glory. The impossibility of their salvation rests then on two things: (1) God has already done all He could to bring them to a decision for Christ but in vain; and (2) they are crucifying again and shaming the only One by whom they could be saved. Again this agrees with 10:29, "Of how much greater punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy who has trodden under foot the Son of God and esteemed the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and has done despite to the Spirit of grace?" It is impossible to tone down the solemnity of these fearful words!

Before going on to consider the illustration the writer gives, it is noteworthy to observe that the words "having fallen away", "to renew", "crucifying", and "putting to shame", occur only here in the New Testament. In each case, they are intensified forms, but their very rarity may indicate that such terrible apostasy is not too frequent. The last two are in the present tense, not because they thus indicate that the apostates will continue in their rejection, but rather because that is all they can do. The present tenses thus emphasize the "impossible."

The illustration. In verses 7 and 8, the writer adds an illustration to bring out his exact meaning. It is important to see that this illustration is designed to fit the whole picture, not merely verses 4 and 5. It is only the latter part of the illustration that illustrates the teaching of 4-5. The author pictures two plots of ground, side by side, both of which receive abundant rain from heaven. One plot produces useful herbs for the sake of those who till it, and is thereby blessed of God. This type of ground pictures those of whom the writer speaks in verse 9, "We are persuaded better things concerning you, beloved, and things connected with salvation." The second plot receives the same amount of rain as the first, but the results are thorns and briars. This answers to the apostates described in verses 4-5. Note their final end as depicted in the illustration: they being found worthless are "nigh to a curse", i.e. their life may be prolonged for awhile but they face the inevitable curse of eternal damnation in the everburning lake of fire. The rain from heaven, of course, in each case corresponds to the five spiritual privileges described in 4-5. The very fact that this rain falls equally on both plots of ground proves that the blessings of 4-5 are not exclusively for Christians. As we are told elsewhere, "the rain falleth upon the just and the unjust alike". It is the rain which makes it possible for the ground to bear fruit, but the kind of fruit borne rests with the ground itself. It is clear from this that fruitbearing is the one unmistakable mark of the Christian, and it is because of this that the writer so strongly urges his hearers on to such a state.

The remarkable fidelity with which this illustration fits the whole picture is but another proof that we have the right interpretation. Using the figures of the illustration, it is clearly evident why it is impossible to renew apostates unto repentance. What is the use of pouring more rain upon land which even though it has had an abundance already can produce nothing but thorns and briars? More rain, in such a case, means only more thorns. The trouble is not with the lack of rain but with the ground. It has never received the good seed of the word by which it can bring forth fruit. It is therefore disapproved and designated for burning. Note that

"rejected", "cursed", and "whose end is burning" all refer to the subject of "bringeth forth" (faith understood) and not to "thorns" and "briars". It is, therefore, not the thorns and briars which are burned, but the earth itself, so not the fruits of the apostates, but the apostates themselves. If we are asked to identify the thorns and briars we reply in the words of our Lord, "the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches." Oh, the awful folly of knowing the things of God but not receiving them into the heart!

IV. ENJOINMENT TO FRUITBEARING, 6:9-12

Recognition of fruit. As we have already seen, the writer recognizes that some among those he is addressing have already brought forth the unmistakable sign of fruit. This fruit he terms,

"...your work, and the love which ye have shown to His Name, having ministered to the saints and still ministering." It is the sight of this fruit that causes him to declare, "We are persuaded better things of you, beloved, though we speak" (that is, though we speak so harshly as to appear to regard none among you as truly saved). The evidence of fruit has convinced him that some are genuinely saved. That he views two distinct groups is clear from the change of pronouns. In verses 4-6, when speaking of apostates, he uses the third person, "they," "them," and the third person plural endings; but when he speaks of the saved among them he says, "you," "you," and the second person plural endings.

Exhortation to diligence. Because the need for true fruit is so vital, the writer declares he passionately desires for each of his hearers that he will press on into the full assurance of hope. The good seed has been sown and they are to receive it into their hearts, not merely their heads, that when the blessings of God lead them to the place of decision they may bring forth true fruit and not thorns and briars.

It may not be amiss in concluding this study to point out how fully the interpretation we have presented agrees with Scripture elsewhere. We have already noted the close parallel between Chapter 10 and Chapter 6, we have seen also how this agrees with the parable of the sower of Matthew 13. It is instructive to note that John speaks of apostates thus, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." (I John 2:19). Jude says, "These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots, raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." Peter says, "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge [full knowledge], of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (2 Peter 2:20-21). Paul describes them thus, "Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was" (2 Timothy 3:8-9). Our poor words could add no more solemn warning than is here. May God grant men grace to flee to the place of safety in Christ while there is yet time.

Today the Saviour calls,
For refuge fly!
The storm of justice falls,
And death is nigh!

Catalog No. 1
Hebrews 6:1-12

DOING WHAT COMES UNNATURALLY

by Ray C. Stedman

Some years ago there appeared a popular song called *Doing What Comes Naturally*. You may remember it was all about hillbillies and the way they lived, and the repeated theme was "doing what comes naturally." That covers a multitude of sins, if I may paraphrase the Scriptures a bit. There are many things that it is just human nature to do, and one is to try to control ourselves or other people by using rules, regulations and laws. In a very real sense it is natural to be legal and law-minded. Listen to the conversation of people around you, or your own conversation once in a while. Note how many times control by law is mentioned. I heard a couple of people the other day on the street corner discussing some particular need in the community, and one man turned to the other and said, "You know there ought to be a law!" Whenever we find something going wrong that is our first reaction, isn't it? "There ought to be a law!"

I overheard a conversation some time ago in which a man and his wife were discussing a certain matter that had to do with the children at home. She said in a very stern tone of voice, "Boy, am I going to lay down the law about that when I get home." We all react like that occasionally, don't we? Did you ever say to someone, "I'm going to give you a piece of my mind." That is just another way of saying, "I'll tell you what you ought to do; I'll lay down the law to you." Sometimes you hear someone determinedly say, "They are going to do it--or else." That is legality again, isn't it? Last year, at the turn of the year, a lot of people were saying, "Well, I've decided to turn over a new leaf. I've signed a New Year's Resolution." That simply means, "I've passed a law concerning myself; now I'm going to behave in a certain way." It is very evident from our conversation that it is a natural thing to be legalistic and to want to control ourselves with law.

But a Christian is called to be unnatural in that respect, or perhaps I should use the term "supernatural." This matter of control is a supernatural thing. We are not called to live by law, we are called to live by grace, and grace requires God's unending help in our life. It's doing what comes unnaturally!

LAW AND GRACE DEFINED

Now I want to begin with brief definitions of what law and grace really are, and then we will consider together some common misunderstandings of these two themes; and finally we'll look together at a marvelous illustration of grace at work in our lives.

Let us start with a definition. If someone asked you to define legality, what would you say? This is a term we throw around rather loosely today. We label someone a legalist in the same way Senator Joe McCarthy called people Communists, hardly knowing quite what the term really means or whether it genuinely does apply. To define legalism is rather difficult; it is about like trying to define a Republican these days. I've tried to think this matter through and came to this definition: legality is an attempt to control outward actions by means of rules, enforced by penalty. Traffic laws are a good example of this. Here is a sign that says "25 Miles Per Hour Speed Limit," and you are going 35. Now you are up against a rule that governs your outward actions. You can go past that sign with your heart filled with bitterness about the whole matter of traffic control, but as long as you keep under 25 miles an hour the law will leave you alone. The law is only interested in controlling your outward actions, but if you fail, there is a penalty. The man in blue will be right behind you with his little siren, and you will be handed a citation. That is a good example of legality. Income tax is another one. If you do not have your tax in by April 15th there is a penalty attached. The government does not care whether you like it or not. You are required to fill out that form, and you are asked to get it in by a certain time. All this is simply the natural, the normal way of controlling the actions of human beings.

Then what is the definition of grace? Well, grace is the control of inward attitudes and outward actions by means of love, without any penalty. If you want an illustration of that ask yourself what makes a young man bring his sweetheart an armful of flowers or a box of candy. If she asked him to do it, it would ruin the whole business, wouldn't it? If he were under obligation to do so, it would be a meaningless act. But something so controls his actions that when the right circumstances arise he gladly digs down in his pocket for the money and brings her the flowers or a box of candy. He does not have to do it, but he does. Why? Well, there is love there. Grace, you see, controls by love.

GRACE APPEALS TO LOVE

Let us look at these matters a little closer. Legality deals with outward actions or words, while grace deals with

inward attitudes and motives of the heart. It is possible for man to obey the law outwardly but disobey it inwardly. A man could stand with a brick in his hand in front of a plate glass window with his heart hot with hatred and with a great surging desire to throw that brick through the window. As long as he does not throw it, the law is totally unconcerned how he feels. As long as he controls his actions, the law does not care what his heart feels like. But grace does! Grace is vitally concerned with the heart. Grace wants that heart to be filled with love and benevolence, instead of hatred and bitterness, and so its control is from within. Law deals with the surface; grace with the center. Law appeals to fear, fear of a penalty; grace appeals to grateful love. Law prescribes what one ought to do; grace creates a "want to" within. It is significant, isn't it, that we all prefer grace for ourselves, but law for everyone else? But the work of the Spirit is to teach us to show grace toward others as well as desire it for ourselves. The Scriptures confirm that it is a natural thing to be legal. The natural man needs law to control his actions. If he does not have the law to tell him what to do, he will go overboard and be lawless, and the result is anarchy and rebellion. The natural man needs law. I'm not saying anything against law; it is necessary. But, it is for the natural man. Let me give you a passage of Scripture that confirms that. You will find it in 1 Timothy, chapter 1, verses 8-11. Paul says,

"But we know that the law is good, if a man uses it lawfully, knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust."

Now, the regenerate man, the man or woman, boy or girl who has come to believe in Jesus Christ, who has come into a living relationship with him, and in whom the Spirit of God dwells is not to be governed by the law. The law is not made for him. We who know Christ are to be controlled by grace in every aspect of life. In Romans 7:6 Paul writes:

"But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."

That makes it clear, doesn't it? We are not to be under the law. Paul repeats this, with different emphasis, in Galatians 4:9:

"But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?"

Paul asks, "Why are you going back under law now that you have been brought out into the liberty that is Christ Jesus?" The Word of God makes it very plain that a Christian is to be controlled by grace and not by law.

Unfortunately, there are many misunderstandings about the practical applications of grace to a Christian life. I want to treat some of the most common of these in a simple, practical manner. Perhaps the misunderstanding that is most prevalent today is that grace really means no control at all. Many, I think, would sing to the old hymn something like this:

Free from law,
Oh happy condition,
Sin as you please,
for there is remission.

Their idea is that you can do anything you want in grace, If you are under grace you do not have any restrictions, you do not have any rules or any regulations, you just do as you please, and nothing can stop you. Since you will be forgiven, you may feel free to live it up all your life. This is a most common misunderstanding of grace, but it is one that is far from the truth.

In a Christian life there are two extremes: legality and license, and the devil does not really care which one he

pushes you into. If he can get you into either one your life is ruined as far as usefulness for God is concerned. But grace represents the middle path that goes right down between the two. License is lawlessness; it is anarchy; it is saying "I'm free to do anything I want, there are no limits to my indulgence. If I want to do something that the Bible says is wrong, well I'm not under the law, but under grace, and I can go ahead and do it." That is license and it is wrong. It is religious anarchy. And there are some who feel that this is what grace is. At the other extreme there is legality. Our trouble is that to escape license sometimes we rebound into legality. We feel the condemnation of conscience that comes with living a wild, free, untrammled life, and we react with legality. Instead of coming to a mediate position of grace, we go clear over to the side of legality. We impose on ourselves laws, rigid rules, long lists of "don'ts" which prevent us from doing anything but eat, sleep, and read the Bible. Have you seen the sign: "Everything I like is either immoral, illegal, or fattening"? Well, that is legality.

GRACE HAS ITS COMMANDS

Now grace represents real control. It is control from within, not from the outside only. It is a middle path between legality and license. A man said to me the other day. "Since I began to learn what grace means, I watch not only my actions, but my thoughts as well. I have a much greater sense of sin under grace than I ever had under law." Surely this indicates how much more control grace exerts than law. The fact is that since grace is concerned with the thoughts as well as the actions, it can prevent wrong actions at the very source: the thought life.

A second widespread misunderstanding exists along with this. Many feel that grace is so opposed to law that it never involves any commands or rules of any kind. I read somewhere recently that wherever you find commandments in the Bible, that is law and if you live by grace you cannot have any laws or rules of any kind. You sometimes hear people say, "I'm under grace, I don't need any rules in my life." And if you refer to some rule they rebel and say, "That's not for me. I'm under grace; I'm not subject to any rules." Now the Bible indicates plainly that grace has its rules as well. Grace gives commands. Let me refer you to some of them. Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Now that is a command of grace. The Bible says, "Forsake not the assembling o~ yourselves together." That is a command, but it is given under grace. The Bible says, "Be not drunk with wine." That is a command, but it is grace! The Scripture exhorts, "Pay taxes to whom taxes are due." That is a command, but it is grace! Grace has its commands just as truly as law does.

LAW CREATES REBELLION

"Then," you say, "what is the difference between law and grace?" The difference is that the law commands without supplying a motive to obey. In fact, it creates a feeling of rebellion within. I don't know whether you react like this or not, but I do. Whenever I see a sign that says "Keep Off The Grass," I have an urge to walk across it. Do you feel that way? There is created immediately a sense of rebellion: "Why should I keep off the grass?" I resent being told not to walk on it. I do not do it, because I know I will get into trouble, but I would like to. Now that is law. It is a command without creating a desire to comply. Grace commands even a higher thing than law, but also creates an ability and desire to comply with the demand. I saw a "Keep Off The Grass" sign some time ago that was gracious, It was not merely the usual, blunt "Keep Off The Grass." Right in the middle of a beautiful, newly planted spot, green with new grass, was this sign that said simply, "Please Give Me A Chance!" That is grace. No one would walk on that grass. It appealed to the instinct for the underdog in every human heart. It created a sentiment for fair play, "Let's give it a chance." That is grace. One sign was as much a command as the other, but the second awakened a desire within to comply with it, and so was gracious. Remember that grace has its commands, it has its rules, it has its regulations---exactly as the law does---but grace alone has the ability to create a desire to comply.

A LEGALIST CATALOG OF SINS

There is yet a third misunderstanding. This is a very common one and a very serious one. It is the thinking that says the standards of grace are much lower than the standards of legalism. The argument goes something like this, in various forms: "True Christians," someone says, "never use tobacco, or dance, or go to the movies. or go to the theater. or gamble. or drink. And since you sometimes see those who say they are loving by grace do

some of these things, it therefore proves the standards of grace are lower than those of the law." Actually, the reverse is true. In the light of the Word of God, which alone must set the standards for believers, these outward acts---smoking, drinking, dancing, movies, theater, gambling, etc.---are much less serious sin, if they are sin at all, than the inward, vicious sins of the spirit that legalists almost invariably permit in their own lives. Legal standards always concern themselves with outward acts. As long as you can keep the outward aspect of your life adjusted to a particular rule or standard, you can consider yourself spiritual. But grace does not stop there. Grace goes beyond the outward act into the heart, and says the heart must be right as well. The spirit must be righteous in God's sight. The standards of grace are concerned with those inward attitudes that create the outward act.

Recently I read a paragraph which manifests a keen insight into this problem, by Dr. Carl Henry, for many years Professor of Theology at Fuller Seminary. Here these words carefully, for he deals with this in a very practical way.

The legalist's catalog of sins is small and specific: commercial movies, dancing, gambling, card playing, drinking beer or wine or liquor, and smoking. No spiritual Christian will presumably do any of these things, and generally will have little to do with anyone who does them. Everyone who grows up in this tradition finds that it has a vice-like grip on him. His conscience has been made sensitive to these things by the never-ending tirade against them. If he weakens and indulges, he is filled with guilt feelings as automatically as Pavlov's dog salivated when the bell rang. Many valid arguments can be marshalled against some of these practices. A thoughtful analysis of all factors involved may lead a person to abstain from smoking. He may not like the taste of a cigaret. The smoke may bother his wife. He may not be able to afford the cost. Or he may wish to use the money for some other purpose. He may not like the looks of a person smoking. He may be aware that others around him are sickened by the foulness of his wet cigar. He may not like the smell of tobacco clinging to his clothing. He may not like the possibility of staining his teeth. For any of these reasons he may choose not to smoke. But this is a wholly different story from condemning smoking as sin because---well, because it's sin, that's all. And from the presupposition that it is sin, the legalists will use the above reasons to prove that indeed it is sin. The answer to its moral rightness is already in mind before investigation of the moral issues is made.

Now that is in no sense an attempt to justify smoking, or drinking, or gambling, or any of these other things. It is simply an attempt to put the emphasis where it belongs, not on outward acts primarily, but on inward attitudes and the signs of the spirit that are far worse in the sight of God. I had a young man from another church come to me a few weeks ago. He had in his hand a pledge that his church had asked him to sign before he became a member. The pledge said: "I promise never to use tobacco in any form, or to drink liquor, or to attend the movies or the theater, or to gamble, or to play cards"---and there were several other things that were there. He said, "My church has asked me to sign this before I become a member. Should I sign or not?" I said, "Yes, sign it. But write on it after the words that are printed there: "I reserve the right to be jealous, gossip, slander, be hypocritical and proud, and indulge in all the other sins of the saints." That is where the real sin lies. Read your New Testament and you will find that gossip, evil talk and a bitter spirit are far worse sins in God's sight than any of the outward acts that may be evil as well. We must put the emphasis where it belongs. The Ten Commandments represent only the minimum standard for moral living. They say nothing about evangelism or missionary effort. There is no life or walk in the Spirit, there is no Fatherhood of God, there is no union with Christ, there is no fellowship with saints, there is no hope of salvation or hope of heaven in the Ten Commandments. All those things are brought in under grace. The standards under grace are far, far higher than those under law. Grace speaks thus:

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice, and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Eph. 4:31-2)

Legalism can never rise to that level. It is only concerned with a few outward things, visible to others, but the heart may be rank and evil with slander, malice, bitterness, gossip, and all the other works of the flesh. Our Lord Jesus gave a perfect picture of a legalist when He said to the Pharisees of His day, "Ye strain at a gnat but swallow a camel. You are so concerned with these minor, outward things, but you let the great and weighty matters of the spirit go by without a thought." That is legalism.

Another common objection to grace is that grace is much harder to apply to life than law. Strangely enough this is an objection that is true. It does take more time and effort to be gracious than to gruffly say "Don't" to someone. Any parent knows that. It is a lot easier to say "Stop that!" and keep saying it for fifteen or twenty years than it is to sit down and explain why an action should be stopped, what the harm is, what is going to happen if it is continued, or to help a child to see what is involved in the whole matter. Sure, it takes time. "Don't" and "Stop that" work fine for a while, as long as the penalty is consistently invoked, but inwardly the heart may all along be seething with rebellion. One mother kept saying to her little boy, "Sit down!" but he wouldn't sit down. Finally, she went over and got him and sat him down in the chair by force. Rebelliously, he looked up at her and said, "I may be sitting down outside, but I'm still standing up inside!"

DISCIPLINE WITH UNDERSTANDING

The trouble is that when control by force is no longer possible the lid blows off! When children are out on their own, the first thing they want to do is the thing they have been forbidden to do all their lives. I do not mean by this that discipline of children is wrong. It is most assuredly right. But it must be discipline with understanding and the manifestation of love and concern. Love may sometimes use force, but it will never be content with the use of force without creating some realization of why force is necessary. Grace takes time and patience to apply. Control comes slowly and there may even be temporary failure along the line. But when children are out on their own who have been taught grace, there is a lasting and solid commitment to the right that will keep them straight all their days.

Grace does require time and above all it requires sacrifice. That is the heart of grace. You must give of yourself. You cannot win love by buying a few gifts now and then, or saying a few kind words once in a while. I have exhorted some who came to me with problems about their teenage children to try grace in controlling their lives when law has been shown to be a failure. I have been amused when they come back in a week or so and say, "It doesn't work; I was nice to him for two or three days and he still behaves as badly as ever." That is much like the man who says to his wife when she asks him for some money, "Well, what did you do with the ten dollars I gave you last year?" No, grace must take time to create love, because it is love that controls. Until you have created that attitude of love in the heart, you cannot possibly expect the result you want. But the results in terms of obedience and direction are well worth all its costs.

LEGALISM IS SIN

There is still one final misunderstanding. This is the idea that it is quite optional whether a Christian lives by law or grace. That is, if grace is found too difficult or demanding, the Lord will accept sincere legalism. Nothing could be further from the truth. Legalism is sin! If you discover it in your heart, you ought to be down on your face before God repenting and confessing the thing. It is corrupting; it is vile; it is disturbing; it destroys the unity of the Spirit and produces the works of the flesh in your life. Paul calls it leaven, and he treats it as evil in the extreme. Ignorance of grace is called weakness in the Scripture. Such a one is expected to grow, to develop and learn something better; but a deliberate failure to live under grace when you know better, is called falling from grace. It is called deceit; it is called vain jangling; it is called empty talk. You are considered unruly and disobedient as Christians. We could sum it all up by simply saying it is impossible to please God by legality. He can be pleased only by grace. We are called to grace. Paul says "Sin shall not have dominion over you, because you are not under law but under grace." (Rom. 6:14) Peter says, "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Pet. 3:18)

Now I come to the last thing, briefly and quickly. It is the supreme illustration of grace. There are many illustrations that we could use, but the greatest illustration of grace is spread right out before us at the Lord's Table. The Lord's Table speaks of nothing but grace.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." (2 Cor. 8:9)

That is what this table proclaims. It tells how grace has already given all for us. Before we even asked, God gave. While we were yet rebels, Christ died. We are invited to come, just as we are. God does not ask us to clean up our lives, nor to improve ourselves. He asks us to come just as we are. Guilty and filthy and stained

with sin; righteous in act without, but rebellious of heart within. Come and receive the gift of love and righteousness he desires to impart. That is grace. There is no need to struggle to be accepted before God today. When you believe in Jesus Christ it is written over against your name in Heaven---Accepted in the Beloved! Welcomed in Christ! Already cleansed, already righteous in His sight!

Grace is flowing like a river,
Millions there have been supplied.
Still it flows, as fresh as ever,
From the Saviour's wounded side!

The appeal of grace now that God has made you saints is, live saintly! Now that He has accepted you and made you fellow-heirs with Christ, joint heirs with the Son of God. live like it, walk like it! The heart that receives such a gift is constrained by love.to honor it. I like the way it is stated in 1 Corinthians, chapter 6, where Paul says,

"What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price? Therefore [because all this is true] glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are His."

Now if that were the law it would read: "Glorify God in your body and in your spirit and someday you will become the temples of God." But grace turns it all around and says, by grace, without merit, without any claim, without any reason why, God has made you a temple of the living God. Now, if you realize that, live accordingly. Glorify God in your body and in your spirit. We could never do it the other way; we could never glorify God apart from the indwelling Spirit, but grace says it's done, it's already accomplished. Ye are the temples of the living God. The man or woman, boy or girl, who grasps this great fact in its living splendor will never be the same again.

Prayer

Our heavenly Father, we thank you for the riches of grace we have in Christ Jesus. How marvelously he has already given himself for us. You have bade us to be tenderhearted, kind, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us. We pray that our hearts may be awakened to the riches of grace and that we may be stimulated to do the very things that are pleasing to you. not because we have to but because we want to. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Catalog No. 4
Various Scriptures

MAN IN THREE WORLDS

by Ray C. Stedman

In these Sunday morning messages, I am seeking to speak to Christians who are troubled by some of the problems that are confronting us today, and to unfold some of the overwhelming and devastatingly complete answers which scripture gives to the burning issues of our day. We have previously dealt with the matter of the authority of scripture-God's voice to man in man's ignorance and need and the only adequate explanation of life as we find it in our day. Today I wish to take up a related issue, one which is a continual problem to a great many Christians and a challenge to the faith of many. The issue is: What is the relationship between learning-the knowledge of man-and the revelation of scripture? Are there contradictions between modern science and the word of God? Can the Bible compete with modern knowledge today?

You and I live in a university community. The great university which is here on our doorsteps, Stanford

University, along with the very fine junior colleges and other schools in this area, represent in the eyes of the world the vast accumulated body of human knowledge, distilled by long and painful effort from centuries of man's search and investigation of life. To review some of the accomplishments of science in our own day is to be staggered in amazement. We cannot but be tremendously impressed by the wonderful mastery of many natural forces which were undreamed of a few decades ago. The advances that science has made in various areas of human endeavor, and the changes that have occurred in our lives as a result of these tremendous strides, are phenomenal. The world is very little the same as it was even three or four decades ago, due largely to these advances in scientific knowledge.

Therefore, there seems to be considerable weight to the claim that is being widely made in our day that if man is given enough time, using the equipment he already has, i.e., his reasoning ability, his powers of investigation and observation, and his ability to think through on relationships and concepts, he can solve all his problems. Therefore the gospel, the word concerning Jesus Christ, is an outmoded message for our day, a barbaric relic of a more ignorant age. It was all right, they tell us, for those days when man knew very little about the world around him, when he lived in superstitious ignorance that excluded him from understanding the world of nature in which he dwelt. But now that the ignorance has been dissolved and the mystery explained, we do not need this message any longer.

There are many who are shaken by that approach. But it is important to know that there is no issue which confronts human hearts today that scripture has not already faced and squarely met. The Apostle Paul comes to grips with this very issue in the first letter to the Corinthian church, and in the second chapter of this letter, he devotes his thought entirely to the answering of this problem.

As you know, Corinth was a Greek city. The inhabitants of Corinth, as of all cities of Greece, were admirers of human wisdom. They were the heirs of the great Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the other tremendous thinkers of an earlier day, men whose reasoning has seldom been equaled in the many centuries following. The Apostle Paul was a very learned man, a very able man, who could quote the Greek poets to the Athenians on Mars Hill and who was acquainted with the philosophies and the philosophers of his day. He was a man of brilliant intellect, with a first-class mind, able to deal adequately with matters of human knowledge and wisdom. But in chapter two, as he writes to these Christians at Corinth, he throws down the gauntlet. He made, he says, a deliberate and unequivocal decision when he came to them.

When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God In lofty word or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

This introduces the theme of the whole chapter, which is simply a contrast drawn between the wisdom of man, the accumulated body of human knowledge, and the wisdom of God, represented in symbolic manifestation by the cross of Jesus Christ. The principles revealed of how far human wisdom is necessary in order to understand divine truth are as relevant and valid today as when the Apostle Paul wrote this.

He begins this theme in chapter one, verse seventeen, where he puts his finger squarely upon the total inability of man's wisdom to cope with the problem of man's heart, that problem with which the gospel comes squarely to grips. In the process of developing this, he reveals three very profound reasons why he determined to set aside, as he says, all human science, philosophy, and logic in coming to Corinth, and to limit himself to a proclamation of Jesus Christ and him crucified. These three reasons are very helpful in our consideration of this problem. Let us look at them. The first is set forth in chapter one, verses 18 through 21,

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart."

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not

God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

There you have the first drawback of human wisdom, in one phrase: "The world through wisdom does not know God." In other words, Paul is declaring to us the narrowness of wisdom. It does not reach far enough: it is utterly limited, it is circumscribed. What does he mean by this? If you are acquainted with the Bible you know that everywhere it views man as a three-fold being made up of body, soul and spirit. Because man is a three-fold entity, physical, the body, and intangible, the soul and the spirit, having each its own peculiar and separate function, man is therefore a being designed to live in three worlds.

The body opens to us the world of matter. We see light, we hear sound, we feel the wind, we smell the odors, the fragrances, and stench of the world around us. We taste food and drink, and by our five senses explore, observe, assimilate and investigate the realm of the material, the world of matter. With the soul, the seat of the mind, the intelligence faculty, the emotion, the ability to feel and respond, and the will, which chooses, the volitional faculty, we may enter the world of mind, reason, logic, opinions, and attitudes-the world of government, music science and literature, of politics, and the arts. By means of the soul we explore human life around us, the thinking of man. We can go back into the past. We can project ourselves, to a limited degree, into the future. We enjoy beauty and order and harmony. Through the soul we are intended to explore, correlate, and investigate the world of mind. This world also includes religion, i.e., man's opinions and attitudes about God; his philosophies, his concepts, pro and con, as to whether God exists or not, and if he does, what kind of a God he is, the total world of human thinking about God. This is the function of the soul. It is a rich fabric of discovery and application.

But in man's life in these two worlds there is one fatal weakness immediately evident. The two worlds of mind and matter, which the body and soul of man permit him to enter, are worlds in which man never finds ultimate answers to his problems. Specific areas of these may make sense, but the links which relate one set of truths to another set are lost to us. For instance, we can build an exquisite, mechanically perfect car, but we find that we can do very little, if anything, about the driver. As a result, though we have invented a beautiful machine, we put the wrong kind of a driver in it and in a few moments the machine is a mass of wreckage. A mathematician may work problems of almost incredible complexity, especially with the aid of such electronic marvels as computers, but when that same man gets home he finds he cannot get along with his mother-in-law. The knowledge of one realm does not relate to another realm. Man lives his life trying to work a great jig-saw puzzle in which the key pieces are missing. Limited to the only two worlds he knows, but which are not enough to investigate all of life, man finds himself continually reasoning in a circle, like a dog going round and round chasing its tail. The difference is that the dog has the happy faculty of always managing to keep his end in view, but man does not.

The reason for all this is simply that all the key answers to life are found in the realm of the spirit, the only part of man which was designed to know and to touch God. This is why Paul says so flatly, the world by wisdom knows not God. It does not move in that realm. It is not properly equipped. In man as he is, fallen man, the spirit is dead and unresponsive, uninhabited by the God it was made to contain.

Let me show you what I mean. If you explore the world of matter far enough, or the world of the mind far enough, you come in each case to a borderline of mystery in which you venture upon a darkened, unexplored, and unexplorable world which is nothing more than pure spirit. For instance, when we trace the world of matter back to its basic structure we discover the atom. And within the atom, the nucleus. Surrounding the nucleus, apparently, are entities called electrons, which are electrically charged. Listen to what John McIntyre, a nuclear physicist, formerly of Stanford University and now in charge of the linear accelerator at Texas A & M, said about these electrons, in an article published in *His Magazine*:

By applying the usual concepts of space and time to the interior of the atom, physicists found basic contradictions between experimental facts. One experiment showed that an electron was a wave extending over a region of space, while the next experiment showed it to be a particle not extending over any space. Two more contradictory descriptions of an entity would be hard to imagine. Finally, as formulated by Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, physicists concluded that there is a limit to the knowledge that can ever be obtained

about an electron; the electron can be described equally well as a wave or as a particle, depending on how the experimenter examines it.

You see, our God, who designed the atom and its components, "is a Spirit." It is quite natural, then, that certain basic aspects of his architecture are beyond human ability to discover. At the edge of mystery man stands, unable to go further.

If you search behind the phenomena of emotion, will, memory, and thought, you come again to an unknown land of human motivation which the great Austrian psychologist, Frankl, calls logos, "the word," and his logotherapy is nothing more than a recognition of the existence of a third area of life, the human spirit. It is a shadowy land of mystery, yet within that land lie all ultimate answers to the problems of life. Now, this is the realm to which the gospel of Jesus Christ is the sole and solitary entrance, as Paul declares in verse 22, chapter 1:

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The wisdom of man utterly fails to reach this essential area for it is too circumscribed, therefore the world by wisdom does not know God.

But this is only the beginning. The Apostle goes right on in Chapter 2, verses 6 - 8, to reveal another fatal weakness in man's vaunted knowledge.

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Here he is declaring the sinfulness of man's wisdom. He says there is a wisdom which is hidden from the eyes of a proud, self-sufficient world, a secret wisdom which they know nothing about. It has been in existence since the foundation of the world, but man in his pride cannot reach it or understand it. And because he lacks this, the knowledge that he does have actually leads him astray and he ends up committing the most tragic and atrocious blunders. When Paul speaks of the rulers of this age he does not mean only those who are of noble birth. He means the leaders, the philosophers, the great thinkers, these clever men who pride themselves on being able to recognize greatness when they see it. They would certainly know another philosopher, they would recognize a great thinker or a great leader. And yet, so blinded are they with their own conceit, that when Truth incarnate stood before them, when the Son of God himself, the Lord of glory, stood in front of them all they could shout in their blindness was, "Away with this fellow, this agitator, this trouble-maker! Crucify him! That is all he is worth." From this fatal flaw in human knowledge stems all the strife and cruelty and violence of all the ages. It was this blindness that caused Lee Harvey Oswald to blow out the brains of the President of the United States. It is this fatal flaw, this same deadly twist which makes a husband snap at his wife or a child to rebel against his parents or the parents to be harsh and severe in their treatment of their children. "No, no," says Paul, "I cannot use the wisdom of the world when I come to grips with the essential problem of human life, for it has no power in this realm. It is too selfish, too self-centered, too sinful, there must be something more."

Well, you would think this is enough, would you not? But Paul is not through yet. In chapter 2, verse 14, he reveals yet a third flaw in man's philosophy and knowledge.

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Here he is declaring to us the barrenness of man's wisdom. This word "unspiritual" is actually the word "soulish." The soulish man is the man who is governed by his soul: his mind, his emotions and his will. He

knows no higher governing level in his life than that. And what does it say about the soulish man? Simply, that he is deprived of all that God wishes to give to man. What is that? What are these things, the gifts of the Spirit of God, which the soulish man cannot receive? It is life and the things which make life liveable. "The gift of God," Paul writes to the Romans, "is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." That is, life as God intended man to live it. The lack of this is demonstrably evident all around us today. Man seems unable to lay hold of what God wishes to give him. He cannot live this life. Jesus said, "I came that you might have life and that you might have it more abundantly." And it is the gifts that make life abundant which the soulish man is unable to receive. Not only life in heaven some day, but life on earth right now. "In him was life," and that life was intended for man, now. It is a life incomparably rich. Look at verse 9.

But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived [there you have the limits of human sources of knowledge: the eye-gate, the ear-gate, the reasoning power], what God has prepared for those who love him," God has revealed to us through the Spirit.

There it is---gifts of grace and power only made known by the Holy Spirit. Why is it that the soulish man cannot have these? Paul declares it is because he does not have the equipment to receive them. He cannot know these things, it is not merely that he does not, but he simply cannot. The soulish man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God for they are folly to him. He is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned, and he does not operate on this level. This is a frightful stumbling block to the intellectual. He cannot understand why the equipment which he has been using to investigate the world of mind and the world of matter and which has reaped such rich rewards of increased human knowledge does not operate in this realm as well. He resents it when this word says, "You do not have the equipment for this, you cannot move in this realm. You cannot grasp these things, you cannot lay hold of these issues."

We know that the space in this room is filled with messages, pictures, and music coming to us on radio waves and television waves, but not one of us is properly equipped at this moment to receive them. We know they are there, there is no question about it, but we cannot receive them. This is exactly the case with the soulish man. There is an area of life in which the natural man, man as he is born into this world, is simply not equipped to operate. When he seeks God through human wisdom, limited to that knowledge which body and soul open to him, he denies himself his basic human inheritance. It is because he rejects the cross of Christ, which is the only way the spirit of man can be made alive and thus enable him to take from God's hands the gifts that God is eager to give.

Now, in contrast, Paul describes to us the spiritual man, in verse 15. This is more than simply a Christian, it is a Christian who has been taught by the Spirit.

The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

The spiritual man, the man taught by the Spirit, whose spirit has been made alive in Jesus Christ and has been instructed by the Spirit-what does he say about him? He judges all things. The word "judges" is a word that means "examines." He examines, investigates-what? All things! There are no limits, no barriers. It does not mean he automatically knows everything. The Christian who thinks he knows everything actually knows nothing. No, it means he is set free to learn. He has the proper equipment. He has now been given all that it takes to investigate profitably and accurately any realm of human knowledge. He must, of course, go through the process of learning. But to the man who has been taught of the Spirit, any realm of knowledge is open. He is free to investigate and learn.

Christianity is not anti-intellectual in the true sense. It is not against knowledge. It is simply against knowledge without God. Christianity insists that man begin at the right place. "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord." It is only when man begins there that he has adequate equipment to put to proper use the knowledge he gains through the investigative faculties of the human mind. The spiritual man examines all things, but Paul says no man has any right to examine him. Why not? Right here he says the most astounding, the most dramatic thing this mighty Apostle ever wrote,

We have the mind of Christ.

Christians, taught of the Spirit, have the ultimate teacher; they have the mind of Christ, and who can examine him? Who can challenge the conclusions of the man truly taught by the Spirit? That is his question, "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" Or as he writes to the Romans in that wonderful passage in Chapter 11:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and his ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

A whole new world of knowledge opens to the man whose spirit is made alive in Jesus Christ. In this realm the wisdom of the world is simply out of its class. It cannot contribute anything. It has nothing to offer. Only the man or woman, boy or girl, born and taught of the Spirit is able to understand true moral values, proper ethical insights—that grasp of human life which takes the knowledge which the body and the soul accumulates and puts it into proper perspective so that man lives as God intended man to live.

The spiritual man begins at the right place. This is why Paul said, "I came unto you determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." If you do not start there, there is no other way. There is no other entrance into the realm of the spirit. "I am the way, the truth and the life," Jesus said, "no man comes unto the Father but by me." Only the poor in spirit can receive the kingdom of heaven. The cross of Christ puts the pride of man utterly to death. A man who is nailed to a cross simply has nothing left. When we come to the place of the cross, when we are willing to say, "Lord Jesus. I have nothing. My vaunted knowledge, my supposed abilities, my talents, all that I have in myself is not sufficient. I see this, now. I see it will never work, it will never do the job, it will never solve the problem. I have nothing, Lord, unless I have Thee." In that place, at the foot of the cross, the wonderful transaction takes place. Jesus Christ makes us alive in him. "You hath he made alive." Paul writes to the Ephesians, "You, who were dead in trespasses and sin, has he made alive in him."

The spiritual man begins at the right place, and from there he grows by the proper process.

We impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.

That is the process of growth, a study of spiritual truths illuminated by the Spirit. And what is this truth? What is this body of knowledge hidden from man in his pride? Paul describes it in verses 10 and 11.

God has revealed to us [these things] through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths [the deep things] of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

If God is the ultimate reality, if he is the reason behind everything, the most important body of knowledge we will ever have to do with is that concerning the thoughts of God, the thoughts God is thinking about this world, about our life, and about us.

This is the spiritual man. Here is the man who has been set free from his fear, for he realizes that God is in perfect control of the affairs of earth. He sees the out-working of God's eternal purpose in everything. Here is the man who loses his hurry. He realizes that most of the mistakes made in the Bible were made by people who were in a hurry. He realizes that to him who walks by the Spirit there are twelve hours in the day, ample time to do everything that needs to be done. Here is the man who loses his blindness. He sees things in right perspective. Life comes into focus again. Here is the man who loses his impotence, who does ordinary things in an extraordinary way, because it is God at work in him.

Let me close with this question: Are you ready to begin? Some may never have been to the cross and, as a result, all your feeble efforts to imitate the life of God in Jesus Christ are absolutely futile. You may be

religious, you may be utterly sincere, but your religion is nothing more than man's thoughts about God. The only way in which you can be made alive in Jesus Christ is to come to the place of the cross and, bowing yourself there, say, "Lord Jesus, I have nothing. I need you." Are you ready to begin there? Are you ready to be taught of the Spirit, to lay aside all of man's wisdom and human knowledge and to be taught of God that you may come back to the realm of human knowledge to learn these things in proper perspective, with proper evaluation?

Prayer

Our Father, just as Paul, preaching with such mighty power to these Corinthians, laid before them the blessed Person of the Lord Jesus, the only One who is able to make alive the human spirit, so we ask that many here today will yield their lives to him, will invite him to come into their lives and make them alive in thee. There are others who have already done this but who are seeking to work out their moral and ethical problems by the pursuit of human knowledge alone. Teach them Lord, to come back to the Book, to be taught of the Spirit, to learn here that which can only be learned in the realm of the Spirit, and then to view all of life from that perspective, that place of knowledge. In Christ's name, Amen.

Catalog No. 74
1 Cor. 1:18-2:16
Nov. 29, 1964

CHRISTIANS UNABRIDGED

by Ray C. Stedman

The title, I am sure, requires a bit of explaining. All of us have seen an unabridged dictionary, one of those heavy books, almost a foot thick, containing every word in the English language. It is a very interesting book to read. It has only one drawback: it changes the subject so frequently. And we have also seen abridged dictionaries. There is considerable difference between an unabridged dictionary and an abridged dictionary, both in size and subject matter, in extent as well as content.

There are also abridged and unabridged Christians. There are pocket-edition Christians with print so fine that nobody can read it. There are desk-edition Christians who lie around and gather dust and are useless. Then there are unabridged Christians, who are a full and complete expression of all that is included in the Christian life. Becoming an unabridged Christian has nothing at all to do with the office you may hold in the church, or the gift you may have, or the training or education you have had. It is quite possible for a pastor to be nothing more than a pocket-edition Christian, very highly abridged. It is equally possible for a plumber to be an unabridged edition, or vice versa for that matter. The issue has simply to do with your grasp and appropriation of all that is in Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament there are certain thumbnail passages which gather up the whole of the Christian life in a very few words. They are wonderfully helpful passages, for we can lay them alongside our experience of Christ and thus know whether we are abridged or unabridged Christians. One of these passages is found in Matthew 11, beginning with verse 28, these extremely familiar words that many know by heart.

"Come to 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 will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

This is a summary by the Lord Jesus himself of all that is essential in the Christian life. It is amazing how it can be put in a few words. It can even be stated in smaller compass than that. Jesus put the whole of the Christian life in two phrases when he said, "Ye in me and I in you." It is all there, and it is all here as well.

You will note immediately that the Christian life falls into two very perceptible stages. There is an initial act by which the life of Christ in us begins, which leads in turn to a continuing attitude. It takes both to make a full Christian experience. There is a contact which brings about a commitment. It is like marriage. Those of us who are married know that the story all began with that age-old experience of boy meets girl. One of the questions I have learned to ask married couples who come to me with problems in their married life is, "Where did you meet?" You can almost see the softening of the friction between them as memory goes back to that hour when boy met girl. But that is just the beginning, for the relationship goes on until bride meets groom. There a commitment is made that totally and radically alters their whole lives. This is what Christian life is like.

You will further note that these two aspects of the Christian life are marked by a double use of the word "rest." It occurs once in verse 28 and again in verse 29. "Come to 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 will find rest for your souls." There is a rest that is given, imparted, and there is a rest that is found, discovered. It is not the same rest. It happens to be the same word in the original Greek, but it is not the same experience, for there is a different procedure: "Come," that is all, "Come, and I will give you rest." The second rest is dependent upon quite another activity: "Take my yoke upon you." A yoke is a heavy wooden beam that binds two oxen together and makes them a team. The yoke is an invitation to partnership and to direction. It means submission to control. Therefore, the whole of the Christian life can be put in two simple phrases: It is a contact that involves receiving something, and a control that leads to a discovery. That is the Christian life.

Now look with me at those statements for a moment. The first is a contact that involves receiving. Christianity, of course, begins with meeting Christ. You are not a Christian because you go to church, any more than you become an automobile by going into your garage. You are a Christian when you receive Christ. It is not learning a doctrine that makes you a Christian, it is not subscribing to a creed, it is not joining a group: it is coming to know Jesus Christ! The wonderful thing about that is that, as the living Lord, he is never far away from us. When Paul stood on Mars Hill in Athens and spoke to the intellectuals of the Greek world, he said to them concerning God, "In Him we live and move and have our being." No man is very far away from God, but no man can come to the Father but by the Son, and the Lord Jesus Christ is available to anyone. That is why he can say in this simple way, "Come to me." When we turn aside from our own ways, when we turn from the pursuit of our own will and look for him, there he is, waiting for us. We cannot see him but we can experience him for he is waiting to be contacted.

This invitation, you will notice, is given to two classes of people, there are those who labor and those who are heavy laden. To read it that way sounds as though this invitation is restricted to the working people and to the poor, but it has nothing at all to do with the way you earn your living. Those who labor, here, are those conscientious, sincere, earnest men and women, boys and girls who are trying to be good, who recognize that God is in control of the world and that ultimately they must answer for their life before him. They know that good actions and good attitudes have certain value in protecting and delivering them from destructive forces in life, so they are trying to live good, moral lives. There are many, perhaps many here this morning, who obey the law, who try to stay out of trouble and hope thereby to please God. They are doing the best they can, hoping to please God. But they are finding this is dull, hard work. It is to these that Jesus says, "Come unto me, all ye that are laboring, all that are working, trying hard."

The second class are those that are heavy laden. These are the people who have flung over the traces, who have given themselves to pleasure and to what we call wild living, and already they are sick and tired of it. They have wrung themselves out and there is not much left. Their nights are an empty round of empty pursuits with empty people. Their days are an endless battle with the hangover of guilt and despair. We know them. these folk who are laden down, heavily burdened with the emptiness, the meaninglessness. the frustration of life. To these also Jesus says, "Come." "Come to me and I will rest you"-literally, "I will relieve you." The word has in it the thought of the lifting of a burden.

Rest comes to either of these two classes by the individual realizing that what he is seeking to do Jesus Christ has already done. He has done it in their place. Are you laboring to be good enough for God? Then you need to know that God stands ready to credit you with all Christ's goodness, that you can throw away your own filthy rags of righteousness. Your efforts to be good enough fall far, far short of what God requires. You know it and he knows it. But you do not need them. God stands ready in Jesus Christ to credit you with his

righteousness. That is the glory of the cross. It is a place of exchange where what I am is placed on him and what he is is given to me. What a relief that is. As Paul says, "We are accepted in the Beloved One," no longer depending on ourselves but on him.

"Dear, so very dear to God,
Dearer I cannot be
For, in the person of his Son,
I'm just as dear as he."

What a relief! I stop trying to work out my own righteousness and rest on his.

Are you burdened with a sordid record and a soiled life? Then you need to know that in Jesus Christ the full penalty has already been paid. You can begin life anew with the page absolutely wiped clean for he has borne the guilt, he has paid the penalty. You can realize that,

"Payment God will not twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine! "

If he has paid it, there is nothing left for me to pay. In the realization of that the burden is lifted, the guilt is gone. You rest in what another has done in your place. That is true rest.

The sense of relief that comes to anyone who experiences this is very real and immediate. It is what Paul calls "peace with God." Most of our songs and hymns and much of our religious testimonies are about this. It can be a tremendous sense of the lifting of a load and result in an immediate sense of joy. I met with a young man this morning who only last night had this experience and he was fairly shaking with joy. He could hardly contain himself over what had happened in his life. I remember well a dear woman a few years ago who was one of those shallow, rootless people living life on the surface, trying to extract satisfaction out of an empty round of pleasure seeking. When she came to Christ the sense of relief was so tremendous she did not know how to express it. She had not yet learned the religious phrases by which we express happiness. She did not know how to say "Hallelujah!" or "Praise the Lord" so she simply stood and shouted "Whoopee! Whoopee!" Many of us can look back to that day as the beginning of days, as a day of great joy.

"O happy day that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Saviour and my God!
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad."

But remember this is only a beginning. Many of us are quite content to rest the whole matter there. We are grateful to the Lord Jesus for having forgiven our sins and set us on the road, but we are hopeful that he will leave us alone from here on. We are quite content with the joy that we found then and are ready to go on and live our life pretty much as we did before, only with the wonderful assurance that our destiny is settled. But if we are content, Jesus never is. It is not very long before we realize he is making rather unpleasant demands on us. He says a flat "No" about certain activities we have been indulging in, certain habits we have been yielding to. We sense within that he is not pleased he is saying "No." He makes us feel uncomfortable about certain pet attitudes we have. We feel convicted about our shortness with those we love, about our criticisms, our lovelessness. He urges us to become involved with people and activities that we have always avoided before. We squirm and twist and thus become aware of the second stage of Christian life, a control that leads to discovery.

At this point Jesus Christ is exerting in your life his right of Lordship. He is the Lord of all, and your acceptance of his salvation has given him the right to be Lord in your life and now he is beginning to assert it. He is making clear that you must give up your pet delusion that you have a right to your own life. This is a false philosophy that we were born under and raised by. We feel we have a right to run our own affairs. But he makes clear that we have no such right. "You are not your own, you are bought with a price." He is insisting we give up that fancied right and allow him his right to make us his instrument in the work that he is doing. In other words, we must move on from being redeemed to becoming redeemers. We become his

instruments to do the work that he came into the world to do, that is, redeeming, transforming, changing men and women.

At this point a crisis usually occurs. We either submit and surrender or we resist and rebel. If we rebel we discover we lose our sense of rest and peace and wander out into a wilderness of doubt where we can never be happy no matter what we do. Many of us have experienced this and know how true this is. No matter how hard we try we can never be happy. We go back into the world and the things of the world and discover that what once was fun is nothing but a misery, a superficial pleasure for the moment, but leaving an unhappy sensation deep within. We try to keep up an outwardly Christian front but inwardly we are wretched, unhappy, critical and hypocritical. Perhaps we try to ram our way to the top of whatever job or profession we are in and thus try to satisfy ourselves with the acclaim and plaudits of men. But we never fully escape the knowledge that we shall have to stand at last before the God whom we have robbed all our lives of his right to be Lord in us and hang our head over a wasted life.

But Jesus does not invite us to this. "Take my yoke upon you, " he says. If we take his yoke, if we bow to his lordship, if we yield to his relentless love, two things begin to happen. First we begin to learn. "Learn from me, " he says. Christ himself is our teacher and under his tutelage the secrets of life begin to unfold to us. We begin to understand ourselves. We begin to understand why men act the way they do, and what is going on in the world, what is behind the strange criss-cross of currents of human life that reflect themselves in the pages of our newspapers? What are these powerful forces? How do they operate? The Holy Spirit becomes our teacher. We are taught of the Spirit only when we take Christ's yoke upon us. That is the first thing.

And the curriculum is outlined for us here, too. What is the subject matter? What shall we study? "Learn of me," he says "for I am gentle and lowly in heart." Our whole subject matter will be gentleness and humility, that is, the secrets of inner beauty. Anyone can obtain a species of outward beauty. If nature does not give it to you then you can buy it in little boxes. But it is inner beauty that makes a person attractive, that makes him wanted and desired. This is simply nothing more than gentleness and humility. Gentleness is strength under control: humility is selflessness. This is the course of study.

Then there is a second thing we discover, Jesus says. We discover rest! "You shall find rest unto your soul," soul rest! The first rest was a rest of spirit. It meant a destiny settled, a relationship assured. When Jesus Christ entered into our spirit we knew that we were his, our destiny was settled. That was the rest of spirit, but this is a rest of soul. The soul is the mind, the emotions and the will. It is a rest that affects us mentally, emotionally, and volitionally. How does it appear? Jesus goes on to tell us, in verse thirty, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. " That which seems to us to be so restricting, the yoke of Christ, that limitation he has put upon us, that control he exercises in our lives, which at first seems to be narrow, restrictive, limiting us, binding us down, holding us back, we discover, when we yield to it, to be easy and light. This comes as a delightful surprise, a discovery. We find that to yield to his control is the key to true liberty. To surrender to his desire is to find the greatest enjoyment. To give up and to give in is the only way to really begin to give out.

This burden of our Lord's yoke is like the burden of wings to a bird, like fins to a fish, like a motor in a car. What would you think if I came to you and said, lifting up the hood of your new car, "Why do you carry this big chunk of iron around with you? Look at all the weight it adds to your automobile! How much easier this car would be to push if you did not have this heavy motor here in the front?" You would look at me very pityingly, and would say, "My dear friend, you do not understand. It is that weight of metal that makes the difference between pushing and riding. If I did not have that I would have to push, but it is the motor that makes possible the free movement of a car." So it is the yoke of Jesus Christ that makes life worth living. It is as we submit to his control that we discover we can step out into a world of adventure and glory, a world where every day is a new experience, a new adventure of faith, an exciting time when every contact is filled with utmost possibilities, where you never know what is going to happen next, and life is filled with meaning and richness. Listen to these words of the hymn writer, George Matheson, in a prayer which fully captures this thought.

"Make me captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free;

Force me to render up my sword,
And I shall conqueror be;
I sink in life's alarms
When by myself I stand;
Imprison me within Thine arms,
And strong shall be my hand.

My will is not my own
Till Thou hast made it Thine;
If it would reach the monarch's throne
It must its crown resign;
It only stands unbent,
Amid the clashing strife,
When on Thy bosom it has leaned,
And found in Thee its life."

Prayer

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for opening these words to us, for the realization that only as we take thy yoke upon us, thy blessed yoke, do we ever fulfill thy intention for us. Lord, teach us to disbelieve the satanic lie that suggests thy yoke will bring restriction, narrowness, and lack of liberty. Draw us in surrender to thyself. In the area of thy present concern for us, Lord, may we say gladly, "Lord Jesus, as thou wilt. Not as I will, but as thou wilt." We pray in thy name, Amen.

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Matt. 11:28-30
December 6, 1964

THE POINT OF NO RETURN

by Ray C. Stedman

Anyone who has ever taken a journey knows that in the process you inevitably reach a place that is called the point of no return. It is the half-way mark; you have gone so far that there is no point in going back. No matter what happens you might as well press on and you either reach the goal or your journey is a failure. In these days of extensive air travel we are frequently aware of this point of no return, for by its very nature air travel stresses the importance of this point beyond which there is no turning back.

Now the end of a year is that kind of point in time. On New Year's Eve we realize more than at any other time in our lives that we can never go back in time. Sr. Helmut Theilicke says we think differently on New Year's Eve than at any other time, for then we see time as it really is---not as a clock with a round face where the hands come back to the same point again and again, but as a flowing river which passes a single point and never returns. On New Year's Eve we feel that we have passed a point of no return. We can look back and remember but we cannot retrace a single moment of the year that is past. Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher whose writings have attracted so much attention these days, once said, "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards."

Before us stretches a new year. We have never been to this place in time or in our lives before. Again, on New Year's Eve, we feel as we never do at any other time, though perhaps it is something we ought to feel every single day of the year. We feel the challenge of the unknown, of the unexplored, of the year ahead of us yet to be discovered. Most of us feel a bit of excitement, perhaps a bit of fear, a feeling of weakness as we come into a new year.

This last summer I stood at the entrance to the wooden stockade where Lewis and Clark spent the winter of

1805-06 on the Oregon coast before their return back across the unexplored areas they had traversed but once. As I stood in that fort doorway, I tried to imagine what it would be like to have seen this country for the first time, to explore a land which had never been seen by white men before. In my imagination I tried to picture what they must have seen as they crossed the broad plains and saw the shining mountains in the distance and were continually expecting unknown perils that lay in their pathway. They had no maps, no charts of the region they covered, and they could never know what lay over the next hill, what perils might be theirs or what broad vistas of enchanting scenery would open before them. Such is this time to us, as we come to the close of an old year and the beginning of a new.

At this point some may wonder if there is not some word in scripture that can help us here. It will be no surprise to you who know the Bible well to discover that in its completeness the Bible has indeed a word for this very hour, and more than one. In the book of Deuteronomy we discover just such a word, an anticipation of the feeling that we experience on this last Sunday of the year. Israel was facing a situation which combined both of the concepts that we have already mentioned. On their way from Egypt to Canaan they had come to a point of no return. They were standing at the edge of the Promised Land, just across the Jordan river, and they could not go back into the howling wilderness behind them. Before them stretched a land of promise, unexplored.

Now I am perfectly aware that the Bible uses this land of Canaan as a symbolic description for us of the Spirit-filled life, the land of promise in which God expects his people to live. But to the degree that every passing year is a mirror of our whole life, this land is also symbolic of the new year to us. It is a land of promise, with possibilities of victory and failure. It is an unknown land, yet to be explored, but there are certain great features of it that can be known to us in advance, just as Moses reminded Israel in the eleventh chapter of Deuteronomy, beginning with verse ten:

"For the land which you are entering to take possession of is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered it with your feet, like a garden of vegetables; but the land which you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year."

The first noteworthy thing about this land is that it is a land that needs to be possessed. There are many blessings but they need to be laid hold of, they need to be captured. Israel could have walked through the land of promise and seen it from end to end, but never once lived in it, never taken up residence there. And it is possible to drift through an entire year and never live in it. Life is built like that in so many ways. Time is not the only factor in living. There must also be an intelligent application of knowledge before the passing of time can be called living.

There are many persons who are living in marriage, but they do not possess the joys of partnership because they are unwilling to put forth the effort in terms of courtesy, love, and thoughtfulness. There is many a student who is simply passing through his courses, but his courses are not passing through him, because he is unwilling to possess them through diligence and application. There are many who live near the land of health but who are unable to possess it because they will not accept certain forms of discipline or give up certain habits. There are great possibilities in store for each of us in the coming year, without question. For everyone here who is a Christian there is an unheard-of possibility next year, for God has said, "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for them who love Him." Possibilities, yes, but they remain to be possessed, and it is quite possible to pass through all of next year---as perhaps we passed through all of this year---without realizing any of them.

I will suggest quickly three things about how to possess these possibilities. I only summarize that which we have mentioned many other times. Possession must begin first with a desire to possess. If you are content with what you are today, then you will never be any better than you are now; you may become worse. Contentment with what you are has a way of deteriorating ultimately into being very distressed with what you are. If you have no urgent desire to lay hold of more, my counsel to you as we are standing at the verge of a new year is, pray that God will awaken in you a hunger and a thirst. Jesus said, "He that hungers and thirsts after

righteousness shall be filled." That is the first thing.

Then, you must understand the principles involved in possessing the great heritage of promise. Possessing what God has to give never comes by uncrucified self-effort, religious activity, or pious deeds. Possession comes by learning to act on the basis of a fact already true! Have you learned that yet? The possession of God's blessing is not something God does when we ask for it, but, rather, faith lays hold of what already is in Jesus Christ. If you do not know what that means, then my counsel to you is, study this great principle, study these things until you understand them. There will be no truth you will ever learn that will be more vital, more transforming, more important than to learn that simple truth in experience.

Then the third thing about possessing is that you must apply these principles in the present moment. Unfortunately, there are some here who well understand the principles of victory but who do not enjoy them in experience because they do not apply them in the moment in which they live, the present moment. Do not wait to begin tomorrow. Do not wait until New Year's Day. We always think that it is possible to obey God in some other situation but not in the one in which we are right now. If we were in some other circumstance then we could do what God wants, but not now. We want to wait until after lunch, or next evening, or next week, or next month. Or else we feel that it is too late---that the hour has passed us by, that we have gone too far down the road, that we have already entrenched ourselves in habits of thought---that "you can't teach an old dog new tricks." But this is the way of defeat. We must learn to live in the present tense. For instead we live either in the past tense or in the future tense. As Major Ian Thomas says, "We say 'Ebenezer, hitherto hath the Lord helped me' or 'Maranatha, the Lord cometh' but what we need to discover is the glory of the forgotten tense, the present tense, that God is the eternal 'I am', the eternal present tense, and that he is adequate for every human need right now." When we apply that, then we will discover that we are possessing what God has for us to possess. Someone has said, "Life by the yard is hard; by the inch it's a cinch." Try that in the new year.

The second thing you will notice about this land is that it is a land of varied experience. "It is a land," Moses said, "of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven." A land of hills and valleys, the ups and downs of life. The hills are those high places of courage and understanding and fellowship, places of far vision, places of invigorating atmosphere. Life has its hills (thank God for them), but it also has its valleys, the low places, sometimes very dark and forbidding. Or even if they are pleasant, life tends to be monotonous in a valley. Our vision is limited, our outlook is circumscribed, and it is the "same old thing" day after day.

Now the promise for this land of the coming year is for both hills and valleys, but with each there is the promise of an abundant supply of water---springs of water fed by rain from heaven. Notice that Moses contrasts this to the way Israel lived in Egypt. He says, "In Egypt you sowed your seed and watered it with your feet." That may be a rather strange expression, but if you have ever watched a farmer out in his field tending his irrigation ditches, you know what he means. Farmers build dams of little piles of earth in the small ditches running out through the fields, and kick them into place. If they want to open up another ditch they simply kick the dam out of the way. So the Egyptians watered their fields from the Nile river and its overflow, by the little dams they built and kicked aside with their feet.

This is an excellent picture of life without Christ, for Egypt is always a picture of that. It was a strange land, half desert, dependent upon the flow of a single river through it and the overflow of that river each spring. Life without Christ is like that. All the resources of a non-Christian life are artificially arranged. So many creature-comforts are provided---even when life becomes utterly unbearable, there are tranquilizers! But in the land of promise, the land under the blessing of God, you will find, if you look for them, springs of water in both the hills and the valleys. Water is always a picture of the Holy Spirit. Back in chapter 8, verse 7, Moses describes this land further. He says,

"For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills."

In both the valleys and the hills! What a picture this is of the supply of the Holy Spirit that is available in the high places where we need God's guidance, God's correction of our vision, God's focus and in the low places where we need his refreshment, his comfort and his vigor. Jesus said, "If anyone thirst let him come unto me: out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." The rivers are not only for you but for those

around you, whether in the hills or in the valleys. You will be a blessing to those around. Those are the possibilities of the land.

Then, the third thing is that this is a land of Divine concern:

"...a land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year."

Now we come to the greatest truth of all. Each year is a land to be possessed, by intelligent obedience to principle. Each year is a land of hills and valleys with hidden springs of water available. But beyond, beneath, and above all these truths is this greater one: that God is deeply concerned about your life from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

Do you sometimes feel that your life is of very little significance? Do you ever get the "if onlies"? "If only I could be here, if only I could be there, if only I had done this." What a depressing experience that is for each of us! Do you look at others and think "Oh, they seem to grow spiritually so much faster than I do. They have so many more abilities and talents than I. There is so little that I can do." Soon discouragement sets in and hard on its heels follows that deadly paralyzer, depression. But remember, there is no such thing as an unimportant Christian! Each one of us is absolutely necessary to the body of Christ---absolutely essential! God will not dispense with any one of us. That is the story of the ninety and nine is it not? "Lord, you have ninety and nine here in the fold; why not be content with these?" "Oh, no," he says, "there is one that is mine that is not here. I cannot leave him alone." And out on the hillside he goes looking for him. Absolutely indispensable! Read 1 Corinthians 12, that wonderful picture of the Body, and Paul's teaching that every part of the Body is indispensable to the Body as a whole. We need each other.

If you feel discouraged, defeated, or insignificant, I suggest that you remind yourself, "I am myself and I am meant to be myself. I am not meant to be anyone else; God does not expect me to be anyone else. Therefore, I must not despise myself or be constantly comparing myself with someone else. Instead, I am going to live the life that God gave me to live, in the circumstances in which he has placed me, knowing that it is as necessary to the total program of God that his life be manifest in my humanity as much as in the life of the greatest saint who ever lived." Our Lord taught that in the story of the widow's mites. The world pays no attention to mites. Two million, yes, but two mites, nothing! But not in the sight of God!

The widow's mite, Jesus said, was worth more than all that was cast in, for God does not see as we see; he does not look at the outward things. And the one who is in the place of obscurity and insignificance is oftentimes the one most cared for and most beloved in the eyes of God.

This last week a man said to me, "I want to thank you for what you have done for me and for what you have meant in my life. And I hope that you can find the occasion to thank the people of your church for me. I attend your church only once in a while, but I want you to thank them for me." And then he went on to explain: "You see, I have been a Christian for only a little while and I still have a very suspicious mind. I do not know why I think the way I do, but I am always testing people, trying them out to see if Christianity really works. And, you know, when I come to your church and someone smiles at me, or speaks a warm word to me, or greets me and remembers who I am, that proves to me that Christianity is real. So I would like you to thank the people of your church." So I am taking the occasion now to thank you for having let the life of Jesus Christ shine through you. A smile may seem an insignificant thing, but it is not---the whole of life is important. "It is a land that God cares for, a land that the eyes of the Lord your God are upon from the beginning of the year unto the end."

Your life counts, whether or not you think it does. You may not see anything that is taking place but God sees and God knows. The remarkable thing about the Bible is how many "insignificant" characters appear there in the most strategic places: how men and women have done single, isolated deeds of kindness and by them affected and changed the whole course of human history. Read Hebrews 11. May the wonderful truth that God is deeply concerned about your life in the new year lay hold of your heart and move you to possess your possessions, to move in and lay hold of what God has for you. No matter what the year may bring in terms of world history, may it be an unforgettable year for you---a land to be possessed, a land with hills and valleys, a

land of infinite concern to God.

Catalog No. 77
Deuteronomy 11:10-12
December 27, 1964

THE FACT OF FACTS

by Ray C. Stedman

This morning my memory went back twenty years or more to an Easter Sunday in Chicago. I was but a young man, living alone in a room at the YMCA. I got up before dawn to attend an Easter sunrise service at Soldiers' Field. As I was dressing in the darkness of that early morning my mind went back to the account of the resurrection of our Lord and the women who visited the tomb in the early hours. It suddenly occurred to me that if something could reverse the flow of time so that instead of moving forward we began moving backward day by day, each day taking us into the past, it would be possible to live again through all the events of recorded history. If this would go on through twenty centuries we would come at last to the day of our Lord's resurrection. It struck me that if anyone could live that long he could go back through time and actually be there at that dramatic event.

Something about thinking that way gripped me and I remember feeling for the first time something of the tremendous reality of this event. It really occurred! It actually happened! Those women did make their way to the tomb that morning, and they were amazed to find the stone rolled away, and with beating hearts and incredulous minds they went to tell the disciples. All the marvelous events of that wonderful, unforgettable day actually occurred! Immediately my mind took in the results of that to me, the meaning of it in my life at that moment, and there came flooding into my heart a great consciousness of the presence of a living Lord. I shall never forget that morning. I stood by my bed, weeping tears of joy as the thought flooded my heart that Jesus Christ was alive. It was a fact, an eternal fact.

Now that same fact is being challenged today in many circles. The challenge is not new: it is very old. It had come even in the first century. A modern teaching today says that we must demythologize scripture in order to understand it. That is one of the theological fads that come and go in history. You know, theological fads are like fashions, like styles: hemlines go up and down, buttons come and go, neckties get wide then narrow, and shoe tips grow pointed then blunt. This is the constantly changing kaleidoscope of fashion. It is the same way with theological fads. One of the popular ones today is the demythologizing of scripture. That jaw-breaking term identifies an attempt to find the truth behind myth, behind what many regard as scripture's fictionalized, stylized accounts.

We are being told today that the early Christians really had the truth but that the way they attempted to convey it to us was inaccurate. The miracles were not really facts but dramatic ways by which the early Christians tried to express truths and thus dramatize them so people would believe them. If you really want to understand what happened in the early days of Christian faith, you must take away the miraculous, the supernatural, and get down to the basic truth behind it all. Modern man, we are told, can no longer accept the myth of the New Testament; he needs to separate the kernel of truth from the husk of myth.

This is the widespread concept of our day. To many, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a dear-cut example of the need for that kind of treatment. They tell us that the great truth of the resurrection is that Jesus is alive, that his spirit somehow transcended death. When he was crucified his spirit somehow survived that experience and he still is able to influence us today. Realizing this, they say, can be a great help in the twentieth century. But to declare that he literally came from the grave in the same body in which he was put there---that his body actually rose from the dead---no, they say, that is myth, that is hyperbole, that is an exaggerated statement, an attempt to dramatize the great truth that Jesus somehow lives. The important thing, we are told, is the idea of Christ's survival of death. It is not important whether or not he actually rose; what is important is the Christian

hope that in some way there is an existence beyond death.

Now, it would almost seem that the Apostle Paul anticipated this very thing when he wrote this fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. The idea was already abroad in the church at Corinth, that Christ was resurrected spiritually but not bodily. Certain men in the early church (Paul even names two of them in his letter to Timothy, Hymenaeus, and Alexander) were teaching that the resurrection was past, that Christians would somehow go on forever beyond death but not in a bodily form, that the new birth was really the resurrection. When Christ changed their lives, this was the resurrection spiritualized. Based on this teaching there were those in the church at Corinth who were actually saying, as men are saying today, that there really is no bodily resurrection, that there is really only a spiritual resurrection.

This fifteenth chapter was written to answer that claim. Its argument is based on one of the great fundamentals of the Christian faith, found throughout the entire Bible from beginning to end: Christianity is not a religion of ideas. Other great religions of the world are collections of concepts, thoughts of men, teachings, and ethics. Christianity is not that. Christian salvation rests solely and solidly upon certain great acts of God in history, upon certain recorded events. These substantiated events stubbornly resist being explained away, because they actually did occur. Therefore, only if they did occur is there any validity to the teachings that are based on these facts.

You find this throughout the Bible. If you are acquainted with this book at all, you know that every event it describes is grounded in history. It relates itself to events that occurred and that were recorded by men. What is the thing that everyone remembers about the Old Testament? Why, it is the Ten Commandments. Well, what is so significant about the Ten Commandments? It is the fact that God gave the Ten Commandments directly to Moses. That is the significant thing. It is the fact that God acted. Israel could never forget that Sinai was an historical event, that God in a moment of time had actually done something. They never could get away from that fact. That is why, later on, when the Psalmists tried to point out to Israel its problems and choices, they retrace for the nation its history, to remind the people of things God had done when he appeared among them, things he actually performed and which they never could escape from.

You will find this throughout the Old Testament. The Flood came as a great event in which God acted to destroy evil and to preserve humanity. God called a man named Abraham to go out on an actual journey into an actual land; he live there and began a new family of nations, and his descendants are among us today. Moses, Joshua, David, Isaiah, Elijah, and Elisha---all these were historical characters whose lives are unmistakable facts, and the facts are crucial. In the New Testament it is the same thing. Here is the story of the birth of a boy and how that boy grew up in a little town in Galilee. The gospels are the story of his life and the specially detailed record of the events of his death. No one can read the New Testament without seeing the disproportionate emphasis put upon the death of Christ. Then, following that, there is this great story of the resurrection, the fact of all facts, the bodily resurrection from the dead.

Now Paul says that this is a fact, in 1 Corinthians 15:20:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

I stress those two words, "in fact." This is absolutely vital to Christian faith. Paul makes a particular point of it. Earlier in the chapter, he lists the witnesses who saw this event. He details how many there were and where their encounters with Christ occurred. There is simply no way for us to overstate the importance of this great claim that the bodily resurrection is no myth. If this were a myth---if it were only a dream, the wild hope of the early Christians, a figment of somebody's imagination---then the whole fabric of Christian faith tears apart. In other words, if you deny the bodily resurrection, you deny the heart of Christianity. That is the claim the Apostle Paul makes. Now, I know that is strong language, but it is exactly what Paul argues. It is not enough to believe in the persistence of Jesus and the survival of the soul beyond death. That is not the heart of Christianity. Only when we accept the fact that Jesus Christ's body came from the tomb do we then have any basis for the hope that the Christian also shall be resurrected.

Let us look quickly at this chapter and note the points that Paul makes in support of this. There are so many

today who interpret this to be simply an unfounded declaration, a beautiful statement that captures our imagination but has no real grounding in fact. But notice his argument. In the first part of this chapter, Paul argues that there would be no Christian teaching and no Christian church if there had not been a bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ:

I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel...For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

That is the gospel the early disciples preached. They did not go around talking about peace of heart, or moral standards. They did not go around discussing how to correct the problems of community living. They went about declaring that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead! There would not be a church if they had not had that message. That is what made them come alive. The Christian hope dates from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Remember that after the crucifixion the disciples were utterly shattered. Their faith was gone; they were dazed, disconsolate, hopeless. They were even returning to their old ways of life. But in three days all of this suddenly, dramatically reversed and something brought them back together and sent them out as flaming evangelists in the very city where he had been crucified, telling the good news that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead. That was the beginning of the Christian message, which has gone on for twenty centuries because of the actuality of that event.

Then, in verse 14, the apostle adds another argument, a second point:

If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain.

That is, if this event is not an historical fact, then Christianity has been a waste of time. It is an empty faith; it is in vain. Think of the indefatigable labors of this mighty apostle. He traveled incessantly about the Roman Empire. He endured great hardships. He lived day and night with danger and peril. He was stoned and left for dead. He was often in prison. He was beaten and flogged. He was shipwrecked three times. Yet he was never willing to quit. And there were the other apostles, the records of whom are not given to us as precisely as his. But they, also, went everywhere and endured great hardships, all of them laying down their lives at the last. Why? Because of a hoax, a fable, a whimsical yarn that someone started back in the beginning? This idea is monstrous, is it not? Who could believe it?

And what about the converts everywhere these disciples preached? Wherever these men preached this message in pagan societies---oftentimes in the presence of those who were alive at the time these events occurred---they established churches. Converts and churches were everywhere. Men and women were won over from fear and darkness and from their pagan ignorance. They were brought out into light and into orderliness of mind, from dissolute, selfish, evil lives into morally pure, loving, and compassionate persons. What did all this? Was it a joke that got out of hand? Was it a psychological trick caused by the eloquent preaching of an utterly absurd tale? Christian faith is in vain if this is the case.

Look at verse 15. Here is a third point the apostle makes:

We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.

That is, if what is preached is not true, then of course the preachers are liars; they are false witnesses, they are deliberate distorters. If what they say about the resurrection is untrue, then you cannot believe anything they say about anything else. Where I lived on a ranch in Montana, we had a neighbor who had such a reputation as a liar that it was claimed he had to get someone else to call his hogs! If you do not tell the truth about the great events in life, how can you be believed about anything else?

Furthermore, if this is not true, then you are in trouble with the teaching of Jesus himself. The gospel accounts tell us that he often predicted his own resurrection. The disciples would not believe it but he had said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again." John said, "This he spake of the temple of his

body." Jesus predicted that he would follow the pattern of Jonah. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so would the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. He said over and over again that the Old Testament prophesied his resurrection. Now if you dispute this resurrection and challenge it, you challenge the authority of Christ himself. How can you believe him either?

Paul makes a fourth point, in verse 17:

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

This means if this literal bodily resurrection of Christ is not true, then we have no hope that anything else the gospel declares to us is true. For this resurrection is proof that his death on the cross has actually accomplished our deliverance from sin. Consider the crucifixion by itself. On Good Friday we reenacted on the account of how our Lord was hung upon a tree. From that event alone, would anyone have assurance that God was satisfied and that the whole problem of one's sin was settled? No, you never would have any assurance; you could never be sure. The guarantee of the meaning of the crucifixion is the resurrection. When Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost he accused the Jews of putting to death the Son of God by the hands of lawless men. "But," he said, "let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, whom ye crucified." When did God do that? Why, he revealed him as Lord and Christ in the resurrection. The resurrection, then, is God's proclamation, his announcement, that what had been accomplished on the cross was valid and that he was ready to back it up. I paid a bill the other day, and I got a receipt for it. That receipt is my guarantee that the man to whom that bill was paid acknowledges the fact it is settled. The cross was the settling of the debt between man and God and the resurrection is God's receipt that the thing stands settled forever.

Look at verse 18. Paul makes a fifth point here:

Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

If the resurrection story is untrue, then when you lay a loved one in the grave you have no hope that you will ever see him again. If this story is not an actual fact, then all hope of life beyond the grave crumbles. This week on the masthead of the Stanford Daily appeared a statement that read, "Another day on the treadmill to oblivion." That is the only outlook one can have if the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not true. If it is not true, then death is not conquered: it is still the implacable enemy against which no human power can avail. It means that we have no ground for optimism and rejoicing on a day like this when we gather to celebrate Christ's victory over death. If this is not true, then it means we live in a universe without a God, that we struggle on against sin without a Savior, and that we face the darkness of the grave without any hope.

A sixth point Paul makes is in verse 19:

If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.

That is, if the resurrection is untrue, then Christianity is no better than any pagan philosophy. In fact, Christians are to be pitied for wasting their time in a foolish dream. Why spend time like this, in worship and prayer? Why not be out on the golf course these Sunday mornings, enjoying the beauty of the day? Why invest fortunes in spreading the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, even denying ourselves luxuries and pleasures in order that it might be spread? Why not lie and cheat and indulge ourselves, like the rest of the world? Let's wheel and deal and bargain and steal; let's go on with life and get ahead at all costs. If Christ did not physically rise, why not forget the whole Christian business and get on with life, throw the Book away and forget it all? After all, Paul says, if this is not true there is nothing to be trusted about the whole thing. If it is a pack of lies, then we are pitiable fools if we follow it.

Then he makes his final point, in verse 20:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

"First fruits" means that if he rose, we too shall rise. Not only in spirit, but also in body and soul. When man fell, he fell as a unit. The whole creation has been afflicted by the fall of man---the natural world as well as the inner world. But when Christ came to redeem, he redeemed the whole man---body, soul, and spirit. That is the Christian hope, and that is the only reason for Easter. We gather here in order that we might remind ourselves that there is a hope beyond the grave, a hope that is spelled out in terms of Christ's resurrection, a hope not only that we shall somehow survive death but that we shall do so bodily. We shall live in a world where we are set free from the bondage that afflicts us here in this world. We shall, as whole men and women, serve God through faith in Jesus Christ---body, soul, and spirit. That is the Christian hope.

The other day a pastor in this area was working late on a Saturday evening, reviewing his adult Sunday School lesson for the following morning, when his doorbell rang. There stood a young business executive, his face ashen, his whole being agitated. Without a word of introduction, he burst out, "Pastor! If the resurrection of Jesus Christ is true, then I must change my life from the ground up!" The pastor invited him in and they discussed together some of the implications of this tremendous fact. In a moment or two they bowed together and faced the risen Christ, and there, as in the Upper Room long ago in Jerusalem, Jesus stood and spoke peace to a troubled soul. That man went out to change his life from the ground up, because this is the kind of a change the resurrection demands. It puts us on a totally different basis of living. We no longer can go on living for ourselves; we must live our lives in relationship to God's word, God's plan, God's universe. That is what the resurrection calls us to.

The resurrection changed Mary from a mourner into a messenger. It changed Thomas from a doubter into a believer. It changed Peter from a denier into a preacher. It changed Paul from a persecuter into a missionary. The early Christians all preached Jesus and the resurrection wherever they went. There were some in that day who mocked and some procrastinated and some believed. But for those who believed, the Easter event became an Easter experience, a cleansing, life-changing, transforming experience. That is what God calls us to this Easter morning. Do you believe the resurrection? Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead, bodily? Then your life can never be the same. That puts a claim upon you that you can never shake off. That means he is indeed the One in whose hands is all power in heaven and earth, and he must be reckoned with. His offer to us is, if any man will receive him, will acknowledge him, will invite him into his life, he shall be born again. Christ says, "I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me." This can be your experience.

Our Father, thank you for this great hope, a hope that thrills our hearts: a hope that our lives will not slip into oblivion after a few years here, but that there is a great and mighty program that lies beyond this to which we have entrance through our relationship with a living Lord, who walks and lives and works among men and women today. Grant that each one here may in simple, childlike faith accept this invitation to explore and experience the reality of a living Christ. We pray in his name, Amen.

Catalog No. 117
1 Corinthians 15:1-19

DARKNESS OF MIND

by Ray C. Stedman

What a baffling and confusing world we live in today. So many conflicting ideas and concepts are thrust upon us from every direction and many of them seem directly contradictory. Authorities of equal repute tell us one thing and then another and what they say clashes violently. It is hard to know what to believe today. In the last few weeks people have said to me "I don't know what to believe about Vietnam. I don't know what is going on out there or what kind of a position to take on it." Others say, "I don't know what to make of civil rights and this civil rights program. I don't know what position to take. There seems to be two sides to this." Others say, "We don't know what to believe about the present political outlook and our present administration." Others are concerned about the philosophy of education of our day, the matter of training children, or the great

and pressing issue of sliding moral standards which is brought before us so frequently today.

Who knows what to believe? Listen to all the voices around and you will come up with many kinds of conflicting philosophies. No wonder that many are confused and ready to follow any voice that seems to offer a way out. Now to a Christian living in this confusing, baffling, bewildering world, the Apostle Paul has a very definite word to say. It is not another vague, uncertain word of advice, simply another of the voices on every hand today, but it is clear and precise and right to the point of the problem that you and I are facing.

In the opening verses of the 4th chapter of Ephesians, the Apostle has been dealing with the nature of the church and the part each Christian has to play in its operation and its growth. But now, with verse 17, he turns to the Christian in relationship to an unbelieving world, a world in which that Christian must live. Though this account was written almost two thousand years ago it is impossible to read this thoughtfully without seeing that the world today is exactly the same, and the Christian's reaction to it must be exactly the same. Following Paul's usual pattern in presenting a subject, he begins with a general statement, then breaks it down into a more analytical study of the various aspects of the statement he has made. Here is the general statement, in verse 17.

"Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds."

Notice the force of that exhortation. The Apostle says "I affirm and testify in the Lord." That means this is not merely a piece of apostolic advice. This is not simple human reasoning, this is a result of divine revelation. This is part of that whole revelation of the mind of God that was given to the Apostle Paul in what he calls "visions and revelations of the Lord," when the Lord Jesus himself appeared to him and instructed him as to the message he should give to the church of his day and through it to the church of our day as well.

This then is not mere human advice. Paul says, "I testify and affirm in the Lord that this is what must be done." This is the finger of God placed squarely at the root of a human problem.

Well, what is it he says? He says, "You Christians must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds." It would perhaps be helpful to translate the word "Gentiles" here by the word "nations". It is often translated that way elsewhere in Scripture and is the same word. It simply means the nations, worldlings, those outside of Christ. This has no reference to the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, it refers to anyone who is outside of Christ. "You Christians", he says, "must no longer live as they do." How is that? "In the futility of their minds." Paul is saying, "The place to start in living as a Christian is to recognize you must think differently than the world does." Notice, he does not start with actions. He is not one of these do-gooders who moves in and tries to change the outward scene only. He starts with the thought-life, with the mind, and he declares that the world's thinking is futile, i.e., empty. This is the vital appeal that he makes to Christians, "You must not think like the worldling does, you must not adopt the world's philosophy of living, or follow the world's systems of value." Why? "Because the worldling," he says, "lives in futility, emptiness of mind."

The word for futility, in the original Greek, means "void of purpose or appropriateness," i.e., pointless. Phillips, in his modern paraphrase puts it very accurately and beautifully: "Do not live as the gentiles live, for they live blindfolded in a world of illusion." The New English Bible says, "Give up living like pagans, with their good-for nothing notions." That is exactly it, "good for nothing." Impressive, perhaps, clever, oftentimes startling, provocative, but pointless! The world in its thinking is pointless.

If this is true you can see why there is such a fundamental cleavage between Christianity and the world, and why the Lord Jesus drew a distinct line of demarcation between the thinking of the world, the direction of the world, the destiny of the world, and those of the Christian. This is why the Christian is told he cannot love the world and the Father at the same time. John makes that crystal clear in his first letter. There is a fundamental difference between the two. This is why "friendship with the world," in the words of James, "is enmity with God." Notice, not friendship with the worldling, that is something different, but friendship with the world, with its ways of thinking, its philosophy. That is enmity with God.

Now this needs to be made very clear, because it is a very important distinction. As we all know, fallen man

prides himself on his ability to reason. We consider this the highest function of humanity and take great pride in the ability of man to ferret out knowledge and to put various items of knowledge together to produce very practical gadgets. We point with pride to the technological perfection of our modern developments, to the skill with which science has harnessed the forces of nature and made them the servants of man. Man exalts his reason, but the writers of Scripture universally agree though all this may be very impressive, clever, and remarkable in the eyes of men, in the eyes of God the reasoning of man is pointless, empty, vain. As the Lord Jesus himself put it, "What is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." Now that is putting it very strongly, is it not? That is speaking plainly.

But see how the Apostle brings Christians face to face with the fundamental issue? We must face this very squarely. Either God is right or the world is right, one or the other. It cannot be both. The Christian must choose on which basis he is going to live his life. If he is to follow Christ he must be willing to have his thinking changed. When you become a Christian this is the first issue you face. You must be willing to have your whole fundamental outlook on life drastically altered. Christianity is not merely a change in outward actions, a bit higher moral or ethical level. Christianity is a revolutionary change of government which results in a radical change in behavior. Paul certainly brings this out very plainly here.

Now he moves on to analyze more closely this problem of faulty thinking. What makes human thinking so pointless, so without ultimate significance? The answer he gives is in verse 18.

"They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart."

He is tracing a chain of cause and effect here. Beginning with the most immediate effect he is tracing it back to that which causes it. The first step is that worldlings think futilely because their understanding is darkened. Just as a cloud, passing over the sun, darkens the light of it, so the thinking of man in his fallen state is shadowed, obscured, darkened. Scripture continually uses these terms, light and darkness, as metaphors for truth and ignorance.

Truth is light; ignorance is darkness. Paul's figure declares that men's thinking is shadowed with ignorance, it is pointless because it stems from ignorance. That is rather arresting, is it not? We think we know so much, and we do. We know so much but we never know quite enough. That is what the Apostle is saying. Again this relates to a truth that we find widespread throughout the Scriptures: Man is ignorant because there is a part of his being that does not function. It is his spiritual life. His spirit is blank, darkened, obscured. In that part of his being which was intended to function as the key to his life there is nothing taking place. As a result, all his knowledge is broken, unrelated, incomplete. That is the picture Paul draws. What man thinks, though it may be very clever, does not bring him anywhere, does not produce anything, does not better him.

We are haunted these days with the question: Has this tremendous civilization really done anything for us? Last week I wandered among the ruins of an ancient Mayan civilization in Guatemala, viewing half-covered temples just now being excavated from the dirt and dust of centuries. The more archaeologists uncover the Mayan ruins the more we learn of the remarkable civilization of that day. But modern man is continually haunted with the question, are we really any better than they? We may be better off, but are we any better? Have we really advanced in any way? The understanding of man is darkened and it is especially evident in his thinking about himself and about God. It can be seen in his value systems, his evaluation of the power structures of life, in the way he determines what is important and what is not important.

Illustrations abound for this. Coming back from Guatemala last week I had to go through customs in Los Angeles. While waiting for the plane to be reloaded I sat in the lounge and picked up a discarded newspaper. (That is the Scottish way of reading newspapers and I take advantage of it every chance I get.) Reading through the headlines, my attention was caught by an article headed, "Religion Fading, Says Psychiatry Professor." I read on and saw that the associate professor of psychiatry at the University of California at Los Angeles Neuro-Psychiatric Institute had said that religion is fading away from modern civilization, and he calls this the most hopeful sign of our times. In the article there was this almost incredible paragraph,

The decline in religious feeling among civilized people is an indication that man is steadily becoming more

rational and less subject to superstition and therefore less likely to kill and maim those who disagree with him.

That in a day when crimes of violence are at an unprecedented height, when the streets of our cities are no longer safe to walk at night, and when the great cities of America literally seethe with suppressed hate and incipient riot and bloodshed! What a confirmation of the Apostle's analysis of human thinking. The mind of fallen man is darkened, blinded, and does not see things as they really are. It can ignore obvious facts that thrust themselves upon us constantly and blithely dismiss them with a wave of the hand to pronounce that man is getting better and better. That is a sign of the ignorance and consequent darkening of the human mind.

This unaccountable darkness is seen in the glib talk today about "situational ethics", i.e., morals determined by situation, expediency, also in the "relativity" of morals, and the widespread acceptance of the idea that sexual promiscuity is an expression of personal freedom, even though those who indulge in this kind of living inevitably show themselves to be increasingly the slaves of human passion, and suffer in their own lives the consequent inevitable restlessness of spirit and torment of heart. How can man be so blind? It is the darkening, the shadowing of the fallen mind.

It is seen in Communism with its emphasis on the material and economic and its ignorance of the emotional and spiritual forces at work in mankind. It is likewise evident in American materialism, with its passion for new and better things while ignoring the hunger of the spirit in man, concentrating only on supplying the needs of the body and the soul, especially the body. It is seen in our admiration for aggressive, hardheaded men who get to the top at all costs, and for our belief that power is measured by how many men you control, how many people are subject to you, how many you can get to serve you instead of how many you serve. It is seen, perhaps most clearly, in the naive ignoring of the basic twist of human nature that is evident in panaceas and programs that are continually offered as solutions to the problems of mankind. I read that letters to the editor in the newspaper quite frequently and I am almost amused at how many people offer simple answers to complicated problems. They come out with very idealistic, wonderful sounding programs based on the naive assumption that human beings can be good if they want to badly enough. If they can just be shown that a thing is wrong they will all immediately stop it, yet the record of history is mankind is continually stumbling over its own footsteps. Man is his own worst enemy, and the basic problem is the twist of universal human evil.

In their ignorant blindness men think themselves all right and therefore fancy they do not need God. The next step is inevitable. They are "alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them." Paul is not blaming men for this, any more than God blames them for it, he is simply analyzing a situation that exists. Because their understanding is darkened, shadowed, incomplete, in their ignorance they reject the life of God and therefore cut themselves off from the one thing man needs to be man! Both nature and Scripture concur that man is incomplete without God. Man was made to be the dwelling place of God. It is God in man which makes man a man. This was fully demonstrated by the Lord Jesus Christ. It was because He was so fully indwelt of the Father that He was able to be fully and wholly a man, man as God intended man to be. Therefore the life of God is essential to manhood and without it man is blinded, weak, and ignorant.

Some of the world's great psychologists have seen the truth of this rather clearly. In a letter to E. Stanley Jones, the great Austrian psychologist Carl Jung wrote:

Those psychiatrists who are not superficial have come to the conclusion that the vast neurotic misery of the world could be termed a neurosis of emptiness. Men cut themselves off from the root of their being, from God, and then life turns empty, inane, meaningless, without purpose. So when God goes, goal goes. When goal goes, meaning goes. When meaning goes, value goes, and life turns dead on our hands.

Jung also saw this evil within himself. He said that the man who used psychology to look behind the scenes of his patient's lives must also use it more especially to look behind the scenes in his own life. If he does not do this, says Jung, he is merely an "unconscious fraud."

But there is yet more here in Paul's great analysis. If men were cut off from God only because of ignorance of Him, they might well excuse themselves, for no man can be blamed for not having what he doesn't know exists, but now we learn the whole truth. It is all "due to their hardness of heart". Man is born ignorant and cut off from the life of God, but he remains in that condition only because of the hardness of his heart. A young

Christian said to me recently, "Why is it, when we have the world's greatest product, it is so hard to sell?" The reason is because man resists the truth, rejects light, turns from God's love, clings to his error, and thus renders his heart gradually harder and harder and more unable to respond.

All of this marks the twisted, shadowed, empty thinking of the world. Paul says, "You Christians must not think this way any longer. If you are going to live a Christian life, the first place it must become evident is a change in your thinking. You must not follow these philosophies, you must not agree with these attitudes, you must not adopt these value systems." For if you do, you will go on to demonstrate the inevitable outcome, the next step in Paul's analysis here, verse 19.

"They have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness."

He says the same thing in Romans 1, "God have them over to a reprobate mind" that they might practice the awful list of evil deeds that is so frankly and bluntly described there. It sounds like it was culled from the pages of any morning newspaper today. Why do people do these things? Why is moral licentiousness so rampant? Why are our standards so constantly deteriorating? It is because men are futile in their thinking. It is because of this shadowed thinking, this incompleteness, this ignorance from which men operate, even the best of them, even the finest of minds, unredeemed, unregenerated.

But the good news of the gospel is that God reaches even these kind of people. He draws and softens and melts. The amazing love of Christ penetrates even the hardness of men's hearts. Therefore we are not to blame people like this, or to withdraw from them. We are to remember that we, too, had the same mind, the same outlook on life. As Paul says in Colossians 1:21, "...you who once were estranged and hostile in mind," that is the way we thought too, until God's love reached us. So we are not to be judgmental, not to be hard and harsh toward these who think this way. This is the basic condition of humanity to which the gospel makes its appeal.

Now the Apostle goes on to trace one other thing. The only hope of helping these people is to demonstrate a wholly different pattern of thought, a wholly different set of values. The implication is clear that if we live like the world lives, even though we are Christians, there is not a thing we can do to help them, not a thing. You remember the story of the boy who thought he would teach some sparrows to sing like a canary, so he put them in a cage with the canary, hoping the canary would teach them to sing. In a few days he found the canary chirping like the sparrows. This is always the case, is it not? If we give ourselves to the attitudes and ways of thinking of those around us we will inevitably do the same things, there is no avoiding it. The only way to help them is to demonstrate a completely different level of life. Many of us have been astounded this past year at leaders who have gone through moral breakdowns. Why? Because somewhere along the line they succumbed to the futile thinking of the world. They gave way in their thought life. This is what makes a man turn from the things of Christ to pursue materialism or personal ambition. He succumbs to the philosophy of the world around.

But now we come to the reason why Paul speaks so strongly. He says in verse 20,

"You did not so learn Christ!---assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus."

In other words, you must not live like the Gentiles because you need not. In Christ you have a different principle of living, a different way of thinking. In Christ you have the truth by which you can test everything else, "The truth as it is in Jesus." That is a wonderful phrase. That ought to form the basic concept of all Christian thinking. You have found in Jesus Christ the truth, the simple truth about life, about yourself, about the world, about the makeup of science and nature, about human behavior. "In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." You have found in Christ the truth. I wish to stress that, for this is the point the Apostle is making.

The Lord Jesus said these challenging words. "If any man follow me, he shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." That means a Christian does not need to walk in uncertainty about things, in lack of

knowledge. It means that in Christ we have the truth that reveals. It is popular today to think that nothing can be known for sure. That is part of the futility of the world's thinking, to think that there are no final answers, no ultimate knowledge, no ultimate truth. Recently I heard even a Christian pastor say that all knowledge must at last be reduced to the tentative. We can only think we know, but we never know for sure. Now Christianity repudiates that concept utterly. The New Testament denies that Christ has come that we might know---not everything, that is true We do not become paragons of knowledge automatically spouting out revelations of ultimate truth about everything. We do not know everything, but what we do know, we know. Christ said to his disciples, "If you continue in my words...you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free." That is what the truth always does, it sets men free. Truth, even though it is hard truth, difficult truth, is realistic and therefore it sets us free and tears away the veils of illusion.

Perhaps I should add this qualifying word here. Not everything a worldling thinks is wrong, because obviously God's truth is at work in the world as well, and the world has picked up a good deal of it The world knows quite a bit of truth, but the point is, it is so intermingled with error that it is indistinguishable until you lay it alongside "the truth as it is in Jesus". That is the only measuring stick we have. How can you tell what is true? How can you tell what is wrong? How can you tell what is error? There is only one way, "the truth as it is in Jesus". That truth is always to the point, it is purposeful, it leads to significant, useful, appropriate living. It is this the Apostle is stressing. We must learn to test all our thinking by what the Lord Jesus has revealed, either directly himself or indirectly through the apostles whom he has sent to tell us the truth. The truth as it is in Jesus.

Tested by this, we discover there is much we must reject today. I do not have any problem with this "God Is Dead" movement. It does not bother me in the least. I know it is one of those things that sweep like cyclones across the landscape of human thinking and then is gone again, to be replaced next year by something else---one of those fads or fashions in theology that come and go. But do I give any credence to it, do I think it has any weight or merit? Of course not! For the Lord Jesus has said that God is not dead. God is an eternal Father, God is Spirit, eternal, immortal, invisible, constantly underlying all of life. Measured by the truth that is in Jesus all such nonsense is immediately rejected as unworthy of consideration.

There are so many things we can measure this way. Today the theological world and many Christians are troubled by the rise of the idea of universalism again, the hope that all men will be saved, that no matter what they do, all are redeemed, all will be saved. But measured by the truth as it is in Jesus we reject that statement, much as we would like to believe it. For you see, Jesus says something different, and though it is hard, he is the authority we accept. Reading an article in *His* magazine recently on this very subject I found deep agreement with these words. The writer says,

I am deeply impressed by the argument of brilliant thinkers like Tillich, Ferre, Bultmann, Bruner and Barth, not to mention John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, the Pope, Nietzsche, Feuerbach, Bertrand Russell, and many more. But what do these men know? What are the data on which they base their judgments? When it comes to the important question, "What is man's destiny after this life?" I prefer Jesus Christ, the God-man, to Paul Tillich, as my authority. I prefer Jesus Christ to Rudolf Bultmann. And above all, lest you misunderstand me, I prefer Jesus Christ to my own blind human guesses based on woefully inadequate data.

Exactly! Christ is the authority. The truth is revealed in Jesus, therefore we reject all philosophies that urge the necessity of "getting even" as a way of living with one another. We reject all philosophy that says that trials are tragic occurrences for which we ought to feel sorry for ourselves and act as though we have been offended when they come into our lives as though we had been specially singled out for difficulty. We are to remember, in the light of "the truth as it is in Jesus" that these trials and sufferings are part of the program, part of God's ministering to us, part of that which it takes to make us what God wants us to be. We are to reject the common philosophy of the day that others are to blame for our weaknesses, that if we lived in different circumstances, with different people and had to face different problems, we could be different. The truth as it is in Jesus says that there is adequacy in Christ for any situation, any place; that God has put you where you are because he wants you to live the Christian life right there; that those around you will never have the chance to see the tremendous, revolutionary difference that being a Christian makes unless they see it in your life right where you are right now.

That is where we are to begin to live, and this is why Paul says we must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the emptiness of their minds, for we did not so learn Christ. There are resources in him far greater than any worldling ever dreamed of. There are possibilities of fruitfulness and glory and grace in Jesus Christ which, if they begin to manifest themselves in your life, will set your neighbors and friends saying, What has this person got? What kind of a faith is this, what do these people have that makes them able to live like this? Now that is the challenge the Apostle sets before us. In the rest of this chapter he will detail it for us in specifics, bringing it right down where we live. As we go through this we shall see that what we do is itself witnessing, telling what we are. Therefore, what we are must be what Christ is, for that is the only life that arrests and changes and challenges men.

Catalog No. 119
Ephesians 4:17-21
First Message

THE NOTE OF CERTAINTY

by Ray C. Stedman

This year the Easter theme of resurrection is particularly meaningful to me. Immediately after this service I will go to the airport and leave for the Holy Land to visit areas about which I have long studied but have never been to myself. On this tour my family and I, along with others from this church, will be visiting many places of interest to Bible students: Rome, Athens, Jerusalem, Galilee, Nazareth these names are as familiar to our ears as those of the streets here in Palo Alto.

But to me, the climax of all will be when we go outside the old walled city of Jerusalem to the place that is called "Gordon's Calvary," a little hill that looks like a skull, with features resembling eye sockets and a mouth formed by shallow caves, and which fits the Biblical description of the place called "The Skull" where Jesus was crucified (Luke 23:33). I can hardly anticipate what my emotions will be as I stand on that spot and think that this is the place where the Son of God suffered, where my redemption was won.

And then to take a few steps away to the Garden Tomb, which very likely is the spot where his body lay, and to stand there before that tomb where Peter and John and Mary and all the others stood with uncomprehending minds that first Easter Sunday morning as they tried to make themselves face the incredible, glorious fact that he who was dead was risen again, as he had said (Matthew 28:6). I do not know what my emotions will be, but one thing I do know: after this experience I will be no more certain that the resurrection occurred than I already am. I do not need to visit the site in order to be assured that this is an historic fact.

For many years, the resurrection of Jesus Christ has been the central certainty of my life, as it has for thousands and hundreds of thousands of Christians. To me the great value of Easter Sunday lies right here. Amid all the question marks of this questioning age in which we live, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's great exclamation point. And if you are aware of the questions, the doubts and uncertainties, that surround us today, I think you will agree with me that we are very much in need of exclamation marks in this day. The belief of Christians this Easter Sunday morning is an island of faith in the midst of an ocean of doubt and uncertainty.

With that doubt in our world goes what always accompanies doubt: despair, and distress of mind and heart. I do not think I have seen a day in which despair was so widespread as it is today. It is not only among those who are older but also, amazingly enough, among the young, who are facing life but finding nothing of challenge in it, nothing of interest, who confess themselves to be bored and frightened and anxious and uncertain. This is borne out shockingly by the macabre fact that, in this country of ours, every two hours a college student takes his own life.

This last week over on the beaches at Santa Cruz our young people have been talking to other young people

who were there for the annual frolic known as "Cruz Week." Of the thousands of students who inhabited the beaches during the week, they have talked to hundreds and hundreds who confessed that they are drifting aimlessly in a dream world, out of touch with reality, unaware of anything interesting or challenging about life.

This very week I received a copy of a letter from a high school senior in Pennsylvania, who wrote those words:

Day after day and night after night I go around searching and trying to find the answer to peace, joy, and satisfaction. The way of meaning to life seems so blocked and hopeless to find I cannot help but view everything as Shakespeare viewed things. No matter how sincere people seem, everything seems like a big stage and everyone just players. A person just assumes a part and plays his part until the curtain goes up for a new scene. Life is a street without purpose, a car without meaning. Life seems like some big joke. It seems like everyone is lying to you, trying to pull a trick on you, and standing back in the shadows laughing at you. It seems too black to realize that here we are, creatures who didn't ask to be born, but are put here on a seemingly forsaken planet. We are demanded to pay consequences for our deeds in a hereafter, we are told, but why should we be responsible for things we do when we didn't ask to be born? WHY? Is the big why in my life.

If that were only an isolated incident it would be distressing, but it is not isolated. It is widespread, and therefore it is tragic. Some time ago I clipped from our own local paper a little poem by a girl in the tenth grade here in Palo Alto. She says,

In emptiness.
All alone now,
Sitting in the darkness.
Where else could I be
But in emptiness?
Emptiness is nothing;
It is all its own.
There is no life in emptiness.
Where am I going?
To boredom, or to serenity?
The earth is turning,
As I am turning,
Forever in a circle
Of emptiness.

That is but a typical statement of some of the widespread despair today. Where does this come from? Why this vast tide of depression spreading across the world, not only in this country but everywhere? Why do young people lie in public parks for hours and hours like zombies because they have nothing to do, nothing to live for, and can't even think of anything to do? Well, most certainly, this is the product of a widespread view in our day the teaching that there are no absolutes in life, that everything is relative. There is no right or wrong, no blacks or whites. Bad is good and good is square. We are told that there are no final answers, there are no ultimate certainties. Everything is tentative, experimental. If someone has a problem, it is not because of his attitudes but it is more likely that something is wrong with his glands. The result of this teaching is that we are facing a generation that is cast adrift, literally that has lost its anchors, is drifting aimlessly. And the world is going mad with lust and crime and war.

In this context I want to turn to a passage which was written by an old man, chained in a dungeon, to a young man who was charged with the responsibility of nurturing an infant church in a hostile, pagan city with very much the same atmosphere as the world and generation in which we live. Paul's second letter to his son in the faith, Timothy, chapter 2, verses 3-8:

"Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will grant you understanding in everything. Remember Jesus Christ,

risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel..."

It was a dark hour when this letter was written. Paul was in prison in Rome. this time not allowed to have his own hired house as he had during his first imprisonment, but instead thrust down into the squalid depths of what is called today the Mamertine dungeon, a dark, filthy hole which was cold and clammy. There he was isolated from all his friends. He says in this very letter that all of them have forsaken him except for one or two faithful ones who stood by. He is lonely, he is cold; he asks Timothy to bring his cloak to him quickly before winter comes. The cause which he serves seems to be struggling everywhere. It looks like a depressing hour. He is writing to Timothy, a young, inexperienced man all alone in the great city of Ephesus in Asia Minor, living in the midst of a cynical, disillusioned generation, as the Roman Empire is beginning to fade from its centrality as queen of the earth. Yet, despite the circumstances, there is nothing of gloom or despair or defeat in Paul's words. "You need," he says, "the dedication of a soldier the discipline of an athlete, the diligence of a farmer but above everything else you need to remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

If this passage is to have any meaning for us today we need to ask two questions: 1) Why did Paul write this, and 2) How do we make the application of it to our own lives? You notice that Paul uses these three figures to picture the requirements for confronting successfully the pressures and good problems that Timothy is facing.

First, he says, you need to be like a good soldier; you need to be dedicated. Do not get mixed up with sidelines, with moonlighting, but stick to the point to the central issue at hand. "As a good soldier take your share of suffering for no soldier on service is entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him. The quality he emphasizes here is dedication; a dedication that is willing to endure suffering and hardship. Timothy was greatly in need of that in Ephesus. The other day I watched two young marines in dress uniform walking down the street, heads erect, shoulders square. In every quiet, confident step they took was manifest their dedication and their pride in their outfit. Paul is saying to Timothy, you need that kind of dedication.

And, further, you need the discipline of an athlete who cuts no corners and takes no unfair advantage of another, who drives hard toward the goal but always competes within the rules. Finally, you need the diligence of a farmer who realizes that he will never harvest a crop unless he plants and cultivates, and does the work required. He will never reap unless he sows.

Paul is telling Timothy, you are called to a task so challenging, so difficult, so demanding, so dangerous, that you need the dedication of a soldier, the discipline of an athlete and the diligence of a farmer. In each requirement he lists you will notice that he is stressing one thing: you do not win without effort. You cannot have a crown without a cross. There is no gain without pain. The soldier who gets distracted, dabbling in peripheral pursuits, does not win the approval of his officer. The athlete who ignores the rules is never given a prize. The farmer who lazes away his days never gathers a harvest. And, aware of all these things, of the demands that life makes, the apostle says to this young man that the one thing that will make all this possible is to remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.

So what do we say to our generation? Here we have much of an entire generation of youth cast adrift with no sense of purpose, with no sense of meaning in life, without any real excitement, without anything to challenge them, feeling that life lies ahead of them dark, black, forbidding, a drudgery. an unnecessary burden which, unconsulted, they are called to bear. How to stir them, how to move them, how to motivate them, how to bring them to vitality and life? Well, fundamentally, is there anything else that we could say, other than what Paul says? Remember Jesus Christ. risen from the dead.

Notice that he does not say to Timothy, remember Jesus Christ, period. There is a false form of Christianity in our day that tells us that the real message of Christianity to people is, "Remember Jesus Christ. He is the example; he is the moral teacher; he has given us the great example of his life and his teaching for us to follow. Now remember that and try to imitate him." But if that were all the Christian message is, then I would say that it is the greatest delusion, the greatest mistake ever, and the greatest tragedy would be that we should ever set it before people. Think of the life of Jesus. Think of his person. Remember his life and you think of tenderness and strength, vigor and restraint, of courage and truth, humor and dignity, of light and love, justice and compassion, sweetness and delight all of these qualities that men admire and desire merging into one

wonderful personality. But when you come to the end of his life, what do you find? Blood and darkness, fear and death. At the end of his life he was murdered, and that wonderful example of manhood to mankind, all that wonderful personality perished. The unforgettable voice was stilled; the great heart ceased to beat; the light in his eyes went out as the flame of his life flickered and died. Jesus Christ was dead, and faith and hope went out with him into hellish darkness.

But that is not the end. No, this Sunday morning we are gathered here to remember the greatest fact of history: Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. Remember that, Paul says. Remember that grace and truth cannot finally be crucified. Remember that all the high things that make humanity beautiful cannot be forever laid in the dust, spattered with blood. And most of all, remember that he who rose from the dead, rose to pour out his Holy Spirit into human lives and, by that Spirit, to make available to any individual all the fullness of himself, twenty-four hours a day.

If that is true, if these words really have meaning, then I suggest that we are better off this morning than those disciples who stood at the tomb on that resurrection morning, or who grasped him by the feet and worshipped him as they recognized that he was risen from the dead (Matthew 28:9). Why? Because even in this there was limitation. Even then he was with them for awhile, then would disappear. And during the days of his ministry he could be in only one place at a time. But this morning he can be everywhere all at once.

All that he is can be available to anyone, any time that there is need. He can be with me as I stand here speaking, my heart inwardly crying out for God to give clarity and strength, purpose and blessing to this message (Jeremiah 1 :6-9, Luke 1 2: 11, Acts 4:8). At the same time he can be with somebody on the other side of the earth--some alcoholic, perhaps, who desires to turn from his drink, every pore of his body crying out for another drink and yet he knows that if he goes back to it, it will ruin him, destroy him, and so he cries out for help. The Son of God can be with him, and all that he is, is available to him (Titus 2:11-14,1 Corinthians 10:13). He can be in the home anywhere with a mother who has a problem with her children but does not know what the answer is (Matthew 11:28-30, 15:28). Maybe someone is crushed and bewildered and so looks for comfort and asks it of him, and there he is. It may be some businessman in his office who does not know what to do or how to find a way out of a difficulty (Matthew 6:25-34, Proverbs 16:3). He can bow his head and say, "Lord, show me the way." And there he is with him. "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead." That is what he came for. That is what this is all about.

This Easter message is not merely that we should recall some historical fact. great as that is, wonderful as that is. But the thing that the apostle is driving home to this young man in his desperate hour of need is that Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, is available any time, everywhere. In the days of hatred and persecution, remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. When violence stalks the streets of our cities, or should nuclear missiles roar overhead, or when despair grips your own heart, remember that there is One who arose from the dead and who will one day, at the time of his choosing, cause wars to cease and sorrow to nee away (Isaiah 51:11). Men shall melt their swords into plowshares and beat their spears into pruning hooks, and never learn war any more (Micah 4:1-4). Then neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more (Revelation 21:3, 4). Meanwhile, remember that this One offers to be in you a well of living water, from which you can drink at any moment of need. You do not have to go back again and again to some place or person. Rather, he is in you, as he promised to be within the woman at the well, a well of living water springing up into abundant, eternal life (John 4:7-30).

If your days are full of difficulty and darkness, remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. As it is put in Hebrews 12: 3, " Consider himwho endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. "You will have to endure hardship? He endured hardship, and he makes his own courage and patience and victory available to you (John 16:33). Are you tempted to be ashamed? He despised the shame of the cross, was contemptuous of it. and he stands ready to pour his valor, his bravery and boldness into your heart so that you need not be ashamed (Hebrews 12:2). Are you weak and faltering? Remember that he is able also to save unto the uttermost all those who come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7;25). Remember Jesus Christ, risen. He is available to you. He lives to meet your need today, small or great, at any moment, all the time. Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. That is the note of certainty which must be sounded today. That is the Easter message.

How do you do this? How do you lay hold of this? First, if you are going to remember something, you will have to have experienced it. You cannot remember something that you have not experienced. At our house we sometimes talk about events that happened when our children were little, and once in awhile one will say "I remember that." But, tracing back, we find that it happened before she was born. She has just heard us talk about it so much she thinks she was there. I used to travel with Dr. H.A. Ironside. He had a most remarkable memory. He could read something just one or two times and he would have it committed to memory. He could recite great, long passages of Scripture verbatim. His wife used to say his memory was so good he could remember things that hadn't happened. But of course you cannot really do that. And you can never remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, in the way that Paul is talking about here, unless you have experienced the fact that he, the Risen Lord, is in you. That is the place to begin. Respond to his invitation, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if an I one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." . . . We will live together (Revelation 3:20). That is the place to start. Invite him to be your living Lord.

Then, of course, if you have done that, to remember something in this way requires the exercise of some vision. Envision his rising again and what it means to you. Even let your imagination work. Think about what this means, Christ in you. Realize who he is, this One in whom is vested all power in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). this One with whom it is possible to do all things (Philippians 4:13), this One who is never limited by any circumstance, is never at a loss, who never makes mistakes. Think of it! This One in you, making all that he is available to you! That is Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. So let your imagination work a bit with these facts. Think of how he makes himself available to you, and of his presence with you, of his power to conquer evil within, and of his love, his concern for you, and his desire to meet you at any level of need, no matter what it might be (John 10:10). Reckon upon the certainty of his ability to impart to you his own resurrection life (John 10: 27-30).

And then let your vision, your imagination become inspiration. Take up the work that you have let drop. Buckle on your armor and go out to battle again, remembering that he in you is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you could ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). So take up the task again, start to work again, relying upon him. Run the race with new vigor and patience, trusting in his adequacy, because he is the only resource that will meet the pressing demands of the day in which we live. And when you discover that fact, and act upon it, avail yourself of his resurrection power, you discover that life becomes a continual challenge, a continual adventure of faith. Every day is a new mystery story in which you see the Son of God taking the problems before you and untangling them, working them out, changing hearts, touching lives, breathing upon the dead and the dull and the apathetic and bringing them to vitality and life and glory. That is the way life is intended to be.

So that is why Paul wrote to this young man, as to us, and said, "Above everything else, Timothy, remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead." Not dead, not lost, not gone, but alive forevermore living in you, to work through you to make your life what it ought to be. And as he continually brings victory and blessing into your life remember to rejoice with him and thank him. This is the value of this celebration "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead."

Catalog No. 184
March 26, 1967
Easter Sunday

THE DEATH OF DEATH

by Ray C. Stedman

Easter Sunday is the day when those who seldom go to church during the rest of the year do come. In my judgment this is a very good thing. It is well to have a Sunday set aside as a kind of ecclesiastical open house, during which the essence of what the church believes is set forth for examination and evaluation by those who

are considering Christianity. Therefore we make you welcome, all who are here as visitors or who seldom have come to church this year. But then, the fact that you do seldom come indicates something. It indicates either that you do not fully understand the Christian message and don't know what it is really saying, or that having understood it you do not consider it very important.

I am glad you chose Easter Sunday to attend, because the resurrection of Jesus is a fundamental element of Christian faith. Perhaps our consideration of it today may help show you why it is important. The whole point of the resurrection story, the fact that Jesus arose on the third day after his crucifixion, is highly relevant to a question which is important to everyone here: What can be done about death? Surely that is one question we cannot avoid. There is a common proverb which says that only two things are sure in life: death and taxes. There are many who are trying to avoid paying their taxes, but no one gets out of facing the problem of death. Someone has well put it, "Dying my death is the one thing that no one else can do for me."

When Paul wrote his last letter to his son in the faith, Timothy, he was in the Mamertine prison in Rome and was awaiting his own death. As you read that second letter to Timothy you can see that he was quite aware that it was drawing close. He felt that he probably would not get out alive, and he didn't. But in the letter he speaks of "the appearing of Jesus Christ our Savior who," he says, "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." There is a phrase that ought to interest you, regardless of what your views may be on Christianity---this phrase "he abolished death". That ought to grip every one of us.

Obviously Paul does not mean by this that Jesus Christ eliminated death, because it is still true that despite the great advancements of medical science during the last generation or so, the death rate remains what it has been for centuries: a flat 100%. And that includes Christians along with everyone else. We all die. But Paul did mean something by the words "he abolished death". It is probably explained best in a passage in the second chapter of the letter to Hebrews.

There the writer speaks of Jesus, who came, he says, to partake of the same nature that we have, "that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage." It is in this way that Jesus abolishes death. He abolishes the fear of death, removing the sting from it and thus making it harmless.

I know there are many who disclaim any fear of death. There are many who boldly declare they are not afraid to die. But in listening to this through many years I have detected a rather hollow note about it. This week I picked up a magazine article and was struck by the opening sentence:

The ancient question of Job, "If a man die, shall he live again?" remains the fundamental question haunting all men today.

This fear of death is revealed in the way we try to hide the fact of death. We do not like the word. There is a daily newspaper published in our land which refuses to use the word "death" in its columns. We do not like to hear it mentioned. That is one difference between our generation and the previous one. In the nineteenth century the facts of conception, birth, and reproduction were regarded as subjects you never talked about in polite society, but the processes of death were quite acceptable. The nineteenth-century writings were full of descriptions of death and essays about its meaning and effect. But in the twentieth century we have reversed all this. We have an almost psychopathic preoccupation with the subjects of conception, birth, and reproduction and talk about them all the time, but the subject of death we seek to avoid, and we refer to it only in euphemisms.

For instance, a body is no longer called a corpse; today we refer to it as "the departed." We do not say that a person has died, but that he has "passed away," or "passed on." Coffins have become caskets, to hold a precious treasure. I was interested to note that in some of the newer mortuary ads, caskets are now becoming "couches," as though to drive away even further all sense of the macabre. I was almost horrified to read in a recent newspaper article of a man who proposed to build a drive-in viewing room, where "the departed" can be laid out for public viewing. You could simply drive by in your car and see these friends who are made up to resemble horizontal members of a cocktail party.

This grotesque pantomime is really due to a morbid fear of death which seeks to flee the tragic facts of our existence. Men are trying to forget that death awaits, that it stands at the end of every pathway and is inescapable, and that we must all be victims. You can see this trend toward escaping such thoughts in the modern attempts to rewrite nursery rhymes for children, to expunge from them all reference to violence and sudden death. That vicious and violence-filled nursery rhyme which many of us learned as children, "Three Blind Mice", has now been done over and comes out this way:

Three kind mice, three kind mice,
They all ran after the farmer's wife,
Who cut them some cheese with a carving knife.
Did you ever hear such a tale in your life, as Three kind mice?

In this trenchant phrase of a modern writer, "Death is muffled in illusions."

Dostoevski, the well-known Russian writer, who once faced a firing squad and was delivered at the last possible moment, said:

The certainty of inescapable death, and the uncertainty of what is to follow are the most dreadful anguish in the world.

There he placed his finger on the cause of our fear of death: "the uncertainty of what is to follow". We know not what, or where. And it is this unknown factor that makes us most afraid. Paul the apostle says, "the sting of death is sin"---the certainty of judgment. Remember how Shakespeare says in Hamlet, "Conscience doth make cowards of us all." Perhaps T.S. Eliot put it best when he said, "It is not what we call death that we fear, but what, beyond death is not death. That we fear, we fear."

The passage in Hebrews says that the fear of death produces life-long bondage. I suggest that this is a true statement and that it is demonstrable in our lives. It limits us, this fear of death. It ties us up. It creates what in modern parlance are called "hang-ups", and these are some of them. First, this fear of death drives us. It hurries us at our work. We feel that we must make time count. We are aware of the passing of the years and are afraid that we will waste our opportunities, that we will lose out on the possibilities which are before us. Therefore we must grasp every moment to fulfill it. We dare not stop, dare not rest, but are constantly driven, driven, driven, because we know the shortness of our time.

Then, fear of death makes us worry. Death threatens us on every side. It is what makes us install seat belts in our automobiles. We are constantly pursued by those who wish to sell us insurance against that day when ultimately we must die. It creates concern over our diet and causes us to eat the most unpalatable of foods for weeks at a time, because we are afraid. It is what makes us check out our pains and aches with our doctor. It sends us to him for frequent examinations, lest this physical house in which we live begin to crumble and we find ourselves facing the king of terrors.

The fear of death sobers us. How many of us have been aware of times when, even in the moment of hilarity, of laughter and joy, we have been conscious that a sigh was not very far from a smile. We have been afraid to enjoy things because we have felt they would soon disappear, and if we gave ourselves too fully to them we would feel sorrow when they were taken away. It hits us too hard. Many are afraid to love because we feel we may lose what we love and our hearts will be made sad if we allow ourselves to become involved. So the fear of death produces a reserve, a coldness, a suspicion, a withdrawing from life on the part of many.

Also, this fear haunts us. Suddenly it impinges on our thoughts when we least expect it. It frightens us in our dreams, and makes us restless. We are afraid to be alone. We don't like silence, but must have a radio or television drumming away in our ears. We constantly demand something to occupy our attention. All this is testimony to an unspoken and unacknowledged fear of death which pervades our society today.

If that is true (and I don't see how anyone can challenge it), it ought to make us receptive to this great message of Easter. What is it all about? Well, it is a declaration that a breakthrough has occurred, that Jesus Christ has broken through the death barrier and has found a solution to this vexatious problem which hangs like a cloud

of doom over every one of us. Somehow he has solved the great Gordian riddle of the ages. He broke through, he rose from the dead. And as a result he offers to break the power of death, and the fear of it, for any individual who comes to know him.

He does this by two means which the Bible declares to us. First, he removes the fear of judgment by the forgiveness of sin. There is nothing more fundamental to Christianity than that. In the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God was doing something that we men do not fully understand but which nevertheless God declares to be true. He was accomplishing the solution of the basic problem of human evil, which dogs us everywhere we go, the best as well as the worst, the righteous and respectable as well as the evil and the outcast. God solved this basic problem in the cross of Christ. He laid our sins upon him. I don't know how it happened. I don't know anyone else who fully understands it. It is one of those great mysteries which God declares and which the mind of man cannot fathom or follow. But God has done it, and in Christ men are forgiven.

The wonderful thing is that when forgiveness is once received there is a reaction of joy and gladness, and a sense of the lifting of a load, which can never be forgotten. Men do not call on anyone else for forgiveness of sins. They do not ask, "Oh, John F. Kennedy, forgive my sins," or "Winston Churchill, forgive my sins." But for centuries men have been crying out, "Jesus Christ, forgive me," and they have risen with a sense of guilt removed and of burden rolled away. And if the burden of sin is taken away, then the fear of judgment is gone. This is the glorious proclamation---that death does not suddenly introduce us to a piece-meal examination in which we must give an answer for all we have done, but in Christ we are free from condemnation. This is the great declaration. It is the sure word of the Scripture: any who believe in him have passed from death unto life and shall not come into condemnation. I shall never forget the day in Chicago, in a YMCA room, when that truth burst upon me in all its fullness. I was a young man, about twenty-one years of age. How vividly it all comes back to me---the joy, the untrammelled joy, that filled my heart as, lying on my bed in my room, it dawned upon me that if anything happened to me I had nothing to fear in the future. I was forgiven. God had already judged me in Christ and I was forgiven, set free. The joy of that has never left me, but has recurred again and again as I have contemplated this great fundamental truth of Christian faith---that in Jesus Christ and in his work for us God took away my sins.

The second thing Jesus does is to promise us life with him. He said, "Because I live, you too shall live." He demonstrated his ability to fulfill that promise by rising from the dead himself. To me that is a most impressive fact. It is what convinces me that I can trust what Jesus says, as opposed to what anyone else is saying in this day and age. I have read the writings of philosophers, thinkers, and world leaders of our time, and in many ways I am impressed by their ability to state their case with logic and clarity. I find that some of them are experts at so presenting their cause that they can make black look like white and white look like black. To read their arguments is to be impressed. But I have long ago learned that if what they are saying contradicts what Jesus is saying then I cannot trust them. I have learned that I must trust, and only shall trust, the one who has demonstrated a knowledge of life surpassing all others, who has positively manifested his ability to solve the most perplexing problem before men---that of death. He has broken through the death barrier. I don't know anyone else with credentials like that. If you want me to believe someone, get him to do that and then I'll believe him. But until then I will trust the One who has manifested an understanding of the basic solution to the problems of life and death.

This is what changes the whole outlook on death. This is why the apostle Paul and those early Christians, as they contemplated their own approaching death, did not feel terror in their hearts. They had no fear of this thing, but could say as Paul said, "O death, where is your sting. O grave, where is your victory?" As a pastor I have stood many times beside a grave and noted the impact death has had upon those who are left behind. I have seen people break up and emotionally fall apart at a graveside, torn by the awful sense of separation from their loved ones. It is a harrowing experience to watch it. But I have often seen Christians facing death, have seen the light in their faces that nothing could rival, have felt the steadiness of their spirit, the sturdiness of their faith, their quiet acceptance of God's will, and even a joy that is manifest in the midst of their sorrow.

I don't know how to explain it except by what is involved in this story of Jesus. Death is no longer fearsome for the believer. Death in Christ means to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. "To depart and be with Christ," Paul says, "is far better." He has taken away the sting of death and removed its fear and

terror. So death becomes but an incident, a moment of transition from this life to the next, and then the experience of joy and blessing beyond expression. I have here a letter which was written by a young soldier about to die. During World War 2 he was captured and imprisoned by the Nazis and was sentenced to be executed. Writing from his prison in Hamburg on the day of his execution, this is what he said to his parents:

When this letter comes to your hands I shall no longer be among the living. The thing that has occupied our thoughts constantly for many months, never leaving them free, is now about to happen. If you ask when what state I am in I can only answer: I am, first, in a joyous mood and, second, filled with a great anticipation.

As regards the first feeling, today means the end of all suffering and all earthly sorrow for me. "God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes." What consolation, what marvelous strength emanates from faith in Christ who has preceded us in death. Everything that till now I have done, struggled for, and accomplished, has at bottom been directed to this one goal, whose barrier I shall penetrate today. "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him."

For me, believing will become seeing; hope will become possession, and I shall forever share in Him who is love. Should I not, then, be filled with anticipation? What is it all going to be like? The things that up to this time I have been permitted to preach about, I shall now see. There will be no more secrets nor tormenting puzzles. Today is the great day on which I return to the home of my Father. How could I fail to be excited and full of anticipation? Then I shall see once more all those who have been near and dear to me here on earth.

And so, until we meet again above, in the presence of the Father of light, your joyful Herman.

That is authentic Christian confidence in the face of death, born out of the great fact we celebrate today---that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. It is a fact enmeshed in history, attested to by competent eye witnesses who again and again recorded objectively what they saw. It has been confirmed in the experience of thousands and thousands who through the centuries have accepted the offer of God and have found this risen Lord; found him to be not only the answer to death but the answer to life as well. For he not only offers to remove the fear of death but he offers also to supply the strength that life demands. He who died for us did so in order that he might give himself to us. He died for us that he might live in us. It is here that Christians find the supply they need to face the pressures, problems, and dangers that life sets before them. Christ's love is available. Christ's patience is available, his power, his wisdom, his strength, his longsuffering, his compassion, his courage---all these are available to those who know him.

This is what we talk about here Sunday after Sunday. This is what we find to be so strengthening in the midst of daily pressures, upholding us in the hour when the world begins to shake and crumble, consoling and strengthening us in the last hour when individually we do what no one can do for us, face the transition from this life to another. God's offer stands available today. "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord," he says, "and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved." There will take place in your life the simple transaction by which Jesus Christ comes in to live within you and to give you a hope that surpasses life, which goes beyond the grave, removing all its fear and terrors and making you not only able to face death but able also;to face life.

Isn't that worth something? There is nothing like it anywhere. No product offered anywhere else can equal it. There is nothing more fundamental to life, nothing more basic, more elementary than this. That is why today we take great joy in declaring to you what we have found in Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, Lord of lords, before whom eventually every knee shall bow, and whom every tongue shall proclaim as Lord to the glory of God the Father. He has solved the problem of history and the problem of death. And he is able to meet the individual need of every life. May God grant that today you may discover this living Lord.

Prayer

Almighty Father, we are grateful to be reminded again of this most fundamental fact of Christian faith: that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Death could not hold him. He broke the bonds that held all other men in bondage and came forth from the grave alive again to show himself to his disciples. Father, we thank you that the joy and triumph of that event reverberates across the centuries to quicken our own hearts as we realize that these

fundamental forces with which we must deal in life have been conquered and rendered impotent by the power of Jesus Christ our risen Lord. We rejoice that in this very severely troubled world we have this great hope which shines as a light in a dark place, this certainty upon which our faith may rest.

We believe, Lord, that the declaration of your word is true, and that there is a greater power than death; that truth crushed to earth shall rise again; that there is nothing which ultimately can withstand Jesus Christ who reigns above all and to whom eventually every knee shall bow, every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Now, Father, we pray that we may understand something of the practical application of this in our own lives, that it might not be merely something to sing about one Sunday of the year, but may be a great and underlying truth which touches us in every realm of life and can prove to be the most life changing fact we have ever considered.

Lord, we pray that any who are looking for answers in the midst of a confused world may give careful consideration to this mighty, triumphant fact declared in the resurrection of your Son, and that they may understand that he who is dead is alive again and lives in order to enter human hearts and change them from within. This is the great message the church has to proclaim today. Grant to us, Father, that we may be faithful in the proclamation of it and that together we may rejoice in the great truth we proclaim. We ask your blessing upon our nation in its hour of trouble, and upon all peoples everywhere around the world who, joining together with us today, lift up the glad, triumphant shout, CHRIST IS RISEN! We pray in his name, Amen.

Catalog No. 275
April 14, 1968

LIFE'S GREATEST CHOICE

by Ray C. Stedman

One of my favorite stories of the New Testament is found in the tenth chapter of Mark. It is one I never tire of reading because it is so suggestive. Perhaps as we look at it you will see something important in it, too. Jesus is on his way from Jerusalem out into what we would call 'the sticks' to preach. He is going out into the country villages.

As he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good, but God alone. You know the commandments; Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother." And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth."

And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

Jesus never said a more startling thing to any individual than that one word, "You lack one thing." Certainly one thing can be very important. If you do not have the right thing it can make all the difference in the world. Here, for instance, is a fine electronic organ, fearfully and wonderfully made. But it is not producing music now because it lacks one thing, a player, one who can sweep across the keys and bring out all the harmony and symphony that is in the instrument. Perhaps that illustrates what this story is saying to us.

Here is a young man who came to Jesus with a great many things. I would like to point out six things about

him that are most impressive. Three of them are very obvious, three of them are subtly hidden. But it is clear right away that there were three obvious things about him: he had youth; he had position (he was a ruler); and he had money. He sounds like an interesting and attractive young man.

When I was a boy I thought that if I could only get these three things I ought to be happy. I had youth. Everyone comes by that naturally---for a while. But I thought if I could also get position or power and some money, I really would have all that my heart could desire.

Here was a young man who had these things and these are important things. I am not going to pretend they are not. It is great to have them. Especially youth. I think more and more frequently of what George Bernard Shaw said, "Youth is so wonderful, it is a shame to waste it on young people." The older I grow the more I see the wisdom of what he says. Here was a young man who had the exuberance and vitality that goes with youth, and that is quite a bit.

This afternoon my wife went outside the house and saw one of our daughters crawling through the bathroom window into the house. She checked the door to see if it was unlocked, and found there was no apparent reason for her to do this other than that it simply looked like an interesting way to get into the house. It was different. That is youth, isn't it? It doesn't always make sense but it has a lot of fun. And this young man had youth. He had the exuberance that goes with it, the vitality, the ability to see the different and to enjoy doing it.

He also had position. He was a ruler. Even as a young man he had a position of authority. That is fun, too. It is a great feeling to be able to say to somebody else, "Go!" and he goes, and "Come!" and he comes, or to sit at a desk and push a buzzer and someone jumps. In fact, it is so much fun that many people would give their right arm to be able to do it. Power, position, and authority---these are coveted things in the world today. This young man had them. He was a ruler of the Jews.

Then he also had money. That was probably the least important of the things he had, but to him it was important, because with money he could buy all the fine things he wanted. Doubtless he had everything his age could offer, because money permits that. It may not give you happiness, but it gives you the choice of what to be miserable with. He was able to afford things that others could not. He had all the luxury, the ease and the enjoyment of things that money could bring.

We would say, ordinarily, that according to the standards of our age this was a very fortunate young man, with his youth, position and money. But he had some other characteristics that are not quite as obvious. I would also suggest that he had a very attractive personality. This is revealed in certain of the things he did when he came to Jesus. First, he met him with the word, "Good Teacher," by which he indicated that he was a thoughtful, discerning young man. There were many people in that day who looked at Jesus and could see nothing but a trouble-making peasant, a bothersome fellow who kept sticking his nose into the wrong things and making trouble for everybody. There were many who were ready to write him off as being of no value at all; but this young man, as he looked at him, listened to him, heard the words he said, and saw the things he did, saw that there was something very remarkable about Jesus. So he came to him and said, "Good Teacher," revealing his discernment.

It was also evident that he had a considerable degree of courage, because he came publicly, at a time when the class of which he was a representative (the rulers of the Jews) were very much opposed to what Jesus was doing. After all, what he was saying among the people was upsetting the apple cart. It was threatening their position of power. Jesus was the revolutionary of his day, and he became so troublesome after a while that those in power felt they had to get rid of him. That is why they conspired to put him to death. Now here was a young man who belonged to that class of rulers, yet publicly and openly he came to Christ and greeted him. That took courage.

This young man was also a humble young man. The remarkable thing said here is that when he came to Christ he knelt down in front of him, publicly. "Oh, well," you say, "that is just the way people of the East greeted each other. That was but an Eastern custom." But it never was the custom for a ruler to kneel to a peasant. Never---in the East, or any other place or time. This would have seemed as out of place then as it would today if, in the streets of London, an ordinary Englishman would find the Queen of England kneeling at his feet. No,

a ruler did not kneel to peasants, but this young man knelt to Jesus. Because he was a humble young man he realized that here was Someone who had something he needed, and he acknowledged it in this humble, public act of kneeling before Christ. So I know that he was an attractive, winsome young man, a man with a strong and good personality.

It is also clear that he had a clean record, and that is a most remarkable thing. We have had young people stand up and describe their involvement in terrible activities, their slavery to drugs, their fantasies with LSD, their participation in sexual deviations, etc. Sometimes Christian young people in our congregation have thought to themselves, "You know, it's wonderful to see the change in these lives. They seem to appreciate the delivering grace of God so much. Sometimes I wonder if I wouldn't be a better Christian if I had stepped over the traces a little more. I sometimes wish I didn't have such a clean record." Have you ever thought that? I've had adults say to me, "Perhaps it would have been better if I had thrown caution and morals to the wind and had a high old time, because these people redeemed from great sin seem to appreciate the grace of God so much." But it is not better. It is much better to have a clean record. Even if a man never became a Christian it is better to have a clean record. Deep indulgence in sinful habits creates a permanent train of thought and arouses lusts that hound and haunt a person for the rest of his life, and with which he must fight continuously. It is much better to have a clean record.

When this young man came to him, Jesus flashed upon him the light of six commandments. He didn't mention the first four commandments, which have to do with man's relationship to God, but he mentioned the last six, which have to do with a man's relationship to his neighbor. Jesus said to him,

"You know the commandments: Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother."

The young man looked Jesus full in the face and said to him with open-hearted honesty, "Lord, I have kept these things from my very youth."

Perhaps someone says, "I think that was a lie. I don't think he really kept these. This was an attempted deception on his part." I cannot agree with that. The reason I cannot is because I read that when Jesus looked at him he loved him. Now, I don't mean to imply by that that Jesus wouldn't have loved him if he hadn't kept these commandments. I want you to know that Jesus loves you, and he will forgive you for every one of them, and he will save you, if you want him to. Jesus would have loved him anyway, but in a peculiar way his heart was warmed by this young man's record. When he saw that here was an earnest, honest-hearted, sincere young man who had all his life honestly kept these things, his heart went out to him. It has never been recorded that Jesus ever loved a hypocrite or a liar. He saw the heart of this young man, and he knew that he was telling the truth.

The sixth thing about him is that he had an honest hunger for life. He came, the story says, and asked Jesus the question, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" That is most interesting. Here is a young man who evidently had everything we think life needs, but he didn't yet have the one thing he hungered after. He lacked something, and he desired to have it. Be careful with what he said, that you might understand clearly just what he was asking Jesus. It is so easy for us to read this question of his as though he were asking, "Lord, now that I have everything in this life, what do I have to do to be sure of getting something in the next?" But that is not what he meant. To the Hebrew mind, this word eternal life does not mean what it has come to mean to us. To us it has come to mean everlasting life, life in heaven someday, but that is not what the phrase really means. It is much more than life that continues; it means life that satisfies---life that fulfills. That is what this young man was after. Oh, it is true that eternal life goes on forever, in heaven; but what he was asking was, "Lord, with what I have, how can I find what I don't have---that which really satisfies?"

Surely that indicates something about this young man. It indicates that with all that he had, he was conscious of lack. His youth was not satisfying him; his position could not command the thing his heart desired; his wealth could not buy for him the one thing he really wanted; his clean record was not enough to satisfy the ache and agony in his soul; his discernment could not penetrate the mystery of life and find the secret he was looking for. His courage was insufficient and his humility was not enough to open the door to the secret he wanted desperately to find; that which would leave his heart satisfied and keep it from being forever so

restless.

In other words, this young man realized he was more than flesh, that the things he had could never satisfy the needs that were inside him---that he was made for something more. There was a cry in his soul for life. He wanted it. He was, in reality, aching for God. There was a great vacuum within which nothing he had, no matter how much it was, nor how the world would say that it was everything he needed, could ever meet in this young man's life. He was hungry for God.

I remember sitting down in a bus beside a high-school-age boy a number of years ago. We fell to talking about lots of things, among them, fear. I happened to mention something about the fear of death, because so many were being troubled with that. I shall never forget how he turned and looked at me, saying, "I'm not afraid to die." I have had many people say that to me, and I knew that at the time they said it they were trembling inside for fear they might die. But I believed that young man as he looked at me and said, "I'm not afraid to die." But then he went on to say, "But I'll tell you what I am afraid of. I'm afraid I'm going to waste my life." I think he expressed what many young people feel---a hunger for life---a desire to really live, to find that which will master them, will satisfy them, lay hold of them, make them feel complete and fulfilled. That is what brought this young man to Jesus.

It is to this young man Jesus said, "You lack one thing." What was it he lacked? Perhaps you read the story and say, "Well, he lacked poverty. That was his problem. He had too much money. What he needed to do was to get rid of his money." If you read it that way then I am afraid you have missed the point entirely. If that is what Jesus meant then this story has no application to most of us. No, that is not what he meant. That is not what he lacked. I do not want to go away with that element in the story entirely, because put it there. He did say to him, "Go and sell all that you have and give to the poor." But he was not saying by that, "This is what you need; this is the thing you lack; you just have too much." No, his wealth was an obstacle that stood between this young man and the thing he needed. What he needed is revealed in what Jesus said to him in his final words, "Come, follow me."

That is what this young man lacked. As our Lord looked at him, he realized that this young man lacked a leader. That was his problem. He was his own final authority. He was his own boss, and that was what was eating at him. That was what was destroying him. He was the only one to whom he had to give account. This was wrecking his life.

Let me prove to you that this is what Jesus saw. Earlier, when this young man first came to him, Jesus asked him this strange question. "Why do you call me good? There is none good but God." Many people, reading that will say, "This is a denial on Jesus' part that he was God. He was saying to this young man, 'Do you call me good? There isn't anybody good but God, and I am not God so don't call me good.'" But look at that carefully. Think about it with me for a minute. Was he denying deity? He either meant that there is none good but God, and I am not good, therefore I am not God or he meant, there is none good but God but I am good, therefore, I am God. Either he was saying, "I am not God" or "I am not good."

Do you think he meant to say, "I am not good"? Do you think he was denying his goodness? Remember, this is the One who stood before his enemies and said, "Which of you convicts me of sin?" Everywhere he demonstrated that he knew what he was doing. As far as the record goes, he never made a mistake, never repented, never had to say he was sorry. He was worshipped by those who knew him best, as one without sin, and about him it is recorded by his closest follower, "In him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5), and by his most prominent disciple, "he committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips"(1 Peter 2:22).

What he was affirming to this young man was that he was God. He is saying, "Do you see me as good? Remember, there is none good but God." Link that with what he asked of this young ruler. Here was a young man who had everything, but one thing. Jesus put his finger on that lack when he implied, "What you need is a king and the only king a man ought to have is God. He is the only One who can fulfill and realize a young man's life, and bring the potential wrapped up in his being into fulfillment. That is what you need a God. Behold your king! Think through what you said to me. You saw goodness in me? Then what you saw was God. You call me good? Then, if you realize what you are saying, you are calling me God. Now, go and sell all that you have and give to the poor, and come and follow me. That is the one thing you lack."

There is only one King who can satisfy the human heart. If you young people bow down and follow some human leader, you will destroy yourselves. If you make an idol of some person---some movie star, some dramatic hero, some fictional character you will destroy yourselves; but if you discover the God who fulfills, who realizes human life. who adds and does not subtract, who multiplies and does not divide, you will have the thing that makes life full and complete. That is why Jesus said to this young man, "Come, and follow me." Here he is, with his strong personality, his clean record and his honest hunger, and yet Jesus is saying, "These things are not enough in themselves. You will never realize what you are looking for in these. You need a King, for no man can reign in life unless he first bows to serve his King. That is the secret of reigning."

But there was something standing in the way. There was something else that owned him, that possessed him, and he had to deal with that first. So Jesus said, "Now, go and sell all that you have. This is what is holding you to this self-centered life of yours. These things minister to your needs, to your self-centered desires. Therefore, deal with them harshly. Go cut them off. Sell them. Get rid of them, and come, and follow me."

We read, "At that saying, his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions. " The most hopeful word here is that word sorrowful. Here is a young man who has stood face-to-face with the opportunity to live as God intended man to live. He had seen the glory of God's light and love flash and flame before him, and he went away sorrowful, because he didn't think he could afford it. It cost too much; "he had great possessions." Read that phrase again. Isn't that a remarkable statement, "He went away sorrowful, because he had great possessions." Measure that by the standards of the age in which we live. You say to me, "Men don't go away sorrowful when they have great possessions. If someone came to you and announced to you that you have just won a sweepstakes and you now had a fortune of \$500,000, would you go away sorrowful?" My answer would be, "No, but you go away sorrowful when you have stood in the presence of Christ and heard him describe what could be yours if you would abandon your great possessions and you didn't." That is why he went away sorrowful.

I don't know what happened, finally, but I know it was one of two things. Either this young man went to his wealthy, luxurious home where he had everything material that his heart desired---beautiful rugs, tiled swimming pool, all the things that make a home luxurious---and he said to himself in the midst of all this, "I can't stand it any more. I don't want to live like this any more. It is too empty. There isn't anything worthwhile in it." And he called to his steward and said, "Add it all up and give it away." And he himself went and followed Christ.

He either did that, or else he went home and woke up the next morning and said, "What a fool I made of myself yesterday. Imagine! Bowing down to that peasant from Galilee. I don't know what possessed me. I thought for a while he was offering me something important but I know better now." And so he talked himself out of it. If he did that, I am sure the day came when he laughed at himself for his youthful naivete. His heart was hardened, and he went on to be nothing but a man of the world, soon losing all the fineness of his character and his personality. He had stood face-to-face with the possibilities of life, and said no to them.

But perhaps I do know what happened, after all. There is a section of the Gospel of Mark that has always fascinated me. It is found in the fourteenth chapter. Mark, in the course of telling the story of our Lord's journey to the cross, suddenly interjects two verses that seem to have nothing to do with the context at all, but which are reported only in Mark. In chapter 14, verse 51, as Jesus was led away by the soldiers to Pilate's judgment seat, Mark suddenly says,

"...and a young man followed him with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked."

Three things are most significant here: it was a young man; he was following Jesus; and he had nothing on but a linen cloth. I think I know that young man's name. It was Mark. This is his own story and this is why it appears only in Mark's gospel. Some think it was Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Some say it might have been Saul of Tarsus. Who knows? I think it was Mark.

But I know this. The Lord is dealing with some here---young men, young women, older men, older women.

He is saying to you, "You have a good personality. Your friends like you. They enjoy you. You have a clean record. You have never done anything out of line. You have never shamed your parents or yourself. You have the possibilities of fame and fortune, of power and position, within you, but these things will never satisfy you. One thing you lack. You need a King. You need an Authority. You need a God to whom you can give yourself, who will master you, possess you. You can never properly exercise authority unless you are under authority, first. If you surrender yourself to him, he will make you reign. He will crown you with life---eternal life."

What do you say to that King? I don't know what he is saying to you first. I don't know the immediate thing he is saying. He may be saying to some of you, "First, go and sell what you have." I don't know. Only you know what he is saying about the preliminary. You must ask yourself, "What stands between me and Christ? Whatever it is, get rid of it. Sweep it away. Cut it off. Is it your right hand? Cut it off. Is it your right eye? Pluck it out. Get rid of it. It is too costly. It will keep you from the most important thing in your life. Get rid of it. But above all, come and follow him.

The glorious thing is that the younger you hear this voice of Jesus saying, "Come and follow me," the less you have to get rid of. If you do it young enough it is hardly a chore at all. It isn't painful then. It doesn't hurt like this young man felt it hurting. If you come when you are young, you can say, "Lord, here I am. I don't have much to leave, but what I had is gone. I have left whatever there is, and I have come to you."

I was only ten years old when I came to Christ, just a boy, in a meeting in the Red River Valley of North Dakota. I didn't have much to leave, but what it was, I left, and came to Christ. The next six months was one of the happiest times of my boyhood. I can remember well the fellowship I had with the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, because I wasn't in a strong church where there was training provided, I began to drift. I moved away from North Dakota and got in with a crowd of companions who knew nothing of Christ and his Word. I failed to lay hold of the marvelous possibilities that were mine. But when I was twenty-one Jesus drew me back to himself, and I began to experience again the fulfillment of his promises. Now I can look back across the years and say that he has done what he promised. He has fulfilled, he has realized my life. He has given me eternal life.

What about some of you? Do you hear his voice tonight? Are you ready to say yes to him? Will you yield to your King? Will you own your God and follow your King wherever he wants to lead you---this most exciting, this most magnetic, most compelling Person who ever lived? Will you follow him?

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THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

by Ray C. Stedman

We want to study a subject which we have too seldom spoken on here at Peninsula Bible Church. The subject is baptism---its meaning, its purpose, and whether it really has a place in the life of a believer today. We will examine some pertinent Scripture, and then open the discussion for questions and answers. I'll begin by reading a newspaper account datelined Ipswich, England: "Mrs. Katie Barrett, 90 years old, will be baptised by total immersion at Bethesda Baptist Church here next Sunday. 'I've been pondering this step since I was 18,' she says, 'and now I've made up my mind.'"

This lady took 72 years to decide to be baptized, and I have the feeling that some here are on that road too. That is one of the reasons we have set aside this evening to discuss baptism and what it means. I find that many people have questions about it. There are many groups these days who teach that water baptism is not for the church today. They say that it was merely a symbol which has been done away with, in the full

revelation of the New Testament. This idea is among the questions I would like to touch upon.

The first references to baptism in the New Testament are in connection with the ministry of John the Baptist. Many Baptists consider John to be the founder of the Baptist church. I am not going to argue that point now, but it is noteworthy that he practiced baptism to such an extent that he gained the title, "the Baptist." John baptized down by the Jordan River. People came to him from all over Israel---from Jerusalem, from Galilee, from everywhere. And, as recorded in Matthew's gospel, chapter 3, John said to them,

"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

That passage is important because it marks the difference between symbolic baptism and the real baptism. When we speak of baptism we must remember that we are talking about more than a simple rite which people undergo. This rite of water baptism is but a symbol of something else, and it is this something else which constitutes the real meaning of baptism the reality behind baptism. John has tied together symbol and reality. He says, "I am baptizing you with water as a mark of your repentance from sin, as a sign of your confession of your sins, but this does not complete the meaning of baptism. There is one coming after me who is mightier than I, in fact, one whose sandals I am not even worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

That last phrase, "and with fire," has troubled many. They wonder what John meant, "with the Holy Spirit and with fire." They understand what "Holy Spirit" means but are puzzled by his reference to fire. John makes it clear in the words that he immediately adds, "His winnowing fork is in his hand..." Do you know what a winnowing fork is? We urban dwellers are probably not very well acquainted with it. But this last April when my family and I were traveling up the Nile River, we saw Egyptians winnowing their grain. They had pitchforks in their hands with which they would toss the grain into the air so that the wind would catch the chaff and blow it away. These pitchforks were winnowing forks. John is simply speaking figuratively, portraying Christ as a thresher coming into the world with a winnowing fork by which he is separating chaff from the grain. John says,

"His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear the threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

There is the "fire," and by this John is saying that when Jesus Christ comes into the world he will baptize everybody in it either with the Holy Spirit or with fire---one or the other. Sometimes the phrase, "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire," has been linked with the tongues of fire that sat upon the heads of the disciples on the day of Pentecost. But it seems that John makes very clear here that he is talking about two forms of baptism: (1) that of the Holy Spirit which, of course, first took place on the day of Pentecost; or (2) the baptism of fire which is the judgment of God. Fire is always a symbol of judgment. John is saying, "Look, you have one of two choices. This one who is coming is going to deal with everyone in the world, without exception. I am dealing with only a few here. But he who is coming after me---who knows the hearts of all men and is able to judge what is going on in their thoughts and in their inner lives---he will baptize you either with the Holy Spirit or with fire." By implication John was saying to these people, "Look, now is your chance. If you don't want to be baptized with fire, then confess your sins, and be baptized with water as a symbol of it, so that when he comes your baptism may be that gracious outpouring of the Holy Spirit which perfects and fulfills God's plan for men."

That explains how the rite of water baptism is linked to the reality of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. If you turn to Acts 1:4 you will find that, after the resurrection, at the close of his own ministry, Jesus confirms this link:

And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

In just a few days that promise was fulfilled. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon these disciples and, for the

first time, the body of Christ was formed. That is the purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is to form the body of Christ by introducing every individual believer into that body. Now, admittedly, this is a metaphorical body---not a physical body but a spiritual one. Yet it is a very real body. And all through the rest of the Scriptures you find the apostles speaking of the reality that the church is the body of Christ, the instrument through which the Lord Jesus performs his work. He intends to do so not only now but throughout all eternity.

Another passage of great significance in this connection is in the 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians. There, in verses 12 and 13, the apostle tells us:

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body---Jews or Greeks, slaves or free---and all were made to drink of one Spirit."

That is the reality of which water baptism speaks. "Well," someone says, "if that is the reality, and if we enter into it by faith in Jesus Christ, and if anyone who exercises faith in Jesus Christ is, by that very act, baptized of the Spirit into the body of Christ, then why do we need a symbol anymore? Is it not possible to experience this reality without going through the symbol of water baptism?" The answer is, yes.

There are many who have experienced the reality of being made a member of Christ's body through faith in him, without ever having been baptized. The thief on the cross is a notable example. There was a man hanging beside the Lord Jesus, dying. He saw something in Christ that marked him as different. He saw that the kingship, about which people were mocking, was no joke at all, that here indeed was a king. Here was a man of authority, a man who had power beyond this life. So he spoke these very revealing words: "Lord, when you come into your kingdom, remember me." That is an amazing thing to say to a man who is dying: "when you come into your kingdom..." But he recognized that Jesus was going somewhere, and he said, "When you get there, remember me." And the Lord Jesus said to him, instantly, "Today you shall be with me in paradise." The thief soon died. He had no opportunity to be baptized, yet he was a member of the body of Christ. Therefore, the symbol does not necessarily do anything for you.

Well then, why have the symbol? Primarily, because the Lord commanded it! If you want to read that command you can turn to the last verses of Matthew's gospel. On the same occasion when Jesus referred to the coming baptism of the Holy Spirit, he also said to the disciples:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..."

That is his command to the disciples. They could not baptize with the Holy Spirit; the only baptism they could perform is with water. The command continues:

"...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you..."

One of the things he had just commanded them was to go and disciple the nations and to baptize them. So the disciples were thereby commissioned to teach people to be baptized.

"...and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

That should be enough, shouldn't it? If our Lord asks us to be baptized, and if we desire to obey his command and fulfill his will, then we should do it, whether we understand any more about it or not, because he knows better than we. If he asks us to use this symbol of the reality into which we have entered, then he has a good reason for it, and our part is but to be obedient to the command of Christ. But, the Lord very seldom gives a command like this without an explanation of it somewhere, as we will see.

We do find that the early church practiced baptism. They did not cease simply because the reality had come and they were now baptized with the Holy Spirit. They continued to practice water baptism. In fact, even the

apostle Paul, who was called separately from the other twelve in that dramatic appearance of Christ on the Damascus Road, tells us that when he went to various places and won people to Christ, he baptized them. He baptized certain Corinthians, and he names them for us. He did not baptize all of them; sometimes he did not baptize at all because he found that people were glorying in who had baptized them. Some of them were proudly saying, "Look, I've been baptized by the apostle Paul!" So he said, in writing to them, "I'm glad I didn't baptize any more among you people." Nevertheless he did baptize, and he was himself baptized with water. So the practice of the early church confirms the command and commission of the Lord to practice water baptism.

But that is not all. We learn from other passages something of the reason why the symbol is still required. The church has been given two symbolic rites: baptism, and the Lord's supper. The Lord's supper is but a symbol of an inner reality, just as is water baptism. Yet very few have ever taken the position that the church should not observe the table of the Lord together. All of us who have done so have found that it is very instructive and profitable to take the bread and drink the cup, and to meditate upon their meaning.

Similarly, water baptism has the function of focusing our attention upon the introduction to the Christian faith. It helps us to understand and grasp what is involved in being made a member of the body of Christ, how it cuts us off from the old life we once lived and introduces us to a new atmosphere, a whole new realm of living, so that we enter into a new life. This is what Paul describes in Romans 6 when he says,

"We were buried with Christ by baptism into death [of course, he is really speaking of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but he includes the symbol of water as well] in order that we might rise to walk in newness of life."

Therefore, this is what baptism means. It is your testimony to everyone that you have actually taken, by your inner commitment, the step of renouncing your old life of self-centeredness and, in response to the invitation of the Lord Jesus, having joined yourself to him, you have begun to follow him in the fullness of strength which he provides. Therefore you rise to walk in newness of life.

There is another passage we should look at which has been very helpful to me. Yet it is very seldom commented upon in this connection. It is found in 1 Corinthians 10, where the apostle says to these Corinthians,

"I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptised into [or unto] Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ."

There is ample justification for taking these Old Testament stories of historical incidents and using them to illustrate New Testament truths and spiritual realities. The apostle himself said that all these things happened to Israel as examples, or types, unto us. Here he speaks of the fact that as Israel came out of the land of Egypt they passed under the cloud. Remember that as they went out into the desert a pillar of cloud went before them by day and a pillar of fire at night. Then they came to the Red Sea, the waters parted, and they went through. Paul says that they all did this together and that it identified them with Moses. They were baptized unto Moses, just as today we Christians are baptized unto Christ.

What did he mean by this, "baptized unto Moses"? Here was a mob of unruly people which Moses led out of Egypt, and until they came to the edge of the Red Sea they were nothing but that, a mob. They had no organization, no government; they were simply a mass of people who were following a leader out of bondage, out of slavery, into what they hoped would be freedom. All they had to unite them was the fact they were fleeing from something they did not like. But then they went through the sea and as they came out onto the other side they were no longer a motley mob; they were a unified nation under the leadership of one man. They belonged together; they were made a unit headed by Moses. Moses was their leader; all that Moses stood for, they stood for. From then on Moses was the recognized authority and the spokesman for God unto that people.

The interesting thing is that this is what baptism accomplishes. It unites us to One, it identifies us with the One who is our Leader. It brings us into union with him. Thus this Old Testament picture is a very apt description of the baptism of the Holy Spirit which unites us to the body of Christ.

Now I want to point out something very interesting about this story. These people passed through the Red Sea; but did they get wet? No, they passed through on dry land. And yet, in symbol, they are spoken of as having gone through the sea, which is a picture of the judgment of God. Perhaps that helps us to come to grips with the knotty problem of the proper mode of baptism. How should you be baptized? Should you be immersed? Should you be dunked, as the common saying goes? Is that the proper mode? (All the Baptists will say "Amen.") Or should you be sprinkled, have water poured on the top of your head?

I will barely touch on the problem of infant baptism because I do not think you can find a single verse in the New Testament which even suggests that it is proper. Baptism is an expression of faith by the individual. It cannot, therefore, be practiced by an infant who is incapable of expressing any faith of his own. Only the baptism of believers is authorized in the Bible.

But the question of mode has been a battlefield through the ages. Men have anathematized and stigmatized one another and cut off fellowship over this issue. There is an old and rather tired story of a Presbyterian and a Baptist who were arguing this question. The Presbyterian said, "Tell me this. You're a Baptist. If a man goes into the water up to his knees, is he baptized?" The Baptist said "No he is not." "Well if he goes in up to his waist, is he baptized?" "No, he's not." "If he goes in up to his shoulders?" "No." "Well, suppose he goes in clear up to the top of his head, is he baptized then?" "Yes!" the Baptist said. "Ah," said the Presbyterian, "you see, it's the water on top of the head that counts!"

That simply indicates the foolishness of this kind of an argument. Water is a symbol, and it is a symbol whether there are five drops of it or fifty gallons---it is still a symbol. The quantity of water is not the issue. I was raised in the immersionist tradition and believed firmly and strongly that the only proper way to be baptized was to be put completely under the water. Yet when I learned to read Greek I found that the Greek New Testament does not tell us whether baptism is by immersion or by sprinkling. The King James Version is very strongly slanted toward immersion, and perhaps the RSV follows it. But in the Greek it is very difficult to tell whether they were immersed or sprinkled or what. I believe that this is designedly so, because God never wants us to focus upon a symbol. All through the Old Testament the children of Israel were constantly being taught not to make too much of the symbol; it is the reality that counts. And those today who try to make issue and to divide people over the mode of practicing this symbol are simply causing schism and division where none is warranted.

To be practical, each individual should decide this issue on the basis of what satisfies him. There is a beautiful picture in either mode. To be immersed is to re-enact beautifully what the Scriptures teach about the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a wonderfully expressive way of saying that you have died with Christ, have been buried with him, and are risen again to walk in newness of life. On the other hand, the sprinkling or pouring of water upon an individual is a beautiful picture of the pouring of the Holy Spirit and of the cleansing of the life that occurs when one is baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, just as the Spirit of God was poured out on the day of Pentecost.

So this is a matter which we must leave where the apostle Paul leaves issues of this nature. About them, in Romans 14, he says, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," and, remember, "Every man stands or falls before his own master." The Plymouth brethren have stated it excellently, "In essentials unity; in doubtful things, liberty; in all things, charity."

Question: What does the word "baptism" actually mean?

Answer: it comes from a Greek word, baptidzo, which means "to dip," "to place into a liquid," to dunk, as we would say. Baptists usually make a great deal of that, because they say that it is the only possible meaning of the term. But, interestingly, the meaning does not include taking out of the liquid again. It just means to put

in. Of course, if you practiced total immersion that way, you'd have to believe in baptism for the dead!

Question: Paul asks two knotty questions in 1 Corinthians 15:29 about baptism on behalf of the dead. Will you comment on them?

Answer: Yes. This is a verse which the Mormons utilize to substantiate their teaching that a person living today can be baptized on behalf of someone who has already died and thus, literally, save them. I have heard Mormons brag about how many people they have saved. One woman said that she had saved more people than Jesus Christ had because she had been baptized for so many. This is obviously a distortion, a twisting of that verse.

Remember that it occurs in the great passage on the resurrection and is part of the proof that Paul is adducing for the fact of the resurrection. There are several good explanations possible for this particular verse. One is that he is talking here about the fact that when we undergo baptism we are recognizing that we are as good as dead in the eyes of God, and that it is the new life that we receive in Christ which makes us alive again in God's sight. We live only in Christ, and that is what is figured by the rite of baptism, as explained in the passage I quoted from Romans 6. We are buried with him by baptism unto death and rise again to walk in newness of life. So what Paul is saying here is that those who are thus baptized are testifying that there is a life after death. This fits in, then, with the theme of the resurrection chapter. He is simply adducing the fact that people are baptized on behalf of those who in reality, in God's sight, are dead. In other words, they are baptized on behalf of their dead former selves. Thus they symbolically portray the reality that they are risen from the dead, with Christ. They are thereby testifying that there is a life after death.

Another explanation is that Paul means that they were filling up the ranks of those believers who had died in Christ. Just as an army needs to have recruits coming along to fill the ranks where men have died, so those who are being baptized on behalf of, or in place of, the dead are thus filling up the ranks of those who have gone on to be with the Lord. So Paul is simply asking why they would do that if there were not going to be a resurrection from the dead. Whatever reasonable explanation satisfies you is acceptable because this is a rather obscure passage. But the main point is very clear. Paul is proving that there is a resurrection from the dead.

Question: If you were baptized as an infant and then have become a believer, is it necessary to be baptized again?

Answer: This is a question that any individual must settle for himself. My personal conviction is that baptism should represent the personal, individual faith of the person himself. Infant baptism could not possibly have done that. Therefore I would say it is necessary to be baptized again.

Question: The entire Lutheran church practices infant baptism. How do they justify it? What text do they base it on?

Answer: This is always a difficult question to answer because there isn't any one text that they use. It is a practice that slowly grew up within the Roman Catholic church. The Lutheran church, of course, broke away from the Catholic church, but in certain areas Martin Luther and the other reformers carried over intact some of their old teachings. The Catholic church developed this idea from a concept that arose in the early church that it was necessary to reproduce in some way the Jewish mark of circumcision. Among the Jews circumcision identified a male child as belonging to the nation. One of the problems of Catholicism is that they have never quite been able to get away from the legalism and the shadows of the Old Testament. Thus they have carried much of the rites and ritual of the Old Testament over into the New. This is where they get the priesthood and the altar--things which are never part of the New Testament picture.

One of the ideas they carried over was circumcision. Yet Paul's epistles state so plainly that circumcision is not necessary for believers today, that they came to the conclusion that baptism was to be substituted. Since babies were circumcised in Jewish ritual it followed that babies were to be baptized. And the idea was thus propounded that this identified them with the chosen people, the church, and that if a baby were not baptized he could not be a part of the church. That is why the Catholic church has always insisted that babies be baptized immediately upon birth, and that if they die without baptism they go into some obscure region called

limbo. Much of this was carried right over into Lutheranism and also into some of the Reformed Churches. This is how the practice of infant baptism arose, but it has no grounding in the actual teaching of the New Testament.

I hope this has answered your questions and put the issue right where it belongs. Baptism does have meaning. It is a witness, a testimony to the world, that you have moved into a new life with Jesus Christ. Just as a wedding ring is a continual symbol to people of a choice you once made, so baptism remains a symbol for all the world to see, that you have cut yourself off from the old life in Egypt and moved into the life of fellowship with the New Moses, our living Lord.

Catalog No. 278

THE WHOLE STORY

by Ray C. Stedman

I suppose there is no instrument of our day more awesome to common ordinary people than the great electronic computers which have made possible the exploration of space. We are very fortunate to have in our congregation a man who has been instrumental in developing the electronic computer, Dr. Gerhard Dirks, who is the inventor of the memory circuits of the computers. Dr. Dirks tells me that the computer is but a faint imitation of the human brain but that it operates very similarly to the brain, though it can do very much less than a brain can. In fact, if the capacity of the human brain were to be reproduced by computers, it has been estimated that one computer capable of doing what the brain does would fill a twenty-story building. But all of that is crammed into each of our heads right now. That demonstrates the amazing ability of God.

The human brain is relatively puny and incapable of assimilating a great deal of information, especially tending to lose the large scene. We can concentrate on small sections of human knowledge but when we try to encompass the whole range, we tend to blow a fuse. At least I do. Our brains are better adapted to the microscope than to the telescope. What I am saying is put much more briefly and perhaps better in the familiar proverb, "We are so close to the trees that we cannot see the forest." This is true oftentimes of Christians and their experience. We tend to concentrate on sections of the Christian life and lose sight of the whole story, the great purpose and drive of God in our individual lives as well as in history. Therefore we need a miniaturizing process, a condenser, that puts revealed truth in brief capsule form. It is the way human beings are constructed, and since the Bible is the book that goes with man and thus explains us, it is not surprising to find passages in the Bible that are miniaturized statements of great encompassing truths; capsulated expressions of truth. John 3:16 is one. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." That puts it all in one brief statement. And the verse we are to look at now does the same thing. It is a miniaturized statement of great and wonderful truths. It occurs in the ninth chapter of 2 Corinthians, in the midst of a passage in which Paul is talking about money, collections, offerings---very mundane elementary things such as that. In the midst of it comes the eighth verse:

"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."

There the story of the Christian faith is reduced to one sentence. Some of you perhaps, like myself, have memorized that from the King James version:

"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

Notice that the apostle begins where we should always begin in our thinking about Christianity: with the power of God. "God is able," he says. There is nothing more evident today than the present weakness of the church. I am glad to see encouraging signs of renewal occurring here and there throughout the church, but in many places and in very many ways the church is exceedingly weak, and it is weak because it has forgotten or lost

sight of the power of God. That is the basic problem with the church. It has only one kind of power it can operate on, and that is God's power. If it loses that, it is reduced to the same power the world or any worldly organization has: the power of numbers, the power of political maneuvering, or the power of moral constraint. But it will lack the great power that makes the church like that described in the Song of Solomon as "fair as the sun, bright as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners." It is only the power of God that can do that kind of thing.

This verse is declaring that we must begin our thinking there: "God is able." It is easy for us to see God's power in nature. I stood this weekend beside a mountain lake high in the Sierras on a bright moonlit night and looked out at the lake with the moon shining on its waters. I was surrounded by frowning peaks which were reflected in the waters of the lake. I was moved by the beauty and power of God in nature. How mightily God has wrought in the universe. I thought of those words in the opening chapter of Hebrews that say of the Lord Jesus that he upholds all things by the word of his power. The great universe is sustained in its complexity by the power of God at work. We sing, How Great Thou Art and we are singing of the power of God at work in nature.

But when Paul wrote to these Corinthians he wrote about the power of God to supply material things they needed: money, and material prosperity, whatever it took to get God's work done. He made a very practical application of the power of God. It was the power of God to supply. Perhaps we need a Poor People's March in our day if for no other reason than to remind us in rich America that there are many people yet, many of them Christians, who still desperately need the power of God to supply. We oftentimes take for granted the supply of our material needs and we need to be reminded that it, too, comes from God, and can be taken away from us as easily as it has been given. We must not forget that it is God who gives seed to the sower, and bread to the baker, and makes possible the sustenance of life at any level. It all rests upon the power of God at work.

But I am often surprised to find many Christians who do not believe in God's power to do other things. They do not say this, but it is reflected in their attitudes and comments. There are half a dozen verses in the New Testament that use the phrase, "God is able." It is helpful to think about what is stated in those verses. There is that well-known one in the 24th verse of Jude, "God is able to keep you from falling." I wonder how many Christians really believe that God is able to keep you from falling? I find a number who seem to reflect the attitude that God is not able to do this, that there are circumstances they can get into from which he is not able to deliver them and that there are pressures that are too great for them to bear and God cannot help them. This is reflected in what they say. "I can't help myself, I have to do this thing." "I lose my temper and I can't help it." Or, "I get subjected to pressure and after awhile I can't stand it any more. I give up." Which means, of course, that they do not believe that God is able to keep them from falling. But the Scripture says he is. He is able to keep us from falling.

Then there is the verse in Romans 14:4 about other Christians. I find that it is quite possible to believe that God is able to keep me from falling, but I sometimes have great doubts about you. Often it is what the other person is about to do that troubles us. Well, that is why this verse is given. It says we are not to judge our brother who stands. like us, before God, because, the verse goes on to say, "he will be upheld, for the Master [or God] is able to make him stand." Did you ever read that verse? "God is able to make him stand." That means when you are praying for someone else and are bothered about his weakness, remind yourself of this. God is able to make him stand. He doesn't need your criticism. That is the suggestion of the verse. Don't run him down, don't criticize. He may need helpful brotherly counsel, or encouragement, or even rebuke, if given in "the spirit of meekness," as Paul says in Galatians. But he does not need your carping judgment, your cutting remarks, your sarcasm. God is able to make him stand. I like Phillip's rendering of that verse. He says, "...God is well able to transform men into servants who are satisfactory." That's putting it well. We have assurance that God has ability to move in the lives of others, as well as ourselves.

Then there is that very wonderful verse in Ephesians 3:20, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that is at work in us." There is the power of God to excel, to exceed whatever we can think. Isaiah said God's thoughts are not like our thoughts, nor his ways like our ways. We are so limited! If we could only understand this. We are limited in our concepts about life, the world, and the universe. We tend to think that God operates like we do, therefore we get restless,

disturbed and upset when God does things quite differently. When he chooses to operate in ways that we do not understand we begin to assail him and to criticize, even to become atheistic or agnostic and say, "Perhaps there is no God." But it is only because God is operating in ways beyond us. God says he will do this.

But do you get the point of the verse? He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. Even our greatest imaginings will be excelled as we wait upon God to work it out his way. Now if we insist on doing things our way, he will let us. One of the most dangerous things about Christian faith is that if you insist on having your way, God will let you have it. But it will be the sorriest day of your life when you have gotten what you wanted. But if you let him have his way, he will work it out exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think. Remember that when God says things, he means them. He will do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. He will excel our dreams, even our imaginations, such is his wisdom, his power, his might, and his ability to act.

Then there is another verse, in Philippians 3:21, that has encouraged me often. We are told, concerning the body and its resurrection, that God is able to subdue all things unto himself. I like that, because I get troubled at times with people who resist the will of God and who are not even Christians. It is bad enough when Christians resist the will of God, but sometimes we are frightened by men who renounce God, who say, "There is no God," and who fling out their chests and assert that they have the ability to do whatever they want to do. Men of power, men with armies and in control of governmental machinery, the Hitlers, Stalins, and others; dictators strutting in pompous pride, declaring that they are a law unto themselves. The trouble with many of us is, we take them at their word. We think they can do it because in certain limited ways they can demonstrate it. But we forget that God is able to subdue all things unto himself. Nothing has encouraged me more than the words of the Lord Jesus as he stood before Pontius Pilate. When he refused to answer a question, Pilate said to him, "Do you not know that I have power to crucify you?" And Jesus looked him right in the eye, and said, "You could have no power except it be given you from above." That has been a great help to me, because it reminds me that above all the imperial processes is the might and wisdom of God.

As the book of Proverbs puts it, "The king's heart is in God's hand, and he turns it whithersoever he will." He is able to subdue all things unto himself. So we need not fear when the tyrannical powers of earth are loosed and stride up and down the earth in military might, uttering pompous threats against faith. God is able to subdue all things unto himself. All these verses give us a glimpse of a vast reservoir of exhaustless, limitless, immeasurable power that is available to us in God. Every bit of it is behind the promises of God. He is able to do what he says. That is what encouraged Moses in Egypt. He believed in One who was able to fulfill what he said. And that is where we stand today. We are to look at the power of God.

Now the apostle moves on in 2 Cor. 9:8 to give us the channel by which this power comes to us: the provision of God. "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance..." "Every blessing in abundance," or as the King James version puts it, "all grace shall abound." That is the literal rendering of the Greek. The word is "grace." What is grace? Remember the small boy who was asked in Sunday school, "What is grace?" He thought the man said, "grease," and replied, "It's what makes the face shine." He was right, because grace does make the face shine---better than grease. Grace is a general term for all that God is, made available to us. It is God's character, God's virtue, all God's Being made available to us. Another way of describing grace is to call it the life of Jesus Christ in us. Paul says, "For I bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus in order that the life of Jesus might be made visible in my mortal flesh."

I was struck by a recent report of a conversation that occurred when a friend of mine was visiting Major Ian Thomas' Bible School in the north of England, at Capernwray. This gentleman and Major Thomas were standing together in the hall of the great castle, engaged in talk. A German pastor, who had just arrived with a group of young people from Germany, suddenly came up to the two men and interrupted the conversation. Without a word of introduction he turned to Major Thomas and said, "Major, I'd like to ask you a question. Tell me, what is your purpose in life?" Without flickering an eyelid, Major Thomas replied, "My purpose is to make the invisible Christ visible. And yours, sir?" The man's chin dropped and tears came to his eyes and began to roll down his cheeks. He stood there without saying a word. Major Thomas opened the door of his study and said, "Step in here a moment," and within five minutes he had led the man to Christ.

"To make the invisible Christ visible," that is God's grace. The life of Jesus Christ in us, supplied to us, living

through us, ministering to our every need, that is grace, the glory of Christianity. If your Christianity does not have that note in it, it is a false Christianity. That is what Christian faith is all about. "Christ in you, the hope of glory," says the apostle Paul to the Colossians. Jesus Christ proposes to clothe his life with your body and live it again in this twentieth century as he lived it in the first century. He will, in terms of your circumstances, be what he was 1900 years ago on the hills of Galilee, but he will be it where you are. That is Christianity, that is God's grace. As Paul says in Ephesians as he prays for the people of God (and these were ordinary people like you and me: bankers, lawyers, shopkeepers, housewives, and servants; all the motley array of people from an ordinary Roman city), "I pray that you may be a body wholly filled and flooded with God himself." That is God's grace, and it is for every Christian. Grace means all that it takes to meet whatever pressures you are under. That is God's provision.

Grace has one peculiar mark about it. It is a gift. It cannot be purchased, it cannot be worked for. It is unmerited. That is the problem. That is why a great many Christians do not know anything about the power of God, because that power comes only through the channel of grace. They keep trying to bargain for God's power, but if you bargain for it, then it is no longer grace. To bargain with God is like turning off the tap. You cannot experience the power of God if you are trying to earn it. Paul, writing to the Romans, says, "It is either grace or works. And if it is works, then it is no more grace; if it is grace, then it is no more works." One cancels out the other. This is why many Christians cannot get hold of the power of God because they say, "Lord, if I do this for you, will you do that for me? If I am faithful to teach Sunday school, or to attend church every Sunday, surely you ought to take care of me so that I won't get sick." But that cancels out grace. God's power cannot come by any other channel than God's grace.

This tendency to bargain is revealed in people's complaints. They say, "Why should this happen to me?" with the implication, "I've been living the kind of life that deserves more than this. God shouldn't do this kind of thing to me." That shows they have been trying to bargain for the grace of God but you cannot do it. You can have all God's power freely if you do not try to bargain for it. He will give it to you, but you cannot buy it at any store. You can have all you need if you will just take it. If you present yourself and say, "Lord, I'm not much, but here I am, and all I am I put at your disposal," then he will take the greatness of his Being, displayed in many, many ways, and put it at your disposal, saying, "Whatever you need you can take." That is what grace does.

The apostle moves on now to the program of God: how this provision works out, "So that you may always have enough of everything." That is God's program. That is the way he expects his people to operate, to have enough of everything. God is no miser. God does not deal out so much patience, so much love, giving only a limited supply. He does not put you on rations and say, "Sorry, you can only have a little bit, there's not quite enough." No, you can have all it takes, any time. He will give you exactly what you need, but never too much.

See how this is pictured in a dozen ways throughout the Scriptures. There is the manna in the wilderness. Every day it came, just enough for the people, but never too much. never enough for the next day (except on Friday, when there came enough for two days). Remember the widow's cruse of oil. There was just a bit in the bottom of the vessel, but Elisha said, "Pour it out and make me a cake." When she poured it out there was as much left as there was when she began. It kept pouring for weeks and months, never filling up the vessel, but never lowering it either, until the famine ended and then the oil stopped. That is the way God gives, just enough, every day, enough. The bread and fishes that our Lord multiplied were enough for everyone and a little bit left over, but everyone had all they needed.

This is what God wants to teach us, here. You do not need to expect a great surge of power coming through you so that you glow like a TV screen. No, as God said, "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." Whatever the pressures, there will be adequate strength to meet it. There is no limit in time. "Always," he says, you may always have enough. No matter whether you are old or young or middle-aged, no matter whether it is day or night or in between, always. There are no limits in time, and there is no limit in amount. You shall have enough. No matter what the demand is, no matter how great the pressure is, you shall have enough of grace. And there is no limit in variety, "for everything." It does not make any difference what the kind of a trial may be, whether it is material, spiritual, social, psychological, or personal. Whatever it is, there is enough at any time, always available.

Then notice how he concludes with the great purpose of God. What is all this for, in your life? Well, it is that "You may provide in abundance for every good work." In other words, that you may be engaged in work that blesses, strengthens, and helps others. That is what God is doing in this world. In Ephesians Paul says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus [made new again in Christ Jesus] unto good works..." That is his ultimate purpose. So many Christians fail to get this. They think that the blessings of the Christian life are designed to make them happy. They always want a good feeling. That is why some people come to church. They only want a good feeling, something that makes them feel a little better as they go out, and they are satisfied if it has done that for them. Some want a riot of emotionalism, to work up a sort of religious "jag" once a week, which will serve to carry them until the next week. But this is not what God is aiming at. It is that you may be involved in doing good works, as the Lord Jesus, who "went about doing good." That was his purpose. That will involve speaking the truth, and practicing love, self-denying love, toward another. There is the formula to change the world. You young people are looking for something to change this generation and I don't blame you. Well, there it is: practicing love and speaking the truth; doing good as you go about everywhere. God has equipped you for it. God's call to a piece of work is his guarantee that you will have whatever it takes to perform it. So go to it.

My question to you as we close is this: Is God obtaining his purpose with you? Is it all working out to good works in your life, works that help others, works that minister to the needs of others? That is what God is after. Or are you denying him his right to use your body for his purposes in the world? In Eternity magazine, this month's issue, there is a very helpful editorial commenting upon the fact that in the early church there was a group of people who called themselves, the Parabolani. That comes from a Greek word, *parabolomai*, which means "to throw yourself alongside someone, or something." It is best translated in English, to risk, or, to hazard; to gamble, even. This is what the Parabolani of the early church were: they were men and women who risked themselves. They formed a group, agreeing together to move into any place of danger or risk, to serve and help others. Whenever anyone was sick with a dangerous disease, they would go and minister to them. When they learned of men who were in dungeons, dangerous criminals, they would risk their lives to help them, to do something for them. In 252 A.D., when the city of Carthage, in North Africa, was subjected to a plague that swept through the city and decimated the population, bodies were left lying all over the streets. No one would bury them, and because they were rotting and decaying in the sun, the plague was spreading throughout the city. The Bishop of Carthage called upon the Christians of Carthage to be Parabolani and to risk their lives to bury these bodies. They did this and the city of Carthage was spared. The plague was finally arrested because the Christians dared to risk their lives.

That is what God is talking about. The noun, *parabolani*, does not occur in the New Testament but there is a verb form used when Paul writes to the Philippians about Epaphroditus, saying he "paraboleuomai-ed" himself, risked his life, for you when he was sick. That is what God is calling for today. Where are the Parabolani of our day? Where are those who will risk themselves, hazard themselves for the cause of Jesus Christ? I have been grieved this last month by the fact that we had to close our Primary church because no one would risk himself to take care of it during the summer months. We have vacant places in the teaching ministry of the church because there are some who will not risk themselves to teach and instruct young people in the ways of Christ and truth. There is ministry outside the church unto a sick and hungry world, waiting for Parabolani who will make themselves available to God and say, "Lord, here I am. You equip me, give me everything I need. There is then no excuse why I cannot be available to you for this need."

Where are the Parabolani? After all, do we not sing?

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.
Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

That is God's call, is it not? To be *Parabolani* in these days, ready to risk, to hazard ourselves. "He that

throws away his life, " Jesus says, "for my sake, shall find it; but he who tries to save it, he who hangs on to it, refuses to risk it, will lose it."

Catalog No. 280
2 Cor. 9:8

THE MAN GOD USES

by Ray C. Stedman

In discussing our subject the term, man, is used in a generic sense which includes women as well. Man or woman, there is no respect of persons with God. God delights to use anyone, boy or girl, man or woman, who makes himself available to him. I suspect that if we investigated we would find in most hearts here a basic hunger to be used of God. If you have been a Christian for any length of time you have experienced something of this and you know the joy of it, the glory of it, the sheer excitement of it. There is nothing quite like the sense of having been a channel of divine activity, of having been used to do God's work. I suspect that there is a hunger in your heart to be used of God not merely occasionally, but consistently. And to be used, not despite yourself, as sometimes happens (for the Scripture tells us that God even uses the devil, so if you are resting upon that you are in pretty poor company), but to be used with full acquiescence and acceptance of God's program for you. Doubtless you desire to be used to heal, to make right, to restore, to break down middle walls of participation, to unite that which is shattered and fragmented, to deliver from oppressions, from bondage and enslavement, to enlighten and open eyes, to illuminate reality, to dispel mists, illusions and visions, and to empower, enrich, fulfill, and intensify. All these are descriptions of the work God is here to do, and what he will use you to do if you are available to him. It is exactly what God proposes to do with each one of us. and thus to be used is what gives meaning and purpose to life. Without this, the best we can do results in a sense of deadness. meaninglessness and pointlessness. We might give a most impressive display of energy, vitality, and activity, but when we get to the end we shall have to ask ourselves, What's been the point of it all? In the day of the judgment of the believer before God he may say to us, "What you did was interesting, and active, but you missed the point." Thus I suspect that with many of us there is a very deep desire to be used of God. I confess, for my own part, that I will be quite content if it could be written on my tombstone what I once saw on another's, "He was used of God."

Spiritual maturity, becoming grown up as a Christian, is nothing more nor less than to be made ready for consistent use by the Spirit of God. When you have reached that place it will be marked by certain signs, which are unconsciously revealed to us by the apostle Paul in a well-known passage from the first chapter of Romans: I want you to know, brethren, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish: so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. It should be quite apparent that the apostle is not drawing a deliberate self-portrait. He does not intend to talk about himself or what kind of a man he is; he is simply breathing out to these Roman Christians, many of whom he has never met, a longstanding desire on his part to come to the capital of the Empire to visit them and to have a ministry among them. But in the process of doing this he unconsciously reveals the qualities of the man or woman that God uses. This we will look at together. You are familiar with the three common divisions of this text, the three "I am's" of verse 14, 15, and 16. First, "I am under obligation [or as the Old Version puts it, "I am a debtor" both to Greeks and to barbarians. "

Here the apostle is breathing out his desire to be used to reach others. He is the man for others; he is under compulsion to travel incessantly to reach "both Greeks and barbarians" (or as we would put it in our modern terminology, both the squares and the hippies), "the wise and the foolish " (the eggheads and the hopheads). It does not make any difference what branch of society you are considering, the apostle says, I have a sense of obligation to any of them. I am under compulsion to reach them and to help them and change them. You see

the beating of his heart for other people. What does this all mean? We read these verses quite wrongly at times. We tend to read them as though he had in view the needs of these Greeks, with their culture and their refinement, and also the barbarian world with its primitive conditions, its lack of understanding and education and, seeing the need deep in each heart, he is desiring to meet it out of compassion. We hear much these days of the humanistic appeal, the need to help people who are in trouble. But we read this quite wrongly if we read it thus. This was not what drew the apostle out to people. These words reveal something quite different. They reveal a man in whom the power of self has been broken.

The principle by which we normally live our lives, that is, "What's in it for me?" is a question which had lost its meaning for the apostle Paul. He was no longer asking himself, What's in it for me?, he was no longer concerned about what he got out of life, but he was breathing out a hunger to be involved, to be poured out, for the life of someone else. He was essentially and primarily the man for others. Selfishness grips your heart as it does mine. It is hard to break its grip. We find ourselves inevitably and instinctively relating everything to what it is going to do to us, and what we will get out of it. As one Christian honestly put it, I lived for myself, for myself alone, For myself and none beside, Just as if Jesus had never lived And as if he had never died. Unfortunately that is descriptive of much Christian living. There you have it. That is life as we know it in these mid twentieth-century days. We live for ourselves; what we want and hope to get.

But how different is the spirit of the apostle. He longs to risk his life, his health, and his fortune for the sake of others. He was most serious about it. You can see how seriously he took it in the eleventh chapter of 2 Corinthians, Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the cities, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. That is describing a man in whom the power of self has been broken. He no longer cares what happens to him, he is ready to risk anything, hazard anything, in order that he might discharge his debt to barbarian and to Greek alike.

It was not always so with this man. There was a time, he tells us, when he, too, lived for self-advantage. He counted up his resources to himself and found there were four things going for him. First was his ancestry. In the eyes of God Paul felt that was a great advantage. He was born a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin. He had the right pedigree. Then too, there was his orthodoxy which he felt also gave him the right to claim the favor of God. He belonged to the strictest party of the Jews, the Pharisees, the fundamentalists. He was a member of the group that took the word of God most seriously and interpreted it most literally. Notice that in these things he was not trying to find favor in the eyes of men, but in the eyes of God. Even before his conversion Paul knew that no life is worth a snap of the finger if it is not somehow related to God. So these are the things he felt counted with God: his ancestry, his orthodoxy. And then, his activity. He says he was a persecutor of the church. When this little cult of the Nazarenes arose around the troublemaker from Galilee, named Jesus, and threatened the Hebrew faith and the teachings of Moses, Paul was not merely content to tut-tut about it and wring his hands. He organized a band of patriots and moved out with soldiers to stamp them out. He was active in the persecution of the church, and he thought in all good conscience that God would be pleased with that kind of activity. Finally, he took pride in his morality. He was blameless, he says, before the Law. Whenever the Law condemned him he faced up to it and brought a sacrifice, and thus cleared up his conscience. He tried to walk upright and just before the Law, and he had a clear conscience in that respect. He thought these things ought to have brought God right over to his side.

But, he tells us, there came a night in the city of Damascus when they let him down over the wall in a basket. For the rest of his life he looked back to that event as the time when God began to teach him the most important lesson in his life. He had marshalled all his resources, all his human abilities, all the brilliance of his mind and the power of his educated intellect, to the task of reaching the Jews in Damascus for Christ, and that night it all came crashing down around his feet. He found himself hunted and hounded like a criminal, driven out of the city. and finally let over the wall in a basket. What a grinding humiliation for a man of proud spirit, as was this man! He went up to Jerusalem, and the disciples there wouldn't have anything to do with him. He went into the temple and the Lord ordered him out of Jerusalem and told him to leave immediately. He then did the

hardest thing on earth to do; he went down to his home town and lived there in humility and obscurity for about five years. No one heard anything about the mighty apostle Paul. "Whatever happened to Paul?" people were asking. "He was converted in such a dramatic way on the Damascus road, and we thought something great would come of it, but who's heard of Paul lately?" But Paul was learning what he expresses in Philippians 3. There he says, "I learned that the four things which I thought would greatly impress God were useless. They were nothing but garbage, pure dung, manure! I learned to count them as refuse, and to realize that in Jesus Christ I had everything I needed. If I would quit trying to live for myself, but give myself to him, to accomplish his goals, all that he is would be made available to me, and I could have everything I needed for whatever he wanted done." That is the secret he learned and that is what finally broke the grip of selfish concern in his life and turned him into "the man for others." He tells us himself how it works. "The love of Christ," he says, "constrains me." It drives me out, it constrains.

Now you see why I say we read these verses wrongly? It was not the need of the Greeks and the barbarians that drew him out. I confess, knowing my own heart, that I could read the most heart-rending stories of need in human lives and remain calloused and unmoved. Such is the selfishness of the human heart, and you well know this is true. You too can be exposed to terrible need, and if it makes too much demand upon you your temptation is to turn and look the other way, to pretend it isn't there, instead of responding. Well then, what is the answer? It is not the presentation of horrible need, the hideous suffering of humanity, that will move us to act, but we must find, as this man did, that the power of self can be broken only as we see the hunger of the heart of Jesus Christ. The love he awakens in us for him creates a desire to satisfy his hunger to have all men brought to him, Greek and barbarian alike. It is what he wants, that makes the difference. But one thing melts the hardness and selfishness of our hearts, and that is love for Jesus Christ.

I agree with John R.W. Stott who, at the Pastors' Conference at Mt. Hermon this past January, pointed out that the primary motive for evangelism is not the need of men, but a spirit of jealousy for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, a hunger that he might have all that is rightfully his. That is what jealousy is, an intolerance of rivals. There is a wrong jealousy based upon a wrong relationship. We have no right to be jealous of those with whom we do not have a proper relationship. But if a wife and husband give themselves to one another they have established a relationship. If a rival intrudes into that, the wife or husband has a right to be jealous because the other one has already given himself. It is that kind of jealousy Paul is speaking of when he says he is jealous for Christ. He says he desires that Christ might have that which belongs to him, which is his by right of sacrifice. As he sees the face of Jesus Christ and the hunger of his heart to have from every tribe and nation men and women to belong to him, this great apostle says, "I don't care how dirty they are, how filthy they may be, how proud or arrogant they may be in their intellectual conceit, I want to reach them for Christ's sake, that he might be satisfied and have that which belongs to him." It is not the message of the hymn, *Will there be any stars in my crown?* I hate that hymn. It is so pettishly selfish.

Or that other hymn which I must confess I don't like either, though it is a favorite of many, *O That Will Be Glory For Me*. Who cares about glory for you or for me? No, there is another hymn I think is much more appropriate. Must I go, and empty handed Must I meet my Savior so? Not one soul with which to greet him, Must I empty handed go? Must I appear before him with nothing to show for what he has been to me, what he is through me; no word of witness, no changed lives, no transformed attitudes on the part of others because of what I have been, by his grace? Must I go and empty handed be? That is the primary thrust to evangelism. Will he have the full glory due to his name? That is what ought to constrain Christians. Here is a man who is constrained by the love of Christ. His heart is captured, his emotions are moved. That is an essential quality in the man or woman that God consistently uses, a constrained heart. Look at the next quality. ...so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. "Not only are my emotions moved by love for the Lord Jesus," says Paul, "but my will is engaged as well. I am not only drawn, I am ready to act." I love this, because it emphasizes a time to stop talking and start doing.

I read years ago of D.L. Moody who said to a man on one occasion, "Why don't you try doing so-and-so?" The man replied, "I've been aiming to do that for a long time." In his blunt way, Moody replied, "Well, brother, it's about time you quit aiming and started firing." It is not enough to talk, to think, or to dream. There must come moments of action. That is what Paul says. I'm ready to go, I'm eager to preach to you. It is action that turns belief into faith. You haven't exercised faith if you have simply believed the truth. You have exercised faith only when you have acted on the truth you have believed. In Hebrews 11 we read, "Noah

believed God and built an ark, to the saving of his household by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith." That is faith. Noah believed and acted. Abraham was called and obeyed. It is not enough to have wonderful desires and wonderful dreams of being used of God-act on them. Some of you have been talking a long time about inviting a friend to one of the outreach meetings this summer. Don't wait any longer, act. Some of you young people have been thinking about inviting a friend to the coffee house. Well, don't wait, act! Invite a lonely person to dinner. Move out! Manifest an eagerness, an ardency of spirit to fulfill what God lays upon your heart. That is the quality of faith, and without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith, mighty faith the promise sees And looks to God alone: Laughs at impossibilities And cries, "It shall be done." That is the second quality of the man God uses; commitment. Paul here is committed to act. He not only is constrained. but he is committed. Finally, the third thing, he is not ashamed of the gospel. He has reached the intelligent conclusion that the gospel has no rivals, that it can do what nothing else can do and therefore there is no need to be ashamed because it is pure. undiluted, undiminished power!

And not merely power, but God's power, resurrection power, a unique kind of power which nothing in the world can rival. There is nothing like it anywhere. To me, this is the missing note above all else which we lack in our present life in the world today. Christians have forgotten that the gospel is absolutely unique. It does not borrow anything from any human source: it does not borrow from psychology, from history, from philosophy, from science, or from anything. It is an absolutely unique force. If Christians are not declaring this, there is no other body in the world capable of proclaiming it. That is why Paul says, I am not ashamed of it. If anything could make him ashamed it would be the city of Rome.

Rome sneered at the Christian story. These proud Roman citizens laughed at this fantastic tale of a man named Jesus who lived in an obscure Roman province, and who was supposedly raised from the dead after the procurator Pontius Pilate had put him to death. It was absurd to these practical hard-headed Romans. Rome ruled in haughty power as mistress of the earth. Rome was proud of its roads which ran throughout the whole empire and made trade and commerce possible everywhere. Rome was proud of its culture with its beautiful cities and its wonderful statues and art and music. Rome was proud of its conquests, of the fact that its armies were unbeatable. For over 1,000 years a kind of uneasy peace lay over the world called Pax Romana, the Roman Peace, because of the power and might of Rome's invincible armies. But with all this display of power there were a lot of things Rome could not do. Rome was powerless when it came to freeing the slaves that abounded in the Empire. Half of the Roman Empire were slaves, and Rome could do nothing about that. Romans were seemingly powerless to curb their own lusts.

At the close of this very chapter of Romans there is a terrible description of what their lusts led them to do. The seeds of disintegration were already manifest in Roman society, which would ultimately bring the whole thing crashing down around their ears. Romans were absolutely helpless when it came to vanquishing their fears. They lived in terror; terror of the barbarian hordes that were around the borders of the Empire; terror of death; and of nature. They were constantly engrossed in rank superstition because of their fears. They were powerless to cure or heal the inner agonies of their spirit. You only need to read the literature of that day to know their poignant cry for help against the meaninglessness of life. They were unable to awaken hope, and on tombstone after tombstone you find written in Latin, No Hope. But all these needs the gospel meets. That is the uniqueness of it. Here is our world today, like Rome, powerless amid its display of power. It can do so many things of a technological nature, but one thing it cannot do: it cannot heal a human heart, it cannot awaken hope, and it cannot unite that which is fragmented and divided. It has no power in this realm. But when you have been used as an instrument of that kind of power, beside that the exercise of earthly power is dull and drab indeed.

Dr. Howard Hendricks from Dallas has been with us here for a few days. He was telling me about his visit to Campus Crusades Headquarters. He met there certain Christian young men who were wrestlers. They had joined a special athletic team that Campus Crusades was sending out in witness around the country. These men were top wrestlers and had been engaged in five or six matches in the Los Angeles area, matched against some of the top wrestlers from the colleges and universities around. They had won five out of six matches and had tied the sixth one. Mr. Hendricks was speaking to one of these young men, a champion wrestler. It is a thrill to be a champion in any sport, it is a good feeling, a great feeling. This young man said to Howard Hendricks, "You know, I've come to see that wrestling is just peanuts. Wrestling isn't important. I'm not a wrestler-- I'm

a witness." By those words he was expressing this fact: there is nothing more exciting than to have the power of the gospel flowing through you to change someone else's life. Look at what Paul says about this, in closing. It is universal in its appeal. It is for Jews and for Greeks: these were the two divisions of the world from the Jewish point of view. Anyone, anywhere in the world, is a proper subject for this gospel. It is designed for all men. It is not provincial, it is not national; it is designed for men everywhere.

Further, it is wholesome in its results. Notice what the result is salvation. Perhaps we do not like that word because it has been so badly abused. We think of salvation as some kind of religious piousness; a kind of religious formaldehyde in which people are steeped, which has no attraction whatsoever. But that is a wrong use of the term. Salvation is nothing less than wholeness. It is to be a whole person, a person who is restored to what he ought to be, and what God intended him to be. That is what is the glorious thing about this gospel. It is not creating plaster saints who walk around in separation from the common, mundane things around them; it is creating people who live, who love to live, and to live at the heart of life, yet who live well-adjusted, wholesome lives, at peace with themselves and at peace with God.

Notice also that it is mighty in its nature. It is power, says the apostle, living power, a living force. It is not some kind of a peace tablet dropped into the heart which gives a momentary comfort. No, no. It is a force that goes to work and keeps on working away, driving you out of yourself, thrusting you on. You can't sleep sometimes because it keeps working on you. You can't run away from it, you can't evade it. It is there, and it keeps pushing and pushing relentlessly, driving you on. It is a living force at work in your life. It is the kind of power that nothing else can equal because it is resurrection power. It works in the midst of death. It works best in a cemetery. If you are living in a cemetery you are a fit candidate for the power of God. Resurrection power works when nothing else will work. Finally, it is simple in its acceptance. It is by faith. By faith! That's all, by believing, by commitment to it. It comes by a man or a woman saying, "I don't understand everything about it, but I've seen enough to know that it's true-I'll follow it anyway." And they do. That commitment of faith to Jesus Christ is the door by which life is opened.

There we have it. Here is the man God uses consistently, continuously: the man who is confident in the power of God, confident that God is at work, confident that he will be at work in his life. Because this is not just for apostles, it is for everyone. Paul said that he was a pattern for everyone of how this Christian life works. The first note of it is that to become confident God is at work, that he can work, does work, and will work, and that he is quite able to do what nothing else can do. Second, here is a man who is constrained, moved, and is motivated, not by the need around him but by the face before him-by the love of the Lord Jesus and the expectation of that day when he will stand at last in his presence and all of his life will be in review. I think it is a salutary thing to think often of that moment. I do. What is the Lord going to say about my life when I stand before him? What is he going to say about yours? How much of it has been self-centered, and how much has been risked, ventured, hazarded for his dear sake?

Finally, because of these two things, the man God uses is a man who is committed, who is eager, who says, "Lord, whatever you want, whenever you want it, I'm ready to follow you." I remember a friend telling me he followed one of these great fruit trucks down the road and on the back of it was a sign that read, "Any load, any place, any time." That is a wonderful motto for Christians. Any load. Lord, any place, Lord, any time. I don't live up to that, but I tell you, I want to, and may God help me to do so. I trust you will join me in that.

THE MAN GOD USES

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Ray C. Stedman

DARING TO BE DIFFERENT

by Ray C. Stedman

I would like to speak to you about daughters. I am regarded as somewhat of an expert in this field, having four daughters of my own. But I want to speak about daring daughters. This is not a revelation of family secrets, nor have I been pressured for equal time by my family. I simply wish to comment on a passage that deals with five daughters of a man named Zelophehad, and thus to learn lessons from the heroines of faith of the Bible.

For a man to have five daughters surely qualifies him as a hero of faith, but it is not the man we shall focus on but his daughters. The word of God does not only present certain men as heroes and leaders of faith, but women as well. In Christ there is neither male nor female, no respect of persons and thus it is equally as possible for a woman to be a warrior of the cross, a conqueror in Christ as any man. We often focus upon the Moseses the Daniels the Davids and Pauls of Scripture, but we need to remember as well the Ruths the Deborahs, the Hannahs the Marys, and the Dorcas; these godly noble women whose lives are models of faith.

In Numbers 27 we meet the five daughters of Zelophehad. They are introduced to us in the first four verses.

Then drew near [to Moses] the daughters of Zelophehad, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, from the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph. The names of his daughters were: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation, at the door of the tent of meeting, saying, "Our father died in the wilderness; he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against the Lord in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away from his family, because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brethren."

There are only two incidents recorded of the decisions which Moses made about civil and family affairs in the governing of the children of Israel as they came out of Canaan. This is one of them, and the other also is connected with the daughters of Zelophehad, found in chapter 36 of Numbers. It is interesting that these five girls are singled out as an example from many incidents unrecorded on the pages of Scripture.

The time of this incident occurred during the wilderness journey, as Israel was coming out of Egypt into the land of Canaan. They were nearing the time of entrance into the land. Moses was now a very old man. He had led the Israelites for forty years of wilderness wanderings. All those who had left the land of Egypt had died, except for Joshua, Caleb and Moses. A whole new generation had arisen and were about to enter the land. They were now anticipating the dividing up of the land. It has always been a thrilling thing to me to see how these people were so confident that God would fulfill his promise of giving them the land that even before they entered it they divided it up among the tribes. That is an example of faith.

In the midst of this division of the land by lots there came to Moses these five daughters of Zelophehad. We learn that their father had died in the wilderness wanderings. There is no mention at all of their mother, so it seems clear that these five girls were left as orphans when their father died. They are disturbed about their threatened loss of inheritance. One other thing is indicated by their names. They come from a very godly family, for you will notice that in each of these names is the syllable "ah." When that appears in a biblical name it is almost always a contraction for the name "Jehovah," the Lord God. So each of these girls had in her name the name of Jehovah which were surely representative of the faith of this family. The name Zelophehad is interesting, too. It means, "protection against fear." What is protection against fear? There is only one thing: faith. Faith is the opposite of fear. Faith is the conqueror of fear. Whenever you are plagued with fears of any kind the answer to them is faith. This is why Jesus said to his disciples again and again, "Fear not, but believe." Faith conquers fear. So it is apparent that these girls had been trained in the matters of faith and had come from a godly family.

Throughout this passage faith is a key note, as it is in any age. Faith is the key note to blessing, the watchword of blessing. No matter whether it is the first century or the twentieth, "without faith," says the Scriptures "it is impossible to please God." This needs to be emphasized today for I find many people who have a struggle with this. Many call me up in the middle of the night to tell me they have difficulty exercising faith for the problems they are going through. They can exercise faith when it has to do with a biblical story. They believe

in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews and that faith conquers many things as in the record there. They can believe that God responds to faith on behalf of certain outstanding religious leaders of our day, as Billy Graham, and others. But many of you are having great difficulty in believing that God will work in our situation and that he will do something for you.

But that is what faith is. It is an expectation that God is going to do something for you. It is a belief that God has promised to do something and that he will follow through. That is what faith is. There is a wonderful acronym built on that word. F A I T H: Forsaking All I Trust Him. That is faith, isn't it? Forsaking all else (i.e. not looking to any other resource not depending on something human) but Forsaking All, I Trust Him. That is the key note of this incident taken from the book of Numbers.

Look at it a little more closely. In the first place there is manifest here the first stage of faith: determination. Here were these girls facing the problem of the possible loss of their inheritance. The family had been promised a part in the land that lay before them, flowing with milk and honey. Many times through that wilderness journey they had anticipated what their portion of the land would be like. They wondered where they would be and what God had hidden away for them in the land of promise. Yet it looks now as though they have lost all this. When their father died their inheritance seemingly vanished with him.

We know now that these Old Testament stories, occurring as they did in actual history are also pictures designed to illustrate for us helpful truth for our own spiritual pilgrimage. As the land of Canaan was before these Israelites as a goal to be sought and a land to be entered, so God has before us a land of promise. It is the promise of power blessing, refreshing, and fruitfulness in the Christian life. It is maturity if you like. Wholeness is another term for it. It is the promise of becoming the kind of people we long to be, of finding the inner resources and strength that will enable us to cope with life. These are all pictured by the fruitful land of Canaan. Remember that Paul said, "Thanks be unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus." That is our land of Canaan. Peter says, "His divine power has granted unto you all things pertaining to life and godliness." Everything you need: that is your land of Canaan.

It is absolutely imperative that Christians determine to possess this. God does not force his blessings upon us. Many young Christians, particularly, make a mistake in this regard. They think that having received the Lord Jesus Christ that everything they need is going to come automatically pouring in whether they want it or not. But that is not true. If you do not want what God wants to give he will not force it upon you. If you do not take what God offers you, you will never have it. Therefore faith is particularly manifested by this quality of determination, a determination to have what God wants to give. Someone has well said, "We now have as much of God's blessing as we want." Let that sink in for a minute. You are now living at the level of spiritual victory you have decided to live at because you don't want more. If you are ever going to have more of the fullness of God's blessing you must awaken a desire for it within yourself. You must want what God wants. You must determine to have it. You are as victorious as you wish to be. The limits are never on God's side, they are always on ours. Every doorway into blessing is framed with the words, "He who hungers and thirsts after righteousness shall be filled."

Now look at these girls and the determination they manifest. It is a determination that exists despite discouragement. It looked as though they had lost everything they had hoped for. Their father had died and there was no male heir. By custom throughout that whole Middle East region, only males could inherit property. It looked like a lost cause. But something made these girls hope that things could be different. What do you think it was? I like to exercise what I call "sanctified imagination." I can imagine these girls getting together after the death of their father and talking it all over. After all, that would surely be a woman's approach to the problem, wouldn't it? As they talked among themselves they began to realize something. Probably they noticed one important factor about this promise of the land: that it was not according to merit but according to grace; that God was not asking the Israelites to earn the land of Canaan, but he was giving it to them. It did not depend on how hard they worked or how many battles they fought. but rather upon the grace of God that would make it available to them. These girls had been raised in a home that understood faith and grace and other such terms, and as they thought about these things they said to one another. "Look, perhaps all is not lost. After all. if this is a matter of grace and not of law then let us remember that grace can give what law cannot. Perhaps if we ask. God has already made provision for a situation like ours. There's nothing revealed that is against it. and perhaps. in grace, God has found a way to supply what we lack."

That is faith. I like that. That is exactly in line with the promises of the New Testament. Remember that great promise in Romans 8:32 "He who spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things? That is grace. We are encouraged by promises like that in Hebrews. " We have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but was in every point like as we are." [He knows the feelings that oppress us and possess us] "Let us therefore come boldly before the throne of grace to find help in time of need." Surely one of the reasons we are so poverty-stricken today is because we have lost a concept of the greatness of God's grace. and his willingness to give us all things that we need. I wish I could drive that home in words of thunder, for I find it is difficult to get people to believe this. But God means it. He will give you what you need. Not what you want, or even what you think you need, but an actual need he will not deny. He says that and he means it as much today as at any other time. These girls laid hold of the possibilities of grace and they came.

They manifested their determination despite delay, as well. Here is where most of us fail. It is not difficult to work up faith in a service like this. If we consider the examples of men and women of faith they often capture our hearts and more our wills and we find ourselves responding in faith to the greatness of God. We then sent ourselves to God and ask him to do something, but nothing happens. After a week or so we are right back in discouragement, where we were before. What is the problem? It is that we have not yet understood the testing of God's delay. These girls did not get what they wanted when they came to Moses. He did not give them an inheritance in the land: he gave them only a promise of an inheritance in the land, that is all. They had to wait, and wait, and wait, for the actual inheritance. That is what God oftentimes does to us because he intends to teach us by delay. Let me share with you words that have been a help to my own heart, from the pen of F. B. Meyer.

So often we mistake God and interpret his delays as denials. What a chapter might be written of God's delays. It is the mystery of the art of educating human spirits to the finest temper of which they are capable. What searchings of heart. what analyzing of motives, what testings of the word of God, what upliftings of the soul-searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of God signifies! All these are associated with these weary days of waiting. which are, nevertheless, big with spiritual destiny, But such delays are not God's final answer to the soul that trusts him.

When these girls came to Moses they came with the determination to have the promise, trusting in God's grace, and they did it despite discouragement and delay.

Following determination there is immediately evident a second characteristic of faith. That second characteristic is found in verse 2.

"And they stood before Moses, and before Eliazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation, at the door of the tent of meeting."

Judging from the census that had just been taken (chapter 26, verse 51) you will note that the number of the people of Israel was 601,730. But that included only the men; women and children were not included. It is before this entire congregation of over a million that these five girls came. I submit that that is a daring thing. I have seen strong men stand on this platform and face a congregation like this, and watched their faces grow pale and their knees begin to knock. They are so afraid that sometimes they have difficulty speaking. That's the fearsome sight that I look at every Sunday morning! But to one unaccustomed to it, it is indeed a fearsome thing. Imagine five girls who never before have faced a congregation like this. coming up before 601,730 men and an uncounted number of others and voicing this kind of request. Surely that exemplifies something of the daring of faith. These girls were determined to have the inheritance God had promised. and they dared to make it known.

But there stood in their way the most powerful obstacle to advance ever known---one of Satan's favorite weapons was opposing them in this request. It was the power and force of tradition. More wholesome projects have foundered on the phrase. "We've never done this before." than on any other thing. More wonderful attempts have been squelched, thwarted, or quenched by somebody saying, "We just don't do that here," than anything else. These girls were facing that kind of problem. Thomas Dixon once said,

Tradition was the most constant, the most persistent, the most dogged. the most utterly devilish opposition Jesus ever encountered. It openly attacked him on every hand, and silently repulsed his teaching. Even the Samaritan woman he finds armed with the ancestral bludgeon. "Art thou greater than our father, Jacob?" Our fathers worshipped in this mountain." Without departure from customs there could have been no Christian church. The great soul-winners of the past had to shake off the shackles of over-conversatism in methods (witness Melancthon, Wesley, Edwards, Finney). The church grows by iconoclasm. Its first work is to set abide false gods.

That is why I chose this passage today. The crying need of the hour is to awaken Christians to the fact that they must not be content with the status quo. The status quo is always satanic. It is the world's idea of the way things ought to be. But as the Bible tells us continually. the world's thinking is satanically influenced and therefore it is frequently wrong. Christians are to be against the status quo and not like those who sing, Come weal or woe, our status is quo. No, no! Christians are called to be revolutionaries, in a right sense; not lawless but "enlawed to Christ," as Paul puts it. Not against the laws of men or of the state, not rebels, but marching according to a different drumbeat. They must be moving out against the trend of the times, and forsaking customs when they contradict or counteract the moving of the Spirit of God.

That is the perfectly delightful thing about these girls. They dared to challenge a tradition that was entrenched in Israel. There was no law that denied them their inheritance but custom was against it. When a good idea is first propounded, most people say, "It's not true." Then when its truth is proven beyond doubt, they say, "It won't work." After its workability has been demonstrated, they say, "It's not important." But when you show that it is indeed important, then they say, "We knew it all the time." Such is the entrenched power of tradition.

But now these girls are reckoning on a promise which is based on grace, so they dared to come before Moses. I would have liked to have seen Moses' face when these five girls stood up. He must have been rather nonplused. He was used to solving problems among this murmuring people, but this one must have floored him. They asked to be given an inheritance as daughters of Zelophehad, when they came into the land, and Moses did not know what to say. But he did the wise thing, he took it to the Lord and his answer came from God. Their daring request moved him for there is never faith without venturing. You must leave the crowd, you must leave the gang or the herd, and step out on a divine possibility before you have exercised faith. That is why faith is so liberating. That is why those who choose to live and walk by faith in what God has said always find themselves out beyond the limits of man's control. They are enslaved to no man. They are free to do what God wants them to do. That is real liberty. Don't you believe the lies that are being told you that if you become a Christian you'll become a slave, limited, narrow, never having any enjoyment of life. That is a lie right out of the pit. It is completely false. It is daring to walk out on the promises of God that makes a man free, or makes him able to discover the fullness of life God has available for us.

One last thing about this. These five girls manifest not only the determination of faith, and the daring of it, but also its reproductive quality.

Moses brought their case before the Lord. And the Lord said to Moses, "The daughters of Zelophehad are right; you shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them. And you shall say to the people of Israel, 'If a man dies, and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. And if he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. And if he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it. And it shall be to the people of Israel a statute and ordinance, as the Lord commanded Moses.'"

Not only did these girls receive their inheritance themselves. but they began a whole series of similar reactions. This became the basis of a new principle and a new law in Israel. Back in Montana where I was raised we had a big can of baking powder that sat on the shelf. I don't know why it has stuck with me but the label on that can had. in big letters across it, the words. Double-Acting Baking Powder. That is what faith is like. It is double-acting. It not only acts in you, but it acts in others, it stimulates others. This is why Jesus said that faith. if it is only as big as a grain of mustard seed, is enough to do whatever needs to be done, even to moving mountains.

Why did Jesus choose that seed? Because a grain of mustard seed has two qualities about it. First, it is a seed, therefore has the ability to grow, to increase. The more you exercise faith, the more faith you will have to exercise. That is a consistent promise and principle of the Scriptures. But, second, it is mustard seed. How many of you, over forty, have used a mustard plaster, at one time or another? I don't know about these modern antibiotics, but I do know that mustard plasters work. I remember as a boy getting a congestion in my lungs and there was placed upon my chest a very gooey concoction of mustard, flour, and water, smeared around on a cloth. After it had been there a little while I began to feel it burn. In 10 or 15 minutes my chest was red as a beet, because mustard has a pungent quality about it. It is an irritant, it stirs things up. And it worked with me. I don't know why---doctors can explain it, perhaps---but it worked.

And that is what faith is like. Jesus chose that simile deliberately because faith has an irritating quality about it. Others hearing about it are stirred themselves to start to do things. Soon a chain reaction starts. When one person begins to live and operate by faith, it stirs up others, and others beyond them, and things keep going until who knows where it will end? The strangely significant thing about this is that this new law, which was introduced into Israel by these five daughters of Zelophehad, centuries later made it possible for Jesus to inherit the throne of David through his mother, Mary. You know that our Lord was the commonly accepted son of Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth. That gave him a legal right to the throne though he was not the actual son of Joseph. If that right had been challenged he still had a right to the throne through his mother. Mary, who, as we know from tradition, was the only child of her parents. She was descended from another son of David. Nathan, and through him she also had a right to the throne of David, but only by virtue of this law in Israel that a daughter could inherit the inheritance of her father. So the long range effect of the faith of these five girls was to make doubly sure the right of Jesus to the throne of David.

How do you know what God is going to do with the faith you exercise today? That is the lure of the dynamic of faith. Others may be stirred to a new endeavor. In Philippians, Paul writes about his imprisonment in Rome, and he says "Many were made more bold to preach the gospel because of my imprisonment." What did he mean? Why, when these Roman Christians saw that the apostle Paul was in prison but his imprisonment was limited by the hand of God and even Nero could only do certain things to this man but gave him a degree of liberty, they saw that the power of the Roman empire was under the control of God. They were therefore emboldened to go out and preach the gospel throughout the city, so that Paul could say. "There is more gospel going on in Rome because I am in prison, than there would be if I were out." That has always stirred me to suggest that the best way to evangelize a city is to begin by locking the preachers up in jail!

Some of you remember reading that in colonial America a young man, named David Brainerd, about twenty years of age, felt the call of God to go out to the American Indians. Through great hardships, alone in the wilderness, sick most of the time, that young man so gave himself, in love for these Indians, through much prayer, heartache, and tribulation, that there broke out at last a great awakening among the Indians. They turned to Christ by the hundreds. He wrote a diary of his account, and over in Scotland a young man named Robert Murray McCheyne read the diary of David Brainerd, and his heart began to burn. In Scotland he began to preach the same gospel and to pray as David Brainerd prayed. Somewhat later McCheyne's letters and sermons were gathered together and published and they blessed the heart of a young man in England named Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Spurgeon went on to become the prince of Bible expositors of the English world, one of the greatest preachers of all time. Another young man who was touched by the lives of McCheyne and Brainerd was Hudson Taylor, the apostle to China. So the chain reaction of faith moves on.

A man named Edward Kimball went into a shoe store in Boston one day to visit one of his Sunday school boys, a young lad by the name of Dwight L. Moody. Through the halting testimony of his Sunday school teacher in the back of a shoe store. Dwight L. Moody came to Christ. God used him to touch the whole world of the nineteenth century for Christ. Who knows what an action of faith will do? Who can anticipate how God will pick it up and multiply it? I have been thinking so much this year of how, twenty years ago, in 1948, five businessmen met in a home in Menlo Park and decided to rent a room in the Palo Alto Community Center to have a Bible fellowship time. Nobody had done anything like that before, but they felt God wanted them to do it, and they did, they obeyed. Out of the twenty or so people who gathered there that first Sunday evening has grown Peninsula Bible Church. in only twenty years time. God has honored the faith of five men who ventured for Christ.

Who knows what God will do or bring about, if you open your home and invite your neighbors in to get acquainted, and to find a door of witness with them later? Or if you take a Sunday school class, or an outreach class, or go on a Rural Outreach trip. Suppose you try a new approach to someone who has been blocking you in other ways. That is to operate by faith. It means to go out, not knowing whither you are going, like Abraham. When a person is obedient to God in that way, it begins a great chain reaction of faith, and no one can tell where it will possibly lead.

I am stirred by these five girls. Their names have come down to us because they were women of faith. There were many daughters in Israel that day, among those thousands of people, but these are the only five whose names we know, because they were women of faith, who believed in God and claimed the inheritance that was theirs. I trust God will lead you the same way.

God calls you to the life of faith. Do not wait for the big and daring things for it is the little things that change the world. I trust God will speak to your hearts about what he wants you do to in this hour.

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POTS, PRESSURES, AND POWER

by Ray C. Stedman

I do not quite know why I am drawn to the Corinthian letters. Perhaps it is because I feel that the church at Corinth was more like American churches than any other church in the New Testament. In fact, I can go even farther and say it was very much like Californian churches. I sometimes refer to the Corinthian letters as The Letters of Paul to the Californians. So in 2 Californians 4, I would like to refer to a passage where the apostle Paul is defending his own ministry. These Corinthians had been challenging his authority, and in his second letter he is explaining to them why he does certain things. The fourth chapter is a wonderful passage because it is so marvelously eloquent in explaining the power and secret of a true, Christ-honoring ministry. In the midst of the chapter the Apostle comes to a brief explanation which is most helpful to us. In verse 7 we have a brief description of true Christianity:

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us."

There is widespread confusion today in the matter of defining Christians and Christianity. There is a common stereotype of Christianity, accepted everywhere, which is completely and demonstrably false. This stereotype runs something like this: (This perhaps may come as a surprise to some who do not really understand how others see us.) In the eyes of the world, Christians are men and women who have, by dint of their own self-will, achieved a certain level of morality, i.e., they don't do certain secular things, while they do do certain religious things. They have come to regard themselves as members of a very exclusive club which is especially favored by God, so that they get (or should get, anyway) many special divine favors extended to them. They gather together weekly to perform certain rather meaningless religious rituals. They believe a number of unprovable claims, but take them by blind faith. The result of all this is the production of men and women who are essentially smug, bigoted, and narrow-minded, who, as the course of history has run on, have become responsible for terrible wars, bloodshed, cruelty, and prejudice; who are the ones largely responsible for creating and preserving the ghettos which are such a problem in our own day; and who, in self-righteous priggishness, think of themselves as especially holy people because they don't smoke, drink, gamble, play cards, or go to movies (some of them, at least), etc.

I have tried to be as realistic as possible in describing what I feel is a very commonplace image, which is, for the most part, regarded as genuine by a majority of people in the world today. Of course, we immediately recognize it as a phony, fake Christianity, produced by the attempt of religious people to imitate the genuine

product. In 2 Corinthians 4:7 we have set forth for us the essence of the true Christian position, a genuine Christianity. That is why I appreciate this seventh verse so much. "We have this treasure," says the Apostle, "in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not of us."

There are two particularly important factors about this verse. One is its description of genuine humanity---humanity as God intended it to be. You will notice that it consists of two elements. First, mankind is described as "vessels". This is not the only place this figure occurs in the Scriptures, and it is a most significant figure. I do not know if you have ever thought of yourself as a vessel, but it is a fundamental and essential concept of the Scriptures with regard to the human race.

What are vessels for? We would all agree that vessels are made to contain something. That is their sole purpose. They are made to hold something. They are designed and shaped to be filled with something. That is why this verse is so significant. It reminds us that we human beings were intended to contain something. We are made to be vessels, pots, if you like, made to contain something, to hold something.

The vessels in your own home (pots, cups, or bowls) are made to contain something and if they do not have that substance in them, they are, of course, empty. It is no accident that we describe lives without Jesus Christ as empty lives, because that is exactly what they are. It is no accident that the world today is suffering from what Dr. Carl Jung calls "a neurosis of emptiness". He says, "When goal goes, meaning goes; when meaning goes, purpose goes; when purpose goes, life goes dead on our hands." This is what is happening in many hearts and lives today, both young and old alike---a great wave of emptiness, of despair. The result is hollow men and women, who have a facade of interest, attention and activity, but within whom there is nothing but emptiness. That emptiness is what is creating the restlessness which is so characteristic of our age and which is breaking out on every side in rebellion and reaction. See how accurately the Scriptures indicate the significant element about humanity: we are made to be vessels, made to hold something, and if we do not have that something in there, our lives are inevitably empty and meaningless.

But, secondly, mankind is not only vessels, but earthen vessels, i.e., made out of dirt, made from clay, from very common material which has nothing in itself of any value, nothing pretentious. Something is there, yes, but nothing of any real value in itself. Here, of course, is the concept with which so many struggle today and which the humanist vigorously rejects. He says that man is the substance of all things. But the word of God takes a very humbling and realistic approach to mankind and says that we are nothing but insignificant bits of clay.

Of course there are all kinds and grades of clay. Some of you are rather fine china---you crack easily. Still you have a very fine texture, though it is nothing more than clay. Others of us are more like sun-dried mud, and we crumble at the first knock which comes along. But at any rate the matter is gathered up in this one phrase---earthen vessels. We are all made of common clay and that is why we all have the same problems. As someone has well put it, "We're all made in the same mold---only some are moldier than others!"

That is a wonderfully realistic view of human life. Pots we are, made to hold something, but of little value in and of ourselves. This corresponds so exactly with the words of Paul when he warns the Galatians not to think of themselves more highly than they ought, "For if any one thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself." This is the biblical picture of man.

But notice how the picture is completed here. In the Christian life, the Apostle says, we have a treasure in those earthen vessels. And he describes it as "transcendent power". That is the glory of the Christian life, of humanity as God intended it to be. The vessel is not much in itself, but it holds an inestimable treasure, a treasure beyond price. Now, these are glowing words. They speak of a reality, of something genuine. It is indeed a treasure, a treasure so valuable that the world would give everything it has to get it. Throughout the rest of this week there will be money expended in large amounts to try to discover the secret of this treasure, what might be called "the lost secret of humanity". Billions are poured out every week in a vain effort to identify this treasure and to channel it into the normal affairs of human life.

It is a treasure because it is a power, a transcendent power. Do you know what transcendent means? Something beyond the ordinary, something above ourselves, something wholly other, something different,

unusual. It is not like the ordinary kind of power, which tears things apart, destroys, blasts, or breaks. This is a strange kind, a kind which unites, which harmonizes, gathers, breaks down barriers and middle walls of partition. In other words, here is the power to change a life or a society from within, not from without. It does not make superficial, external adjustments, changing the outward face of things, but a genuine transformation which arises from within, which completely and permanently changes an individual. As individuals become changed, the society of which they are a part likewise becomes changed.

Do you know any other power like this? This is why I glory in the ministry of preaching, because it is the declaring of an unrivalled power. There is nothing like it in the world. The gospel has no rivals whatsoever. There is no other philosophy or approach to life which can anywhere nearly compare with it. It is completely unique. It is so tremendous because it is the power which really changes men and women.

You can imitate this power, dress up the outside, see what it is supposed to look like and, for a time, produce something which resembles it and which may fool yourself and others for awhile but which in the long run is nothing but a cheap and shoddy imitation of the real thing. Sooner or later its real character becomes evident to all, as it cannot stand the tests which are applied to real Christianity. No, this is not something fake, not phony. It is a genuine transformation, a permanent change within an individual.

The secret, as you well know, is Christ alive in us. As the Apostle puts it in clear terms to the Colossians, his ministry is to make known,

"...the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery [that's this treasure], which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

This is real Christianity---Christ in you, not merely to take you home to heaven when you die, but to manifest his life anew in you right now, to live again his life in you in terms of your situation and circumstances. This is the treasure. We have this treasure in earthen vessels, and designedly so. God put it in failing, faulty, weak, sinful men and women in order that it might be evident that the power does not originate in us. It is not a result of a strong personality, or an extroverted nature, or a highly honed and trained mind. No, it is not a result of any of these things. It is something which arises from the presence of God in the heart. That is why God so delights to call people like us---the stupid, the weak, the faulty, the failing---and to manifest his life and grace through us.

In the next two verses we have the experience of Christian living:

"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed..."

That is life, isn't it? There are all the pressures common to man, unremoved in the life of a Christian. I have grown tired of saying what every Christian spokesman must say---that it is quite false, the idea which so many seem to have, that when you become a Christian everything smooths out, and you are given a membership in a red carpet club through life, so that mysterious bridges appear over all the chasms, the winds are tempered for you, and there are no pressures, no difficulties, no problems. No, no. What a far cry that is from reality! The problems, the pressures are all there. This is life in the raw. Look at these categories:

Afflictions: These are the normal trials which everybody faces, Christian and non-Christian alike. Your washing machine breaks down on Monday morning, your mother-in-law arrives just when you didn't want her, sickness strikes in your family, heartbreaks come---these buffetings of life which come to every one. They are all so normal, so daily. I tell you, these last two weeks I feel as though I've been fighting ten rounds a day with Cassius Clay!

Perplexities: This refers to all the pressing calls for decisions, when we don't know what to decide. We are at a loss, we can't see the end, we don't know how it is going to turn out. We are afflicted with fears, anxieties, worries, and uncertainties, all gathered up in this word "perplexities."

Persecutions: These are the misunderstandings we all run up against, the ostracisms, the cold shoulders which are shown to us at times, the malicious actions and attitudes, deliberate slights, attacks on our character and our reputation, and oftentimes, the bigoted, prejudiced, unfair practices of members of society against one another. all part of the Christian's life as well as the non-Christian's. And finally,

Catastrophes: "Struck down!" Stunning, shattering blows which drop out of the blue into our lives---accidents, fatal illnesses, war, earthquake, famine, riot, insanity---these terrible episodes which shatter a family or an individual and leave us frightened and baffled. All these things are part of normal Christian experience. There is no change in the problems, the pressures.

But look at the reactions. "Afflicted, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed." There is a power within, a transcendent power, different than anything else, which keeps pushing back with equal pressure against whatever comes from without, so that we are not destroyed, not crushed or despairing. That is what the Christian life is intended to be. There is no question about it. We are called to this kind of victorious experience.

Perhaps every one of us who knows Jesus Christ has experienced something of this at times. We know the truth of it. We know how Christ can undergird us in times of sorrow and strain, but usually it is in the big things, the shattering things, that we experience something of the reality of this. But the point of this passage is that this is intended to be a constant, continuous experience. What Paul is saying is that we are to meet the pressures with an answering inner pressure, not only in the big things but in the little things as well. Our homes ought to be different, because the home is the ultimate test of the spiritual life. Others are watching you---particularly how you live at home---and they are waiting to see if you really are different.

Let me share with you a very practical application of this from 1 Corinthians 13. I am not always pleased with these paraphrases of Scripture, but this one is helpful:

Though in the glamour of the public eye, I sway the emotions of men by my oratory, or by my silver singing, or by my skillful playing, and then go home and gripe because supper is late or because my clothes weren't made to suit me, I am become as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal.

And though I am able to impress others with my vast knowledge of the deep things of the word of God, and though I am able to accomplish mighty things through faith so that I become famous among men as a remover of mountains, and have not the love that reaches the deep longings of the hearts around the family circle and removes the barriers that grow up in shy and tender hearts, I am nothing.

And though in the glamour of public praise I bestow all of my goods to feed the poor, and though I win the name and fame of a martyr by giving up my body to be burned, and yet close up like a clam at home, or behave like a snapping turtle, knowing nothing of the glory of giving myself in unstinted self-denying service to those nearest and dearest, it profiteth me nothing.

Now abide fundamentalism, premillennialism, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love!

What makes the difference? What is the secret? How do you transform your life into a continuous expression of this kind of living? The Apostle gives us that secret in verses 10 and 11:

"...always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

There it is! There are two factors. One is an inner attitude to which we must consent (verse 10). The second is an outward activity to which we are exposed (verse 11). But the result is the same, you will notice. Each verse closes with these words: "...so that [in order that] the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies." That is, in our outward life, now. Not in heaven some day; now! "...so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in

our mortal flesh." Not our immortal flesh, not sunshine some day, but now!

What is the secret? Well, Paul says, it is the death of Jesus, the dying of Jesus, the cross of Jesus. The key to experiencing the life of Jesus is the death of Jesus. The key to discovering the glory of this treasure hidden within (the living out of the life of the Lord Jesus now) is the accepting of the meaning and practical result of the death of Jesus. That is the key. Twice he gives it here.

What is the cross? The cross of Jesus had only one purpose. It was to bring to an end an evil man. Now that may be striking to say about Jesus, because we do not usually think of him as an evil man. But remember that Scripture says, in this very letter, that "he was made sin for us." He became what we are. When he became what we are, there was nothing else God could do except to put him to death. He brought him to an end. That is what God intends to do with what we are, apart from dependence on Jesus Christ. He desires to bring it all to a crashing end in the death of a cross.

The cross puts to death the proud ego, that factor within us which, when we do good, wants to blow a trumpet so everyone can hear. Or when there is an opportunity to show off, it makes us eager to get in line. It is that faculty within which wants no one else to be as educated or as popular or as skillful or as beautiful as I, that faculty which resents it when another is chosen for what I want. "Share my sin and you're my dear brother, but correct my errors and you're a snake-in-the-grass!" It is the thing which struggles to be the center of my life, and expresses itself in self-excuse, self-pity, self-indulgence, and self-assertion, the ego which seeks constantly to be ministered to. This is what the cross puts to death.

And the secret of experiencing the life of Jesus is an attitude which welcomes the cross and gladly consents to having the ego crucified within us, put to death, allowed no expression, allowed no place of indulgence in our life. When we do that, then the life of Jesus becomes manifest immediately, and shines out.

I think the Apostle is thinking here of the story of Gideon and his band of three hundred men who gathered around the camp of the Midianites. You remember that they had torches hidden in earthen vessels, earthen jars, which obscured the light. They circled the camp of the Midians and, at a given signal, broke the vessels, and the light flared forth. There was a great victory over the Midianites who saw, as it were, an army surrounding and threatening them. That is what Paul is getting at. The vessel must be broken. There must be that which grinds down this proud ego within us, this self-expression. As we consent to that, the life of Jesus comes flowing out. "Rivers of living water" begin to flow from us.

Look at the second factor in verse eleven: "For while we live we are always being given up to death..." Now, this is different. The first factor is an attitude we accept, to which we consent, but this one is in the passive voice. This is the kind of action in which we are the object. We are being given up to death. This refers to those circumstances, trials, and pressures that God puts us into which force us to lean upon Jesus Christ. We feel we are being sentenced to death. You will find this illustrated in chapter 1 of this same letter. The Apostle says, verse 8,

"For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Why, we felt that we had received the sentence of death; but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead."

That is why you get into trouble. That is why pressures come, and why problems arise in your life. That is why you never can get things worked out finally. You seem to get all the problems taken care of and you settle back and BANG!, another one hits. You are being delivered up to death in order that you might trust in the One who dwells within, not in happy circumstances, nor in pleasant surroundings, but in the Lord Jesus within. Then the life of the Lord Jesus is made manifest in your mortal flesh. God works through the Scriptures to teach us the attitude we are to have, and also through the circumstances of our life to force us to experience it, so that the light hidden within, the treasure within, may break out, and men and women may see it and be blessed and strengthened.

That is why Paul closes with these words,

"So death is at work in us, but life in you."

The blessing goes to someone else as well as to you when this is carried out. Surely this fittingly leads us to the celebration of the table of the Lord. I hope that it will have fresh and rich meaning to us as we come to it now. It is the death of Jesus, producing the life of Jesus to be manifest within us, releasing the fragrance of the Lord Jesus to lives around us, and in our own lives as well.

Prayer

Our Father, we need periodic reminders of what we are in ourselves---empty pots made to contain God, made to hold the Almighty, useless and meaningless and empty without him. Lord, we pray that we may learn to accept gladly, cheerfully, and understandingly the experiences which come our way which force us to rely upon your grace. And even more, that we may learn to accept these snubs to our ego, these humiliating experiences which crush us, but which also produce the life of Jesus within us. Help us to do this in honesty and genuineness today. We ask in Christ's name, Amen.

Catalog No. 283
2 Corinthians 4:7-12
September 8, 1968

ON LIVING TOGETHER

by Ray C. Stedman

I have chosen a passage which is addressed to our Lord's disciples describing some of the demands of true Christian living. I have found that one of the great problems of the church in our day (which is resulting in many turning a deaf ear to what the church has to say), is that we tend to assume that because we are Christians everything we do is therefore Christian. Thus we oftentimes succeed in baptizing our carnality! But the demands of Christian true life are far greater than what we so often exhibit. To review those demands is to face the real test of how genuinely Christian we are.

These words come from the lips of the Lord himself and thus they are doubly significant. Luke 17:1-10:

And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come; but woe to him by whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him." The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" And the Lord said, "If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. Will any one of you, who have a servant plowing or keeping sheep, say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down at table?' Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and gird yourself and serve me, till I eat and drink; and afterward you shall eat and drink'? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

Our Lord here makes four apparently disconnected comments on life. Each one is a fit subject for extended study and we could well spend a message on each, but for the present I wish to take them together as a unit, briefly and not exhaustively, to try to discover the underlying element that ties these four comments together. There is one tie which unites them and it forms the basic purpose of our Lord in giving these comments at all.

He is examining here certain common attitudes about life, attitudes which were as common in those days as they are today for people are the same in every generation and every century. Our Lord is looking at the lives of people around him and the lives of his own disciples and he is singling out certain attitudes which are basically wrong. They are attitudes which we all have but which he says are no longer consistent with the new life that is ours in Christ, and he is showing why they cannot be permitted in the Christian life. So, in these four comments he is essentially demolishing excuses. He is removing certain dangerous attitudes and exposing the false refuges which disciples sometimes take.

Look at the first one.

"Temptations to sin are sure to come; but woe to him by whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin."

Here our Lord is answering the common attitude, "What I do is my own business." It is an attitude we frequently have, the idea that we are not responsible to anyone else and no one else has the right to make demand or claim upon us with regard to our behavior. It is basically the old question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" to which so many of us answer essentially, "No, I'm not." But our Lord is awakening a sense of responsibility to others in these words.

This is fundamental to Christianity. No one can be a Christian and ignore his brother. No one can be a Christian and fail to recognize that his life has influence upon other lives around and that influence governs and limits to some degree the activity of every Christian. Notice the practical aspect of this in our Lord's words. First, he acknowledges the sinful atmosphere of life as it is today. "Temptations to sin are sure to come." Literally he said, "It is impossible but that offenses will come"---that is, that's the way life is.

The Bible makes clear that human life is not being lived as God intended it, that something has come in to derail mankind, and therefore man is not fulfilling God's will but lives under a false philosophy, a false approach to life; under a power, a subtle influence that controls his thinking and brainwashes his attitudes. Because of this deviation, temptations to sin are sure to come, we cannot avoid them. "But," he says, "don't let that be an excuse for becoming a channel of sin." It is true that there is a sinful atmosphere in which we must live, but we must repudiate the fatalism that some would assume. We might say, as some do, "Well, if this is the case, what's the use of trying to behave myself? Why should I? Why should I worry about anyone else? They're going to be tempted anyhow." Notice our Lord cuts right across that, "but woe to him by whom they come." Don't be the channel through which temptation comes to another. You don't have to be such a channel, as a Christian.

These words are addressed to Christians, to disciples, and he is answering the attitude of so many of us. "If I don't do it, someone else will." Have you ever said that? No, says the Lord Jesus, don't say that. "Woe to him through whom they come." You don't have to be the channel of someone else's downfall.

Then notice how clearly and bluntly he puts the terrible effects of this. "It is better," he says, "that a millstone be hung about his neck, and he be cast into the sea." That is the way it reads here using the passive voice. In the Greek it can as well be read in what is called the middle voice which indicates reflexive action. He is then saying, "It is better for him to hang a millstone about his own neck and cast himself into the sea." It is better to commit suicide than to be an instrument of someone else's downfall. How we need to heed these solemn words these days when so many are suggesting that it doesn't make any difference what you lead another person to do, that if the experience you lead him into is fulfilling or satisfying you don't need to worry about the results---nothing serious will occur. But Jesus says quite the opposite. He says it would be better for you to take your own life than to find yourself a deliberate channel by which someone else is introduced to evil.

What does he mean by this phrase, "these little ones"? He does not only mean children, although I think every parent here, watching this baby dedication service, felt something of a sense of awesome responsibility in realizing that their children are going to reflect their lives, and that they, too, will sit under this judging word of our Lord's. It is better that a millstone should be hung about our neck than that we should deliberately misguide these little ones. The latter phrase means, essentially, "innocent ones," anyone who has not yet

experienced evil in some particular form. I think there is going to be a terrible fulfillment of this curse someday. Our Lord does not say what the penalty is, he simply leaves it hanging there, content to contrast it with being drowned in the sea. Even that is better than what will be the penalty for those who lead others astray. Think of that when you are tempted to introduce some young person to wrongful sex, or to the use of drugs that will destroy his brain and his humanity, or whatever else it may be. These searing words judge us.

Then he goes on to the second thing,

Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, "I repent," you must forgive him.

This is closely related to the first comment. He is giving to these disciples, who felt the sharpness of his first word, the key to its performance. "Take heed to yourselves." How do you properly influence another person? How do you avoid leading them into temptation? By taking heed to yourself. That is the place to start. Do not wait and insist that the whole world change; begin with yourself. That is always the place to start.

The essential change which he is asking is that we learn to be forgiving. Is that not wonderful? How we judge each other in ruthless condemnation, cutting each other off, refusing to speak to one another or to have anything to do with each other, because of some trivial irritant! Our Lord says this must not be your attitude as a Christian; learn to forgive. He is answering here the attitude of so many who say, "If so-and-so doesn't shape up soon, I'm through. I've had it." What is he teaching us here? The need for patience with one another. The need to exercise forgiving, understanding patience.

Remember that Paul had to learn that. There was a time when he was irritated with young John Mark because he withdrew from the first missionary journey and went back. Paul said, "I'm through with him, I don't want him any more." But God dealt with Paul and later on you find him writing to Timothy, "If John Mark is there, bring him with you; I can use him in the ministry." He had to forgive him even as the Lord exhorts us here to do.

But now notice the two steps. These are very important, but I can only touch on them briefly. There are two things he says to do. "If your brother sins rebuke him." Do not let him go on ignorant of why you won't speak to him; tell him, let him know. A friend was telling me just this week of a letter another had written, saying how glad he was that nothing was going wrong, everything was fine in his life. Yet my friend had received letters from others about this person saying that there were some matters drastically wrong. But this person was utterly ignorant of them. Why? Because those Christians around him did not love him enough to tell him. It is not an act of love to hide what bothers us. Bring it out. There is no other way to get it settled than to bring it out. Rebuke him, says the Lord Jesus. That is as much your responsibility as the command to forgive. Tell him what is wrong. Do not "white lie" to him, but tell him. Then, if he repents, forgive him. And if he does it again seven times in the same day, you must forgive him. That is the problem, is it not? We say, "I forgave him twice, but the fellow is still doing it." Well, forgive him again, says the Lord, and again, and again. In another place he makes it 490 times, seventy times seven, which means, of course, that you are never to quit.

What kind of a sin is it that can be committed seven times in one day? Dr. Henry Brandt has an amusing story along this line, of a husband and wife. The husband said to the wife one day, "Dear, you know, you have a habit that bothers me no end. I've never said anything to you about it but I get so irritated by it. I wish you'd stop it." "Well," she said, "what is it? I'd be glad to stop it if I knew what it was." "Dear, you're a doorslammer. Every time you go through a door you slam it behind you. It bothers me, and I wish you'd stop." She was immediately penitent. "Why, I'm sorry. I didn't realize I did that. I certainly don't want to keep irritating you, and I'll never do it again." And she went out, and bang! She slammed the door behind her unthinkingly. What is he supposed to do them? Forgive her. And the next time she does it? Forgive her---seven times in a day---over and over again.

Now we come to the third incident, which grows out of the first two.

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" And the Lord said, "If you had faith

as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

What a tremendous word on faith! Notice the background. This is one of the places in the New Testament where I see a great deal of humor. I am always being moved to laughter as I read the accounts of our Lord with his disciples. Notice what happens here. The apostles are feeling the pressure of these great demands of our Lord upon them: the need for being responsible to others and to recognize the power of their influence over others; and then this tremendous requirement to be forgiving toward a brother who has taken a misstep, to be genuinely understanding and accepting toward him, over and over again. They feel the natural impossibility of this, and I think they look at each other and perhaps all of them turn and look at Peter because he was the most difficult of them all, and then they turn to the Lord out of a great sense of weakness and say, "Lord, increase our faith!" If we're going to have to live at this level then you're going to have to do something to strengthen us. We can't fulfill these demands unless you increase our faith."

They are perfectly right about that. You cannot live like this unless you are walking in fellowship with the Son of God. It is only the Lord's life in you that can give you this kind of reaction to these situations. They are perfectly right about that; but they are wrong about something else. They are wrong about their understanding of the nature of faith. Obviously they are thinking of faith as some kind of outward commodity that God can give in measurable amounts, 10 lbs., or 50 lbs., of faith, whatever you need. If you lack then come to him and he pours in more faith, fills up your reservoir. We need faith in quantity---more faith. We use that language yet today and properly so, for even our Lord spoke of those that had "little faith." But it is wrong to think of it in a quantitative sense. That is not what the Lord means and that is why he goes on to correct them. He says, "Look: faith is like a mustard seed; and if you had faith like that, you can do impossible things." He even chooses the most dramatically impossible of all. He says, "See this sycamine tree growing here in the ground? If you understand the nature of faith you can say to this sycamine tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,'"---not simply be cast into the sea---be planted, i.e., the tree would continue to grow in the midst of the sea, which is utterly impossible.

Why does our Lord choose that example? It is not because he wants us to be miracle workers, going about demonstrating remarkable things, supernatural activity. You cannot read the New Testament and take it that way. These miracles were not the foremost thing in his own life, as he said again and again. They did not really change people. When his ministry drew to a close hardly anyone was left who had seen the great miracles. No, that is not what changes people. And Christ is not after that kind of disciples today. What he is saying here is that you can do things that look impossible, utterly impossible, but as his other verses make clear, those impossibilities must always be in line with the will and purpose of God. If God wants, for some reason, a sycamine tree to be rooted up and planted in the sea, then you can do it. Faith that fulfills God's will is always equal to any demand; but it is not magic.

What is he really saying here? He is saying to these disciples, "Look: faith is like a seed, tiny and small, but if you plant it, it will grow." All seeds have that power. But in particular, faith is like a mustard seed: it has the quality of irritating others, stirring them up, moving them. Perhaps you are saying to yourself, as these disciples were, "We can't do this, there's no use trying; it's hopeless." But our Lord is answering that common attitude. Why try? If God would only give me the faith then I could, but until he does, it's hopeless; I'm not even going to try. Have you ever said that? But Jesus is saying, "Look: start with the faith you've got." Faith grows, therefore, start where you are, and you will find that as you do, faith will grow. And, like mustard, it has an amazingly pungent quality about it; it will stir others up, and soon you will find yourself and them well on the way to your goal.

That is the story of every great work for God that has ever been done through all the twenty centuries of Christian experience: men and women started with what they had, they did not wait for more faith but began with what they possessed, and it began to grow.

Then the last comment. He said to them,

Will any of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep, say to him when he has come in from the field, "Come at once and sit down at table"? Will he not rather say to

him, "Prepare supper for me, and gird yourself and serve me, till I eat and drink; and afterward you shall eat and drink"? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded?

What is our Lord saying? After we face the demands of Christian living, these high and holy standards of conduct that the Lord lays upon us because we have his life in us, as we face these and begin to exercise the faith we have, even though they appear impossible of fulfillment, we will discover that we actually accomplish these things. Little by little, as we look back, we see that there have been changes, amazing changes, and things were accomplished that we did not expect. We realize that we have been successful. Then what happens? Sooner or later we will say to ourselves, "Look how faithful I have been. Now, I have a little favor I'd like to ask of God and surely, after all I've gone through for his sake, he ought to be willing to do this for me." No, says Jesus, you're quite wrong; that is not the proper attitude. God is never in debt to any man. When you have lived at your highest and fulfilled all that God demands of you, you have only lived a normal Christian life. You have only done what he asked and expected of you, there is no credit due to you. You have no right therefore to make demands upon him. The Lord is correcting the false spiritual pride that often creeps in, to which we are all exposed. He is puncturing the balloon of spiritual ego which says, "I'm obviously quite valuable to God. I doubt if he could get along without me, and therefore I expect some special favors from him." No, says the Lord, that is never to be your attitude.

So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty."

That is the proper attitude; that is what we must say. We are never to be in the position of demanding that God fulfill some favor to us, or to be upset with him because he does not do what we have asked him to do.

But I do not want to leave it there because I think that unless that is balanced, it gives a false view of God. That is what he is teaching us as to our attitude, but this is not what he himself is going to do. When we go home to be with him and we have, to a large or small degree, faithfully fulfilled his will, what will he actually do to us? Is he going to act as in this story and say, All right, you've been serving me on earth; now you've come home to heaven, get busy. I've got a lot more things for you to do? No, that will not be his attitude. The actions of the Lord toward his own are found in the twelfth chapter of this same book, in verse 35,

"Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes [these are the ones who have been alert to fulfill what he wants here]; truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them."

Is that not amazing? How like our Lord! He will come and serve us. Years ago I heard of a missionary couple returning from Africa in the days of Teddy Roosevelt. It happened that after years of service they came back on the same ship as President Roosevelt, who was returning from a big-game hunting expedition in Africa. As they were boarding the ship, crowds were there and a band was playing to send the President off, but no one was there to say goodbye to them. The man said to his wife, "Isn't it strange, dear? Here we've given our life to the service of God, spent years in Africa, endured many hardships, lost a couple of our children and buried them out here. It's been very difficult, but nobody really cares, do they? Look at all this folderol that goes on when the President returns from a big-game hunting expedition! But nobody really cares whether we have done anything for God, or not."

All the way across the Atlantic it burned in his heart. Bitterness crept into his soul, and he said to his wife, "I'll bet when we get to New York there will be another band there waiting for the President but nobody will be there for us, we'll be on our own." Sure enough, when they pulled into New York harbor there was a band playing Teddy Roosevelt's favorite songs, and all the high officials of the city were there to meet him. But the missionary couple slipped off the ship unnoticed, and rented a run-down flat on the East Side of New York. The man was utterly crushed and said to his wife, "It isn't fair, it just isn't fair! Here we are, we haven't any money, we don't know who is going to take care of us or where we are going. God has promised great things, but nothing's happened. We've given him everything we've got, and what has he done for us? But just look at

what happens when the President goes on a big-game hunt! It isn't fair!"

His wife said, "Dear, I know it isn't fair, but this isn't the right attitude. You mustn't think this way. Why don't you go into the bedroom and talk to the Lord about it, and see what he has to say?" So he did. He went in and knelt by the bed, alone. He was there a long time, but when he came out his face was alight, and his wife saw that something had happened. She said, "What happened?" And he said, "I got down on my knees and poured out the whole story to the Lord. I told him that I thought it was so unfair and especially that when we came home the President got this big welcome but no one cared about us. I told him that he was treating us all wrong. But you know what the Lord said to me? It was almost as though I could hear the voice, he leaned down and said, 'But you're not home yet.'"

Is it not gloriously true? When we get home he will be waiting for us. He will gird himself and say, "Sit down at my table," and the Lord himself will come and serve us. That is what God is saying to us. What a wonderfully balanced approach to life we have in these words of Jesus! How awesome is the sense of our responsibility for others! It is better to be hanged with a millstone and be drowned in the sea than to be a source of error to somebody else. How demanding is this need for understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness of each other when we do things that are wrong, even forgiving seven times in a day! But God has given us all that it takes. He has planted in our hearts a faith which looks to him for the answer, which asks of him and he will give us all it takes to do this, if we are ready to begin where we are, to move in that direction, trusting him to come through with what is needed. Then he cancels out the spiritual pride that threatens to derail us. Thus he balances our life and keeps us useful, worthy, profitable servants, doing that which he commands.

These verses have helped me greatly in the carrying out of many practical details of my life, and I trust they will help you. This is the kind of Christianity the Lord Jesus wants. This is what he has come to make possible, and this is what we must be in this hour.

Prayer

Our Father, thank you for these simple words that come from our Lord's lips. Let us take them seriously, Lord, not only here in this place but this afternoon and tomorrow and all through the week, remembering that we have available to us a wonderful life within, a secret which the world knows nothing about, the Lord Jesus himself, indwelling us and making possible this kind of living. We ask in his name. Amen.

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Luke 17:1-10
September 15, 1968

SECRET GROWTH

by Ray C. Stedman

I can recall the time---eighteen years ago, in May of 1950---when I first came out to Palo Alto, right after graduation from Dallas Seminary, and spoke for the first time to the little group that was meeting in the Community Center. I remember the story I used to introduce that message. It was of a stranger who was visiting a certain town and who stopped one of the natives and asked him where the churches were located. This fellow happened to be something of a wag, and he said, "Well, the Episcopal church is down by the theater, the synagogue is next to the bank, the Presbyterian church is over by the cemetery, the Methodist church is next to the golf course, and the Baptists are down by the river." I remember commenting on how appropriate it was that the Peninsula Bible Fellowship was meeting in the Community Center.

Well, we have moved out of the Community Center, but we are still in the center of the community, and I rejoice in the fact that, through these many years now, God has blessed our efforts to be a part of the life of the

world around us---in it, but not of it. This, of course, is the mark of a Christian community.

This is a Sunday we have set aside to think about what God has taught us through the years. In trying to put this down in some orderly form, I have felt very struck by the parable our Lord told of the seed growing secretly, recorded in the fourth chapter of Mark, verses 26 through 29:

And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come."

There is our Lord's extremely instructive comment on how the kingdom of God comes in the affairs of men.

I do not know what you think of when you hear the phrase "kingdom of God". Perhaps you might think of the theocracy back in the days of Israel when God ruled the nation through his presence in the temple. Or perhaps you look forward to the time of the millennium when, as the Scriptures promise us, the kingdom of God shall be visible on earth, and none shall hurt or destroy in all of God's holy mountain, and righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Every man's heart leaps up when we hear words like that. Of course this year we are hearing them from all the political candidates, and each one is volunteering to be the man to produce such a kingdom. But we have heard all that before. We know that man will not bring this about, although there will be a day when the kingdom of God will be visible among men. But you and I have lived long enough with this process to know that this is not enough in itself; this is not all there is to scattering the seed. Back of the proclaiming there must be obeying. We know that the man or woman, boy or girl, who tries to proclaim the Word, to tell people what God says, but who isn't himself (or herself) obeying what he says, has already ruined his witness and the Word falls barren and dead upon the ears of those who hear. So you see, part of scattering the seed is the obedient heart, responding to God's Word.

But even back of that there is a previous step. We cannot obey it until we have heard it. I do not mean just the hearing of the ear, but the understanding of the mind and heart. This Word must somehow come alive to us. We have to see it as truth, as real and vital and living truth. It has to grip us and hold us and capture us. And I trust that we have already learned that this experience comes only as we ask God to make it known to us. We ask the Holy Spirit to perform his function of taking this Word and unveiling it to us, opening our eyes. So the scattering of the Word involves prayer, seeking God's face, and opening the eyes of the heart to his Word, being ready to obey it and then to proclaim it in truth. This is man's part in the process. As Jesus made clear, this is the first step: we must scatter the seed of the Word, in this way.

Then this inevitably is linked with the sovereign, mysterious activity of God (and this is the important element in this parable)--making the seed grow. Jesus says it happens in three stages. There is first the sprouting of the blade, and then the unfolding of the plant as it grows up from the earth, and then the ripening of the seed into the full grain in the ear. All of this is God's responsibility; God alone can produce it.

You have already sensed how this works in your own lives. Have you not felt the Word of God take root in your life? Some saying of Scripture, some verse, some phrase, some great thought has captured your mind and taken root in your heart and you have said, "Lord, that's true; I'm going to walk in light of that, I'm going to follow that way." And then as you seek to do this you discover it is doing something to you and you do not really know what it is. And then comes a time when its fruit begins to appear. Looking backward you see that the planting of the Word in your own heart and life is now beginning to produce blessing, marvelous benefit. You are a happier person, a more fulfilled person, a whole person, made new again, set free from habits and thoughts that were troubling you. The Word has come to harvest and has produced fruit in your life. And this, says Jesus, is the process by which the kingdom of God takes root in the hearts of men.

It is a simple concept, this matter of proclamation of the Word of God, the scattering of the seed, and then its springing up afterward. It happens in life all around us. Every year farmers go out and cast their seed. And perhaps, if the Lord had not pointed it out to us, we would never have seen that this is what we do. But since this is the case, there are certain conclusions to which we must come.

First, it is obvious that we must be faithful to sow the seed. You cannot expect to harvest if you never sow. To me, one of the weaknesses of the church in general today, and in some degree of our own church here, is that we circumvent this sowing. We gather together sometimes and show films on how to sow seed. We take courses in it and we read books about it. But somehow we resist letting this seed actually take root in our own hearts---opening our eyes to it, believing it, obeying it, and then proclaiming it to those around about. But this is the only way God has arranged for planting the kingdom in the midst of men. He is not going to do it through political maneuvering, or military conquest, or through any other program men can devise; he is going to bring it about only through the planting of the seed. And you and I must be faithful to sow it.

You young people especially must realize that you will never have the kingdom of God in your heart, you will never know the glory of living under the rule of God or know the benefit of his fulness in your heart unless you sow this seed. This is the responsibility God has given to men. We must take it deliberately, thoughtfully, seriously, and open our hearts to his living Word.

Second, we must leave room for God to work. Is this not what Jesus makes clear here? We must expect God to do something when we sow the seed. After we have opened our hearts to his Word and allowed it to take root in our lives and set ourselves in this direction, then God must do the rest. There is nothing else we can do.

I think this means we must avoid doing certain things. We must not expect, for instance, the knowledge of the Bible alone to be sufficient. I believe in knowing the Scriptures. I think it is wonderful to memorize them. I met a group of boys the other day who were telling me how much they had been memorizing the Scriptures, and I think that is great! I also remember that it is common knowledge that Nikita Khrushchev can quote the first four books of the New Testament from memory. So memorizing Scripture is not sufficient in itself. Knowledge of the Bible is not sufficient in itself. You can be a Bible scholar and study it from Genesis to Revelation, be able to explain dispensational charts, know where the Antichrist comes in, and all the other intricate and esoteric considerations that are involved in deep Bible study---but that is not enough. You have not sown the seed of the Word of God until it has been obeyed in your heart, until you have launched your life out upon the basis of it. We must never be content with letting Bible knowledge take the place of Bible obedience.

Also, we must avoid arranging for phony harvests. Jesus said that when the harvest grows up, then is the time to put in the sickle and reap. But I think a lot of us are constantly trying to produce harvests in our own lives which simply aren't there yet. We want to reap either when we have not yet sown, or when it is not yet time for the harvest. We want so badly to see results, don't we? We are never content with this process of sowing and then waiting for God to work, but we want it to come NOW! Instant salvation. Instant maturity. This is the cry of the age in which we live. Everything comes in instant formulas: just mix with water, stir, and you've got it. This is how we want maturity as Christians. But we cannot force it; we must wait out God's time with patience, as a farmer does. He does not go out the next morning and dig up his crop to see how it is doing. And neither must we. We must allow the seed to bring itself to the harvest, as God has arranged, and not be trying to reap phony harvests before the time.

Furthermore, we must refrain from attempting to dictate what form the seed will take when it becomes ripe. I think this has been one of the greatest faults of the church for many, many centuries. The Roman Catholic church decided very early that they were the true church and only that which was in accord with their form of church government was genuine. They have stuck to that idea ever since and it is causing endless problems today. But when the Protestant Reformation came about, it is remarkable that the churches which spun off in that great revolution of thought did exactly the same. So today we have many different denominational groups, each insisting that it is the true church and that it alone represents the kingdom of God among men. This is absurd! The seed will produce what is inherent in it. "The earth produces of itself," said Jesus. We cannot dictate what form the seed will take. We can only recognize the result as being the product of God's life at work, characterized by that which characterizes him.

Third, we must expect this process to take some time. The seed does not grow up overnight, as I have already suggested. In the seventeenth chapter of Luke, Jesus also said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation," i.e., you cannot camp beside it and watch it appear. "A watched pot never boils," says the old

proverb, and watched seed, similarly, does not grow.

This is the reason for so much pessimism today. Men and women look at the church and say nothing is happening. No, Jesus says, you cannot tell that way. The kingdom of God does not come by observation, by scrutiny, with careful watching and measuring, like everything else. This is encouraging, is it not? You look around and see so much apparent failure. The standards by which we attempt to measure progress seem to be so negative; there seems to be no mark of success. It is because we have not taken seriously what Jesus says: It does not come that way. You cannot measure by the normal measuring stick. It is not a question of how many countries officially acknowledge the cross of Christ. It is not a question of how many people subscribe outwardly to the cause of Christ. The kingdom does not come with observation, yet it is coming, nevertheless, and it is a process that takes time.

As Jesus suggests in this parable, the man went back after he had sowed the seed and lived a normal life. He rose in the morning and slept at night. He did normal things. You and I must learn to expect this in our own experience. As the seed takes root in our lives we are to keep on doing the normal everyday things of our experience, washing the dishes and making the beds, making phone calls and decisions at the office---all the normal things. And all the time we are doing so the principles to which we are committed in our own hearts are making gradual changes. Things we cannot see are happening. When we think nothing at all is happening, everything is happening. Therefore we are not to get discouraged when it looks as if nothing is occurring in our lives.

Does a farmer get discouraged when he plants seed? Does he go out the next morning, see the field lying there just as black as the day before and say, "Oh, what a waste of time. Nothing's happening." And the next day there is still no sign of anything. And the next day, and the next. After four or five days does he say, "What's the use of this? Why did I waste my seed? What's the point? Nothing happens at all." No, no farmer does that. He knows that as surely as the seed is there it must take root. The forces of life in the soil must react with the forces of life in the seed, and, without his realizing it, things will happen. And, sure enough, if he waits a little while, when he goes out he finds green shoots sticking up here and there. A little while later the whole field suddenly turns green---almost overnight, it seems.

This brings us to the fourth conclusion. We must realize that the growth of the kingdom of God can be detected only at certain stages, as Jesus made clear. First the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear, the full stalk of wheat. Though we cannot see change in our lives from day to day, yet there are times when we can see that something has happened. When we take the backward look, when we compare what we have become with what we were a while ago, then we see change. This is exactly what a farmer does, is it not? He can look at his field any given day and not detect any change from the day before. But when he looks back two or three weeks, or two or three months, he can see remarkable change. Jesus says this is what happens in our lives as well.

I think all this has been illustrated in the experience of twenty years at Peninsula Bible Church. You remember, those of you who were here at the beginning, that we began with the conviction of certain truths of Scripture which needed to be emphasized in our day. In many ways we were almost alone in the emphasis of those truths. Not entirely alone---we must never allow ourselves to adopt an Elijah complex, in which we say, "We alone are left of all the people of God." God always says to us, "I have yet seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. What are you talking about, "all alone?" But we did begin with certain emphases.

I would like to outline briefly the four great seeds I believe God led us to sow in the beginning which we have now come to harvest in our experience as a church. First, we began with a deep and strong conviction of the Lordship of the Spirit of God, a conviction that the Lord Jesus is a living presence in his church. He is the Lord of the church. He has not left us; he has not gone off to heaven somewhere in space to sit and twiddle his thumbs while we get everything done down here. No! He is right with us as he said he would be. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Make disciples of all nations...and lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age."

Therefore he is able to direct the activity of this church. And through the mind of the Holy Spirit imparted to those who are in leadership within the church, chosen by the Spirit, he directs the steps we take, chooses the

activities in which we are involved, and develops the strategy for approaching the community around. Now, I believe that. I believe it has been demonstrated through these twenty years. This is one of the reasons why we have the form of government we have here at Peninsula Bible Church. We have tried to follow as closely as possible the New Testament pattern. We find that a living Lord in our midst is still able to direct, with Holy Spirit strategy, the workings of his body.

The second principle with which we began is the ministry of the ministry of the saints. We do not believe there is such a thing as the "clergy", if you think of them as an isolated group of superior people, different from plain-vanilla Christians, who have a special pipeline to God and therefore are the only ones who can make decisions and perform ministries within the church. No, we took Ephesians 4 very seriously. God has given certain gifts to members of the church, so that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. He has equipped certain ones among us for a ministry of training and helping---for what reason? For the equipping of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ.

The work of the church belongs to everyone. This includes the counseling, the evangelizing, the visiting, the praying, helping one another, and the teaching of Scripture. This work belongs to the whole body, and all the body must be at work in it, each one fulfilling the gift God has given him. If you ignore the gift the Lord Jesus Christ has given you, you have wasted your life. I do not care if you have made a million dollars, or ten million dollars---you have wasted your life if you have not put to work the gift God has given you. This is the basis for measurement of success at the judgment seat of Christ.

A third principle is the authority and centrality of the Word of God. We have tried to sit under its judgment. Though so many are doing it today, we have tried never to presume to sit in judgment over the Word of God, which he has spoken and given through the prescribed instruments he has chosen. We have tried never to say, "Should this be here in the Bible, or should it not?" We have tried, rather, to say, "What does this mean, since it is here, and how does it apply to us?"

And finally, the fourth principle has been declaring the great secret which God has given to man in his Word: the indwelling life of the Lord Jesus, the power of a risen Christ, living his life again within each one of us, to manifest once again all that he ever was in the days of his flesh, but to do it now in the midst of this twentieth-century world. As Ian Thomas so succinctly puts it, "To make visible the invisible Christ." This is the function of the church. It is here for this purpose. Primarily, above everything else, this is what it is in the world to do. And when it starts to do this, all the highly desirable secondary results flowing from it, including the solving of some of the thorny issues of society and the alleviating of the misery of mankind.

If you look back on these twenty years you can see that we have undergone exactly the process our Lord has outlined. There was first the conviction that these principles were true, arising from studying and thinking about the Word of God. The five men who gathered together to form this church did so with the conviction that these things were true. But it was only conviction. It was only the Word planted in the heart, sprouting, taking root within. But as we went on we began to see the promise of things to come---that God was doing a new thing, that he was producing the life of the Spirit in a rich and abundant way in our midst. We have always been excited here at Peninsula Bible Church because we have seen God at work, and we see the promise of things yet to come. Now, twenty years later as we sit and look back upon it all, we can see that in many ways we have come to harvest. That which has been growing secretly is now manifest, visible to all. One of the encouraging things to us is that many are watching what God is doing here with us. But we are only one local church. This kind of pattern is expected to be reproduced throughout all the world.

This brings us to the final observation from this passage. The reaping is intended to make possible a yet greater sowing. Why does a farmer reap his crop? So that he may live from it, yes, but also in order that he may plant his seeds afresh the next spring. And then there will be a greater harvest than before, because the seed grows in such a way that it multiplies and increases, the barns fill up and overflow, and there is still enough for greater sowing yet at every new opportunity. I think this is where we stand this morning. This is to be a repetitive process. What God has taught us, and brought to fruition in our lives, we sow again in the lives of others; we pass it on. As Paul wrote to Timothy:

...and what you have heard from me before many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

There is the process. And in this remarkable way, which is going on secretly underneath all the confusion and the hoorah and hoopla of the world, beneath all the political chicanery and maneuverings of governments, within and above and beyond and beneath and around all the structures of society, this seed is growing secretly. God is producing his great and final harvest, and it will all come to pass exactly as he says. The Lord Jesus said, "The tares and wheat will grow together until the harvest, until the Lord sends his angels to separate one from the other, and to gather the wheat into the barns and the tares unto the burning."

How encouraging it ought to be to us that this seed grows secretly both in our lives and in the entire world. God has not failed, and the church has not failed. It cannot fail. Oh, there is a lot of scaffolding and physical structure, a lot of human organization and trappings all around the church, which we have falsely identified as the church, that is rotting and crumbling and falling to pieces. But this is not the building God is building in this age, nor the seed that he sowed and is producing. That seed is growing unto harvest, exactly as the Lord Jesus said. It will increase as you allow that seed to be planted in your own heart, and God will give the increase.

Prayer

Our Father, we thank you this morning as we think back upon these twenty years. What a brief time that is---hardly time at all for a crop to have matured and yet here it is. We thank you for the harvest we have reaped and are reaping in these days. And we thank you for the confirmation of the truth of this Word we have looked upon. How it ought to encourage us that you are able to produce this kind of harvest in the life of any individual here today, as well as in the life of the whole church around the world. How true these marvelous words are, Lord Jesus: "The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear." And Lord we pray we may recognize that these processes will never fail until that great day when all the harvest of the earth is reaped and the kingdom of God shall be made visible among men. "Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven." We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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LIFE BEYOND DEATH

by Ray C. Stedman

Let us talk about life beyond death. Surely there is not a person here who has not at some time thought about what happens to him when he dies. You cannot live very long without at least having fleeting thoughts and questions about it. Each of us is aware of the mystery of death. We cannot escape it for it confronts us on every side. It is important, therefore, to examine a subject like this from time to time, though some people try to ignore the whole subject of death.

If you have ever visited the Hearst Castle near San Luis Obispo and have seen that magnificent building and its beautiful grounds and have heard the story of the Hearst family, you will remember that the guests who visited that castle were given one rule. They were absolutely forbidden to break this rule upon pain of immediate exclusion from the castle. To do so meant they were never again allowed entrance to the grounds. That rule was that no one should, in Mr. Hearst's presence, utter the word, "death." He tried to ignore death, to exclude it from his thinking. But, as always happens to men like that, death caught up with him one day. He himself died, and the castle passed into the hands of the state. All that was once his is no longer even in the possession of his family.

It is foolish, of course, to try to ignore death. As Robert Browning put it in one of the most striking passages he ever wrote:

Just when we're safest
There's a sunset touch,
A fancy from a flower bell,
Someone's death,
A chorus ending from Euripides,
And that's enough for fifty hopes or fears,
The Grand Perhaps!

What did he mean? Well, he meant that we spend much of our time trying to forget about God that just when we think we have got everything taken care of, all our plans are made and we have excluded him from our thinking, then something happens to intrude. We see a sunset, and it reminds us of the ending of life. Or we see the beauty of a flower, and know that in a little while it will be crushed. Or someone's actual death occurs and we are forced to face up to the issue of life and death. And that, he says arouses a bevy of hopes and fears within us which he calls, "The Grand Perhaps." That may well be the best title of all for this study of life beyond death.

Recent attention has been called to this subject by articles that appeared in Look magazine based upon a book recently written by Bishop James Pike. In these articles Bishop Pike recounts for us his experiences with his son, who later committed suicide. It is a tragic story, one of the most pathetic I have ever read. It is the story of how the Bishop's son tried to lose himself in the hallucinations of LSD, gradually becoming what is called today an "acid-head." He tried to break the habit, but found that he could not. His father took him to Cambridge, England, where together they tried to work this all out. But all he could do to help his son was to sit with him during his wild "trips" and watch the steady deterioration of his son's mind and heart, until alone, in a hotel room in New York City, the boy took his own life.

The Bishop goes on to recount the experiences that followed when, upon his return to England, he found himself confronted with certain unexplainable phenomena which all related somehow to his son. Though he was reluctant to admit it to himself, he concluded that these were what many called "psychic" experiences. He felt that perhaps he was in touch with the spirit of his dead son who was trying to communicate with him. This led, as often happens in cases of this type, to seances, visits to mediums, and attempts to break through the barrier of death and communicate with those who have gone beyond.

There have been many who have sought to explore this whole subject of life beyond death through such dangerous devices. I use that adjective because the Bible warns that these are highly dangerous methods of conducting psychic research. Consistently in both the Old Testament and the New the Bible declares that one is playing with fire when he dallies with the occult world. It is not because he is apt to stumble on knowledge which no one else has, but because he is exposing himself unwittingly to control by, or the outright possession of, demonic spirits, wicked spirits. The Bible explains these experiences as not being truly communications with the dead but rather encounters with deceitful spirits impersonating the dead. Such spirits, having available to them information about the dead, pretend to be the spirit of a dead person in order that they may establish ultimate control over an individual's life. When we see these matters in the light of scripture we can see how pathetic indeed is the Bishop's search. What a revelation of the utter bankruptcy of liberal theology is indicated when this Bishop of the church has nothing more to offer his searching, desperate son in his terrible plight than a word of good advice and a steadying hand, and now he himself is being misled into contact with the occult world.

There have, of course, been other guesses as to what happens after death. There are those who tell us the whole matter is made clear by the teaching of reincarnation---that having once lived on this earth it is possible to come back and live again in another body and in another place. There has been much "evidence" advanced to prove that this is indeed the case. But once again we are dealing with impersonating, deceitful spirits who have no compunction whatsoever about deceiving those investigating these kinds of experiences, making them believe that they are in contact with incarnate persons when they are not at all. If we take the Bible at all

seriously we will not get involved with this kind of thing because it is exceedingly dangerous. We are tempting powers greater than ourselves.

But the wonderful thing is that we do not need to do this. The Christian has what Peter calls, "a more sure word of prophecy, which shines as a light in a dark place." I like that description. Have you ever been in a dark place and wished that someone would turn on a flashlight, or even light a match? Perhaps someone did, and what a comfort it was to see a light shining in a dark place. Now that is what the word of God is as regards this whole realm of communication with the dead. There are several passages of scripture that deal with the subject, and one of the most striking is found in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10.

"For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life."

That is a wonderful word, a word that makes clear certain facts about life beyond death for a believer in Jesus Christ. Notice how it begins. It is striking, is it not? "We know..." We know, says the Apostle Paul. There is nothing uncertain about it at all. As Christians we know a number of things that non---Christians cannot know. Not long ago a man approached me about this matter of the note of certainty in Christian faith. He challenged this, saying that the only proper approach to life is to view everything as uncertain, you cannot depend upon anything for sure, everything is tentative and we must be prepared to find that we have been wrong about many things, therefore we must not say that we are sure about anything. We discussed this at some length, until finally I said to him, "Well, you seem to me to be rather sure about this whole idea that there is nothing sure."

He acknowledged that he did have a sense of conviction about his declaration. I said, "Since by your own logic it is obvious that you may be wrong, and I have reason to believe that you are, then I prefer not to approach life on that basis." You never read this kind of nonsense about uncertainty in the New Testament. The declaration of Jesus Christ was that he had come to tell us the truth, that we might know. Again and again the Apostle John rings the changes on this, saying, "We know...These things are written that you might know," etc. Paul says here, "We know" certain things about life beyond death.

Well, what things do we know? First, says Paul, we know that we now live in a tent---"if this earthly tent by destroyed." Twice he calls the present body a tent and sees it as only a temporary dwelling place. Once I visited a family who were waiting for their new house to be finished and they were living temporarily in a tent in the back yard. It was not very comfortable. They were just getting by, but they were doing it with the realization that this was but a temporary arrangement and soon they would be in their real house. That is what Paul says is the case with us in the present body---we live in a tent.

It is immediately evident from this that there is a difference between the spirit and the body. We are the spirit; the body is merely the dwelling place, the tent, in which that spirit is now temporarily living. I have pointed out many times that this is a universal truth, instinctively understood by all until they are educated beyond their intelligence, and then they start denying it. Until then everyone knows this to be true; even children do. I have often told the story of the time, years ago, when one of my daughters crawled into bed with me one morning. I kept my eyes shut and, as children will, she tried to wake me up by poking and punching me and trying to get me to open my eyes. Finally she crawled up and sat right on my chest and, reaching down, pried open my eyelid. Then she leaned over and said, "Are you in there, Daddy?" You know, I have often thought how true it is that even a baby understands that man is more than an animated piece of beefsteak. He is a spirit, dwelling in a body. But it is a temporary arrangement at best.

Furthermore, you will notice that part of this certain knowledge that the Apostle has is that in this tent we now groan and sigh. Do you ever listen to yourself when you get up in the morning? It is pretty evident that the Apostle is right, isn't it? Yes, we do groan and sigh. There is the groan of present experience. The tent is beginning to sag. The stakes are loosening and the pegs are growing wobbly. We discover that things are not

going along as they once were. Every now and then, especially after we have been exercising strenuously, we find these words to be literally true--we groan. Some time ago I ran across a droll comment that makes this clear. It is headed, *It's Later Than You Think*, and it goes this way:

Everything is farther than it used to be. It's twice as far from my house to the station now, and they've added a hill which I've just noticed. The trains leave sooner, too, but I've given up running for them because they go faster than they used to. Seems to me they're making staircases steeper than in the old days. And have you noticed the small print they're using lately? Newspapers are getting farther and farther away when I hold them. I have to squint to make out the news. Now it's ridiculous to suggest that a person my age needs glasses, but it's the only way I can find out what's going on without someone reading aloud to me. And that isn't much help because everybody seems to speak in such a low voice I can scarcely hear them.

Times are changing. The material in my clothes, I notice, shrinks in certain places. Shoelaces are so short they're next to impossible to reach. And even the weather is changing. It's getting colder in winter and the summers are much hotter than they used to be. People are changing, too. For one thing, they're younger than they used to be when I was their age. On the other hand, people my own age are so much older than I am.

I ran into my roommate the other night, and he had changed so much he didn't recognize me. "You've put on weight, Bob," I said. "It's this modern food," Bob replied, "it seems to be more fattening." I got to thinking about poor Bob this morning while I was shaving. Stopping for a moment, I looked at my own reflection in the mirror. You know, they don't use the same kind of glass in mirrors, anymore.

Yes, in this tent we groan. There is the groan of present experience, and there is also the sigh of expectancy. Says the Apostle, "While we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." That is the sigh of future expectancy. We know that life is only temporary. We sense that there is coming a time when this earthly tent shall be destroyed. We all face it, don't we? Despite the advances that have been made in medical science and the remarkable things that medicine has done, it is still true that the death rate remains exactly what it has been for centuries: a flat 100%. This earthly tent must be destroyed. But the Apostle says, "We know that we have a house waiting for us, eternal in the heavens." An eternal house is waiting. It is for this we sigh.

This introduces a subject that is of great interest, and yet also of great controversy. There are many guesses as to what this heavenly house is, this eternal house, "not made with hands." Some have thought that perhaps it is the same thing as mentioned in John 14, where Jesus refers to "mansions." In the King James Version he says, "In my Father's house are many mansions...I go to prepare a place for you." I personally do believe that there is a tie between these two passages and that they are referring to the same thing. But I do not think it is a building. I do not take the word "mansions" literally as though there are going to be buildings waiting for us in heaven. Perhaps there may be, and if you choose to read it that way, it is all right with me, but I personally do not think it is true. I do not think Jesus is referring to buildings, but to bodies. And also, that is what Paul is talking about here. It seems clear, from the parallelism of this passage, that he is referring to a body. If he could describe our present body as a tent, then is it not fitting that he should describe the resurrection body as a house? A tent is temporary; a house is permanent. We will move from the temporary to the permanent; from the tent to the house eternal in the heavens. So I think it is highly likely that he is suggesting us here that what we have waiting for us is a resurrection body.

Now immediately this poses a problem for some. They say, "Well, if this is the resurrection body, then what do we live in while we are waiting for the resurrection?" The resurrection, we read in the Scriptures, is linked with the return of Jesus Christ. The dead in Christ do not rise until he returns for his own, and it may be years before that happens. Certainly, in the case of many of God's saints, it has already been centuries. What has happened to them? What do they live in when they die? In order to answer that problem some have suggested that God would provide for us a kind of intermediate body; a temporary body that would do us until the resurrection occurs and we get this present body back, refurbished, refinished, and glorified, an eternal body.

I have great respect for those who have taught this. In fact, even my beloved teacher, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, held this idea. But I have personally found no support for it in scripture. There is nothing that refers to an intermediate body anywhere; it is purely a supposition designed to explain what seems to be a puzzling

passage. Rather than suggesting that, if we compare this passage with what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 it will be immediately clear that he has in view the resurrection body. Notice what he says here in verse 4 (2 Corinthians 5):

"For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life."

Now turn back to 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter. In verse 51 the Apostle says,

"Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed."

Clearly, he is talking about the resurrection body here. Then he goes on to say, in verse 53,

For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

The interesting thing here is that the word for "clothed" in 2 Corinthians 5 ("that we would be further clothed,") is exactly the same word in Greek as that which is translated in 1 Corinthians 15:53 "put on" ("this perishable must put on the imperishable,") i.e., this perishable body of ours must be clothed upon with imperishable life, and this mortal nature must be clothed with immortality. "Then," he says, "death is swallowed up in victory." That is exactly what he is saying here in 2 Corinthians 5, "that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." So it is clear that we have here a parallel passage.

But that brings us back to our original problem: what are we going to live in during this intervening period between our death and the resurrection of the body at the Lord's return? The solution to it is that we need to understand more clearly the differences between time and eternity. The reason why we get into difficulty over this is because we project into eternity the attitudes and relationships of time. It is amazing how we do this quite unthinkingly. We still think of heaven as a kind of continuation in every way of this life. Now it has similarities, there is no question about that. There are many things which will be very similar indeed to our present life, of this I am sure. Friendships will be continuing, relationships will be extended, we will recognize one another, we will have memories of things on earth, these are clear. But it is wrong to project into eternity the conditions of time, and one of the conditions of time is sequence of events.

Down here we must wait patiently for things to run their chronological course; but we need not do this in eternity. As best we can understand this whole matter of eternity (and Dr. Einstein has surely helped us a great deal in this with his concepts of space and time), eternity is now, one great now, where things happen, not so much in sequence, chronologically, but according to our spiritual readiness. (You will have to think a bit to follow me now. It may strain you, but you can groan about it afterwards.) Remember that in eternity there is no such thing as now. That is why God, who is an eternal Being, sees the future as clearly as the past. It is not because he must wait for things to happen; for him they have already happened. Everything that is ever going to happen has already happened, in God's eyes, and it will also for us, in eternity.

I do think there is a sequence of experience in eternity, but it is not based on chronology; it is based upon spiritual readiness. You will notice that there are certain passages of scripture that seem to support this. For instance, how do you explain the statement in Revelation about the Lord Jesus, where he is called "The Lamb of God, slain from before the foundation of the world"? The cross occurred at a moment in history; we can date it. We know precisely when the Lamb of God was slain. Yet the Bible says it occurred before the foundation of the world. What do you do with that passage? How can you explain how a historical event, which occurred at a certain spot on earth, in the biblical reckoning is said to have occurred before the earth was even made? Well, if you are projecting all the thoughts and relationships of time into eternity, you are bound to have great difficulty with this. But if you remember that in eternity all things are present at one time, then of course it is no problem.

Take another example. In Ephesians the Apostle Paul says that we are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. How do you explain that? Well, only when you see eternity as not a succession of events in chronological sequence, but as relating to us in a different way, can you explain it. There is another passage in Hebrews that has always intrigued me. At the close of chapter 11, after listing the great saints of the past, Abraham, Moses, David, Jacob, Joseph, and others, the writer says of them "apart from us they shall not be made perfect." Well, what does that mean? Surely it hints at some event or experience in which all of God's people enter into the experience of perfection at once. It is not in sequences, not separated by chronology, but all at once.

Let me see if I can make clear what I am getting at. I believe this suggests that when a believer in Jesus Christ dies he at once experiences the coming of Christ for his Church. He steps out of time into eternity, and since, as far as his spiritual readiness is concerned, the next event for him is the coming of the Lord, that is what he experiences. The moment he dies he must awaken with the consciousness, "I've made it! I thought there might still be some time between my death and the coming of the Lord. But isn't it an amazing coincidence? He came just as I died!" And, what is more amazing, in the experience of that believer he does not leave anyone behind. All his loved ones, who know Christ, are there, too. Even those who, in time, stand beside his grave and weep and go home to empty homes are, in his experience, with him in glory. Furthermore, since there is no time in eternity, he discovers that, to his amazement, just as he reaches heaven, so does Adam. He is raised all at once---because they together experience this great event of the coming of the Lord for his own. Thus it is true, as Hebrews says, "that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

Does that stimulate your thinking a bit? Does it turn the gears a bit? It ought to. So much of our problem with the Bible lies in us, not in it. What a challenging book this is, and how amazing it is. How far it reaches out beyond the experience of men and reveals things that men, as they plod along in their earthly career, must uncover only painfully and slowly. Men think they have made tremendous advances in knowledge, only to discover that the Bible said it all along. They have only discovered what it meant that is all. I must press on, but there are some wonderful things to think about here.

Now there is a problem passage in this connection, in Revelation 6:9-11. John, there, is shown an amazing scene.

"When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been."

"Ah," someone says, "then there is a sense of time in eternity." Here are these souls who had once lived on earth but were killed for their testimony. John sees them in heaven, and what does he hear them cry? "How long, O Lord? How much longer must we wait before we are avenged at last?" And the Lord says, "Just a little longer. Only be patient until others add the testimony of their lives to yours, and then join you through the gateway of martyrdom. Just wait a bit!"

How do we explain that? It is explained by the fact that these martyred souls are obviously identifying with the conditions of earth. They are in eternity, yes; they have stepped into eternal relationships, but they are concerned about what is happening on earth. On earth there is always the awareness of time, of delay, and of waiting, and since John is still on earth their expression of concern must be voiced in the language of time. Perhaps this indicates a further condition of the eternal experience: that those who have stepped out of time into eternity can also step back in again if they desire to. In the life to come this may be the way we will experience the workings of God in the past. We might be able (this is fancy, I admit, but I think there is some justification for it) to choose a period in history which we would like to explore and step back into that time, living through its events, invisibly, behind the scenes, observing all that happened. Thus time would remain as a kind of volume in the library of God, a reference book into which any of his creatures may look to discover how God worked in history and thus to learn more about him. Now that is pure fancy. Do not quote that as scripture, but

to me, that is the explanation of this passage.

Now as we come back to 2 Corinthians 5, we learn that Paul is longing for this event. It is not a morbid desire on his part to get out of his body. He is not anxious to leave for he says, "Not that I want to be unclothed..." No, no. "It is rather," he says, "that I simply desire to be further clothed. I want to move on into the full experience of life, as God has promised it. I'm tired," he says in effect, "of being limited by this body. There are times when I long to be free and enter into the fullness of the resurrection body."

There is much I could enter into here, by way of speculation, but I do not wish to take time for it now. But I would point this out: one of the things we are learning down here, in this body, is how to manage the resurrection body. That will be a body fully subject to the spirit. How many times must you say, when someone invites you to do something, "Well, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." You mean, "I wish I could; I'd love to do it, as far as my desire is concerned, but I find my body unable to respond---the flesh is weak." But in the resurrection body this will not be true; there the body will be equal to the demands of the spirit. Anything we want to do we will find we are able to do. What a glorious experience that will be!

Do you know how I know that is true? It is for the same reason Paul can say with authority, "We know." His certainty comes not only from revelation, but remember that at the close of this very letter he tells of an experience he had. In the 12th chapter he says he was "caught up to the third heaven" to the throne room of God, into the very presence of God. Twice he says, "I cannot tell you what it was like, it is not lawful for me to do so. That is, you wouldn't understand my description, right now. But I can tell you this: I could not tell whether I was in the body or out of it. If I was in the body it was so responsive to me that I couldn't feel it, and if I was out of the body, I didn't miss it." Surely that is describing an experience of liberty so intense and marvelous that he felt his spirit was incapable of doing anything. I tell you, a vast and exciting panorama opens when you think about a verse like that.

But now, look at the present situation. He goes on to say (verse 5),

"He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord."

That is the present situation. In view of the certainty of this coming glory, says Paul twice, our present life should be marked with courage. "We are of good courage." Surely that means more than merely stiffening the upper lip; it means, rather, that he is full of encouragement. He is joyful, expectant, full of good courage.

There are two reasons given for it. First, because we have the Holy Spirit as a guarantee. God is preparing us for this great life ahead. He is getting us ready. He is teaching us how to walk by faith, and not by sight, so that we will be able to handle the resurrection body when we get it. To encourage our spirits during this present time, he has given us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that the resurrection will happen. How does the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts serve as a guarantee? In two ways. There is, first of all, the Holy Spirit's past experience along this line. In chapter 4, verse 14, Paul says, "knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also..." The Holy Spirit has already done this once. He knows how to do it, for he raised the Lord Jesus. So we have a guarantee that he can perform this feat with us. Second, there is his present ministry in our daily life. Look at verse 16, of chapter 4,

"So we do not lose heart [that is the same word, "we are of good courage"]. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day."

The Spirit has not only effected a resurrection with the body, as in the case of Jesus, but he has been doing it with our spirits every day since we have become Christian; renewing us, freshening us, resurrecting us so we do not get discouraged or downcast in spirit. He knows how to bring us to life again, to renew us daily as we rest upon the power of the indwelling life of God.

The second reason for being of good courage is that some day, Paul says, we are going home. Notice how he

puts it. This is beautiful, I think, He says, "we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from God." "But," he goes on to say, "we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord." Did you catch that? We Christians keep talking about "going home to be with the Lord," but have you noticed that you are already "at home" when you are in the body? In other words, you will never get away from home. We are at home right now in the body. We feel at ease, we feel relaxed about our bodies. We like this physical life, it is comfortable, we do not particularly want to leave it. But when we do, we will find that we will be just as much "at home" there, just as much at home as we were in the body. It is still "home"---it will be no different in that respect.

It is this concept that really marks the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament view of death. In the Old Testament days the saints of God wanted to stay, but were willing to go. But in the New Testament the apostle says, "We would rather be at home with the Lord." We are willing to stay, but wanting to go.

That brings us to the final thing he has to say, in verses 9 and 10. These reveal the eternal issue that we must always be concerned with.

"So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him."

Whether we are down here or up there, it makes no difference; one thing must always be characteristic of us: we make it our aim to please him. Our motivation then follows.

"For we most all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body."

What constitutes good or evil? It is made clear in verse 9: good is what pleases God. Our aim must be to please him, for what pleases him is good. When we stand at the judgment seat of Christ and all our life is evaluated for us, we will see that only what is done by Christ can be called "good," for his is the only life that pleases God. Evil is what displeases God. What is the ingredient that marks a thing as either good or evil? What essential ingredient must there be to please God? "Without faith it is impossible to please him." Faith is the response of an obedient heart to God's word. It is acting according to what God says. Without that it is impossible to please him. I do not care if you are trying to be religious or not; if all your trying does not include the element of responding to the Word of God, then you are not pleasing him. You may be very sincere about it, but you are exceedingly displeasing to God. Faith is acting on the basis of the written word and in dependence on the indwelling power of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. Without that element of faith, motivating and undergirding each activity of life, the most sincere action or attitude is unacceptable to God and constitutes "evil." One of these days you will stand before the judgment seat of Christ who, not in anger but in truth, will examine your life. No matter how much approbation you receive from others for the way you have acted, the only thing that will count in that day is what he says about you. In that day all that will be of value will be what you have done in response to his word, in obedience to what he has said. Thus you will have lived by faith and not by sight. And the wonderful secret is, that all eternity is to be lived on that basis. It will not be by your feelings, or because of apparent circumstances, but by what God says is true. That is faith. That determines the value of your life and mine.

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WHY WORSHIP?

by Ray C. Stedman

When you heard that we shall explore together today the theme of worship many of you perhaps are saying: "What do you think we have been doing all morning?" Our bulletin even calls this time "Morning Worship

Service."

We have indeed been worshipping, but what may appear as worship to us, visibly successful in the eyes of men, may not be worship in the eyes of God. He sees and hears much more than we do.

Let me read to you a description of God's reaction to a worship service held some years ago. It is recorded in the first chapter of Isaiah, verses 11 through 17. There God says:

**When you come to appear before Me,
Who has asked this of you, this trampling of My courts?
Stop bringing meaningless offerings,
Their incense is detestable to Me.
New moons, sabbaths, and convocations
I cannot bear your evil assembly.**

**Your new moon festivals and your
appointed feasts My soul hates,
They have become a burden to Me.
I am weary of bearing them.
When you spread out your hands in prayer,
I will hide my eyes from you,
Even if you offer many prayers,
I will not listen.**

**Your hands are full of blood.
Wash and make yourselves clean;
Take your evil deeds out of My sight.
Stop doing wrong,
Learn to do right;
Seek justice,
Encourage the oppressed;
Defend the cause of the fatherless,
Plead the case of the widow.**

Surely these words indicate that God looks at a worship service differently than we do because he reads our hearts. These words reveal that worship is not something we do. Worship does not deal with what we make our bodies do, (either singing, kneeling or praying), but worship consists of who we are, what our heart is feeling. This is the aspect of worship I want to explore with you.

It is startling to realize that everyone worships! Everybody! Everywhere! Worship is the fundamental drive of life. Atheists worship. Infidels worship. Skeptics worship. Even Republicans and Democrats worship. Lawyers, insurance agents and even Internal Revenue Service agents worship! All people worship for worship is the fundamental difference between humans and animals. Animals do not worship. They have no sense of the beyond or of the numinous. But God has placed eternity in man's heart, as the book of Ecclesiastes tells us. This urge causes men everywhere to worship. If they are not worshipping the true God, they are worshipping a god of their own composition. Worship, therefore, is a universal phenomenon.

The word comes from the old English "worth-ship" which means to ascribe worth or value to something or someone. Clearly there are two forms of worship. From the Christian point of view there is true worship and there is false. The worship of all the peoples on earth fall into these two categories.

True worship is to attribute worth to a real Being, one who is truly there and who is truly worthy. Dr. Francis Schaeffer wrote a book called *The God Who Is There* to make the point that although God is invisible to our eyes he is actually there. The function of believers is to learn what God is like and to acknowledge him to ascribe worth to him, to reflect upon the value, beauty and character of God. This is true worship.

False worship, on the other hand, is to attribute worth to an illusion which is not really there, or which is not worthy. It is not worthy of worship because it is merely imaginary. In the ancient world, false worship usually

took the form of bowing before idols or images. People created representations of gods, usually in the form of a human being or animal. Then they ascribed worth to it and regarded it as extremely valuable in their lives. They thought the god either helped them in causing their crops to grow or it protected them from some danger or evil. Thus they ascribed great worth to speechless images and idols.

Sometimes they worshipped deceitful spirits. Without the help of a visible image, they nevertheless worshipped an invisible spirit-being. The American Indians did this. In my study at home I have a portrait of three Blackfoot Indians on horseback worshipping the rising sun with their arms outstretched and their faces turned upward. They saw the sun as a spirit-being, and they also worshipped other spirits such as those of the mountains or the waters. They assumed that some being was there even though they could not see it.

In our modern world, men still worship. Either they worship the one true God, or often they worship some idealized view of themselves. It is amazing how many millions of people worship themselves. You may be familiar with the bold words of the poem *'Invictus'*:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

That is the worship of self. Sometimes worship is expressed in bowing down to or looking to some projected exaggeration of a living person. We know how easily many make idols of actors and actresses, rock stars and athletes. They imagine what they are like, and then ascribe worth to that purely imaginary image. It then becomes a driving force in their lives. Think of how many people are still worshipping Elvis Presley. The cheap tabloids even try to convince us that he is still alive by showing pictures of him at some shopping center or rock concert. This is a form of idolatry, for it is ascribing value to him which is totally imaginary.

There are many today who are caught up in the New Age movement and who worship invisible sources of power. They believe in strange spirit-beings that appear to them, they say, and give them advantages or special insights into the secrets of life. This form of worship is widespread.

I offer these examples to show you that worship is indeed a universal practice. Everyone does it! The only question is: are we practicing true worship or false?

It is apparent from this that worship is continually happening. It underlies every action and attitude we manifest. It colors all our life and goes far beyond a couple of hours on Sunday morning. Worship touches us all the time. Everything we do springs from our concept of what is important and valuable to us.

Since worship is the driving force of all human existence then when it is lost, whether it be true or false, life becomes dull, drab, and cheerless. Men and women ultimately sink into despair because life appears to be no longer worth the living. This fact alone indicates that worship is the most important and fundamental aspect of our existence. Millions today are turning to drugs because they have been disillusioned in the god they have been following, especially the god of their own selves. Out of their emptiness and absolute despair, out of their worshipless lives, they turn to anything that promises them a return of the feeling of significance. That is what drugs appear to offer them.

On the other hand, when true worship occurs, life becomes vital, real, exciting, daring and adventurous. It is felt to be eminently worthwhile. Those of us who have learned to worship the true God know this is true. Worship is the foundation to all we do and say, and we find ourselves worshipping in some form or another all day long. It is clear, therefore, we must give close attention to what true worship is. How do we learn it? How do we practice it? To answer these questions we must turn to the Scriptures. I want to explore the nature of worship now, and next week we will look at some of the methods of corporate worship.

In the fourth chapter of the gospel of John, we learn about worship from the lips of Jesus himself. At that time he was speaking to a woman at the well of Samaria who was lonely and miserable after five failed marriages. Obviously she had tried to satisfy herself and her longings by marriage, but it was all to no avail. Obviously

she was thirsting for something and had probably reached the place where she no longer expected to find it. Without bothering with marriage she was now simply living with a man. Reading her lonely heart, our Lord offered her new life using terms derived from the spot where they were gathered. As they sat by the well, he offered her a well of living water which would constantly be flowing, springing up to give her continuous life. He told her she could come to it any time and it would refresh her. She did not need to return to the physical well for the slaking of her soul's thirst. Finally, Jesus said:

God is a Spirit; and they Who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth.

With these words, Jesus indicated the fundamental elements of true worship.

God is a Spirit and so are we! We are spirits dwelling in bodies, which in the design of God creates a third entity called, soul. We have personality because we are spirits dwelling in bodies. Our human spirit is designed to communicate and interrelate with the Spirit of God. This is what Jesus means when he says we must worship God in spirit. He is referring to our human spirit which is usually referred to in Scripture as the heart.

We talk about doing things with our whole heart. By this we mean our spirit is fully engaged we are functioning at the fundamental level of our humanity. We are said to be involved "wholeheartedly." Therefore, to worship "in spirit" means that our worship must be genuine and heart-felt. We must mean it and feel it deeply. We must be fully committed to what we are doing as an expression of what we actually feel.

We can also express this truth negatively, as Scripture sometimes does. Worship is not to be phony or a put-on. It must not be mechanical. We ought not go through the motions of rising, standing, kneeling or praying without these actions reflecting what we are thinking or being. That kind of worship is unacceptable in God's eyes. It is a mockery. If we recite words that do not say what we really mean we are insulting God and treating him with derision and scorn. In Isaiah 1, God was reading the hearts of the people who were performing an outwardly beautiful service. But their hearts were wrong, and their worship was not "in spirit." Therefore it was totally unacceptable to him.

It is clear in the Scriptures from beginning to end that the one thing God hates above everything else is hypocrisy. We do too in other people! We do not mind it in ourselves, but we do not like it in others. If we treat God this way in worship, he is deeply offended, just as we are when someone is hypocritical toward us.

The second phrase Jesus used in talking about worship was "in truth." This refers to our view of God. The God we worship must be the true God. He must be the God who actually exists the true and living God. This is the danger of films such as 'The Last Temptation of Jesus' which is now playing in our theaters. It draws a false picture of Jesus. It portrays a Jesus who never existed, a being distorted and even perverted. This film gives people the wrong impression of Jesus. Not only films do this; many books and sermons do the same. Even sermons about God can give a wrong impression as to what kind of a being he is. Any worship based upon these false conceptions is not "in truth." Our worship must be in line with what is actually there.

You may well be asking: How do we know the true God? As we sing in a great hymn, God is: "Immortal, invisible, God only wise, In light inaccessible, hid from our eyes." If God cannot be seen, touched, felt or heard, how do we know the true God? The answer is that God has revealed himself to us. He discloses himself in three basic ways.

First, He reveals himself in the world of nature. Scripture tells us and experience confirms that we get a sense of God's wisdom, majesty, and power in the world of nature. You cannot study this marvelous universe with all of its complexity of design, its interrelatedness and its universal manifestation of the same laws without coming to some comprehension of a Great Designer. There is a Mind involved in creation. It is incredible to me that some scientists who work in these areas never grasp this simple fact. Everything in nature is shouting at us that there is a Mind of great intelligence, wisdom and power behind it. The majesty of God is visible in the beauty of his world, the lofty height of the mountains, and the roaring of the sea. These all evoke a sense of worship.

Second, God reveals himself in Scripture. The Bible is the most amazing book in the world. No other religious book has the qualities and characteristics of this one. Even though it has come from many different sources across hundreds of years, it presents an unusual manifestation of harmony. All of the books blend together and confirm each other. When you search deep into its pages, you discover that there are no errors or contradictions. Yet it speaks far beyond the understanding of the profoundest mind.

It is evident to anyone who reads the Bible carefully and properly that it is something greater than man could produce. God has spoken in his Word. It reveals his character, it tells us of his work both in creation and redemption, and it unfolds the great ultimate purposes of God what he is doing with the universe in which we live. We would know none of this without the Word of God.

There is still a third means of God's self-communication personal worship. When we take the facts of nature and the revelation of Scripture and begin to respond to them in prayer and obedience, this is true worship. Praising him, praying to him and ascribing value to him, do something to us. Our mind becomes illuminated and we begin to understand the words of his book more clearly. They sometimes glow with life and seem to leap off the page to grab your heart. We are enormously impacted by these great words of Scripture or even by standing on a mountain top looking out over a beautiful vista at a glowing sunset, we are moved by the majesty and greatness of God to know him in greater vision.

This, then, is God's self-revelation through his Spirit to our spirit, and it is another way of knowing God. The saints who have lived with God for years and years begin to reflect that knowledge by taking on his character. All of this is testimony to the witness of Scripture that we learn to know God through these three means.

The two major factors that we learn about God are his holiness and his grace. The basic nature of God is holiness. I do not know how you feel about this word, but for years I became uncomfortable whenever I heard it. I knew some people whom others called holy, and I found them to be very disagreeable. I came to associate the word with grimness. They were the kind of people who seemed constantly worried that someone somewhere was having a good time! But that is not holiness at all! Four different times the Scriptures use the phrase "the beauty of His holiness." True holiness is beautiful and attractive; it compels attention.

The word is difficult to define. Often it is defined as "separateness" and refers to something or someone who has integrity; who cannot be torn apart or easily manipulated. Holy people are strong and steadfast. Used of God, the term is the exact opposite of sinfulness. Sometimes the word is translated as "distinctiveness," or "uniqueness" or even "perfection." This is the meaning of God's holiness. He is a perfect being. All his attributes are in harmony and balance. There is nothing eccentric about God. He is flawless and remains so unchangeably.

That holiness becomes the ground of our stability. We are not dealing with a capricious God whose mood is different every time we come to him. We can trust God. Therefore, his holiness becomes the basis for our worship. It is such a beautiful holiness that it is awesome. Those who glimpse it usually fall on their faces in awe and even fear. They marvel at such a glorious, holy God.

In Isaiah chapter 6, the prophet suddenly saw a vision of the greatness of God while in the temple. He saw God lifted up and seated on a throne. The smoke of incense filled the temple and he heard seraphic beings, angels, burning creatures, bowing down before God and crying out endlessly, "Holy, Holy, Holy!" There is something very impressive about this scene.

The Hebrew language has no words to express comparison. In English, we have comparative words such as "good, better, best" or "big, bigger, biggest." The Hebrews express comparison through repetition. Many times, in both the Old and New Testament, you will find words repeated to express intensity or comparison. If the Hebrews wanted to describe great joy, they said "joy joy." If they wanted to speak of great fear, they said, "fear fear." Notice in the King James version of the Bible how many times Jesus says "Verily, verily, I say unto you..." This expression is derived from his Hebrew background. He is saying, "What I am about to say is really true true true!" This is a high degree of comparison.

When the Hebrews wanted to express a superlative, they repeated the word three times. This only occurs twice

in the Bible, both times in very interesting places. One is found in Revelation, chapter 8 where John sees the judgments of God being poured out upon the earth. A great angel in the form of an eagle flies through the heavens crying out, "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth!" In other words, there could be no greater time of trouble, no greater woe could affect the earth, than during that time. The only other time this repetition is used is in Isaiah 6 where the angels cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy." Superlatively, they are saying, God is perfect! This perfection creates a sense of awe and even fear before him.

There is another characteristic of God in Scripture which is seen as frequently as his holiness his grace. Grace is God's love in action. This becomes the feature that draws our hearts to God. We read of his love in Romans 5:8 and 8:32: "God commends his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," and "He who spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The more we read of God's love manifested toward us, forgiving us at infinite cost to himself, through much pain, agony and sacrifice to satisfy the demands of his justice, the more we are drawn to him. We are able to come to him, not as suppliants crawling on our knees pleading for help and mercy, but as beloved children, as part of his family. We are cared for and protected by a tender Father's heart. This is God's grace as seen in the Scripture.

When we begin to see God in his holiness and grace, it strikes deeply into our hearts. We find that our worship, our response to him, becomes the driving force of our life. It touches everything we do affecting our actions, words and attitudes. Such worship becomes the reason behind everything.

David expressed this kind of worship in a psalm found in 1 Chronicles 16. Part of his hymn of praise to his God is in verses 23 through 31:

**Sing to the Lord, all the earth;
Proclaim His salvation day after day.
Declare His glory among the nations,
His marvelous deeds among all peoples,
For great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise;**

**He is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the nations are idols,
But the Lord made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before Him,
Strength and joy in His dwelling place.**

**Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations,
Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due unto His name;
Bring an offering, and come before Him;
Worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness.
And tremble before Him, all the earth;
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved.
Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
Let them say among the nations, "The Lord reigns."**

That is true worship! It is designed to remain in our hearts all through the day. If we believe this, it will color every single aspect of daily existence. For the true worshiper, God becomes the place to which he flees in times of pressure. In times of temptation, when he feels weak and assaulted, unable and uncertain, he runs to God in his mind and rests upon his great promises. From this base, he draws joy, calmness, strength and courage to do what he needs to do, even though it may be painful.

As Christians, we need to carefully distinguish between prayer, praise and worship. They are not the same even though they usually occur together, and properly so. Prayer is our occupation with our human needs and problems. We come to God with our needs and ask him for his supply. Praise is the occupation of our minds with his blessings. We are thinking of all that God has done for us and give thanks for how he has blessed us. Worship is our occupation with God himself, with the greatness of his being. This is what many of our hymns

reflect. When we say, "Lord, save me," this is prayer. When we say, "Thank you, Lord, for saving me," this is praise. When we say, "Thank you, Lord, for being such a great Savior," this is worship.

When I was a student at Dallas Theological Seminary, the founder Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer told us that as a boy he woke up every morning to the sound of his mother singing a hymn in the kitchen. She always sang the same one:

When morning gilds the skies,
My heart awakening cries,
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Alike at work or prayer To Jesus I repair,
May Jesus Christ be praised!

What a profound influence this had upon his life. Her daily worship contributed to his godly development. C. S. Lewis has expressed this in a practical way. He says, "The moment you wake up each morning all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists in shoving it all back, in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in."

If you read the psalms frequently, you will see that many of them are evidently written about how to get up in the morning. When you are still groggy with sleep and need help waking up, it is not the fragrance of "Folgers coffee in your cup" that will help. You need to do what the psalmist does. I always picture Psalm 103 as coming from a man standing before a mirror shaving and saying to himself:

Bless the Lord, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits;

Then he starts to list those benefits to himself:

He pardons all your iniquities;
He heals all your diseases;
He gives you joy in the midst of your life...

That is worship. Sometimes the psalmist has to struggle. In Psalm 42, he asks himself questions: "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you so disquieted within me?" He is saying, "What is the matter with me this morning? I don't think I can handle this day." He keeps asking the question until he gets an answer. This teaches us how to get up in the morning.

I try to do this myself each day. When I get up, I usually take a shower first. While the water is pouring over my body, I pray, "Lord, cleanse me inside as well as out. Just as this water washes away the dirt of yesterday, Lord wash away the mistakes, the loveless words, the hurtful thoughts that I entertained, the wrong things I did, the selfish attitudes I manifested yesterday. Help me to learn from them and to start out this day with a clean slate knowing that you are here to help me." As I eat breakfast and visit with my wife, we pray, "Feed us with your Word and your thoughts. Feed us with the sense of the Lord Jesus who is the bread of life unto us. Give us this day our daily bread."

You can do the same thing. As you go to work, you can pray, "Lord, work through me today. Help me to be an instrument of yours." While you are working, you can send him arrow prayers flashes of prayer all through the day, "Lord, guide me...protect me." When the Internal Revenue Service calls to audit your account, your heart may sink, but you can pray, "Lord, what is going on? Help me." If someone asks a question and it is obvious there is something deeper behind it, you can say, "Lord, use me, help me." When you are coming home, thank him for your eternal home, your certain destiny, and for your home now with your loved ones who share it with you. As you go to sleep, sing a chorus of "How Great Thou Art." The God of glory who indwells you and walks with you throughout the week is the basis for your very life. Therefore, worship him all day long.

If you do this, when you come on Sunday morning and sing the great words of the hymns and hear the words of Scripture, your mind will not wander. You will be so caught up in the expression of what is valuable to you the worth of the God you serve that you will give yourself fully in heart, spirit, and truth to him. As Jesus said, "My Father is seeking such to worship him."

Catalog No. 711
Various Scriptures
November 6, 1988

WHAT DID WE COME HERE FOR?

by Ray C. Stedman

Last Sunday we sought to explore the fact that everyone basically worships. Worship is a human condition. The only question is: Are you engaging in true worship or false? True worship, of course, involves a God who is actually there, and who is worthy of worship. False worship adores an idol or an image of a god, an imaginary god, an illusion, something that really is not there; or if there, is not worthy of worship. But everybody worships in one way or the other.

This morning we shall look together at what it means to gather in a corporate experience of worship. We are essentially answering the basic question: What did we come here for? Through the years I have observed many reasons why people come to church. I have been listening to them for well over four decades, and I probably have heard them all.

Most people come because they derive some personal benefit which they may be hardly aware of or which they cannot articulate clearly. They simply say, "I just like church. It helps me. It does something for me." That is rather vague, but nevertheless is an adequate reason for coming. We do many things on the basis of simple enjoyment.

Other people come because they feel a need for meeting people, for being with others, for socializing. That is not quite as adequate a reason as the above, but it is understandable because we are social creatures. We like to be where other people are, at least for most of the time.

Some, I am sorry to say, come because they feel they have to. There may be some teenagers here who feel that way. There may be children present who would not otherwise come but their parents have made them come. I have to say that that is not necessarily a bad reason. I had to go to church when I was a child, and at first I didn't always appreciate it. But later I began to understand what lay behind that demand. Although it should not be done with cruelty or with insistence against a very strong or determined will, nevertheless, it is responsible parental behavior to train our children to come to church and to bring them for that purpose.

Some like to come because they enjoy the music and the singing. They appreciate hearing people raise their voices in a harmonic expression of their faith. They like the words of the great hymns. or enjoy the music of a good choir. I greatly enjoy the singing of hymns. I feel they are a tremendous way to teach theology. I hope you do not ever sing hymns that you do not listen to while you are singing.

It is amazing how many people enjoy hearing hymns even though they don't agree with the words. I met a woman once who declared herself an atheist and a feminist, yet she said, "I do go to church every once in a while because I like to hear them sing the 'herms' of the church." I told my wife afterward, "I hope she did not sing them too lustily lest she suffer from a 'himnia!'"

But at least some people come because they like the preaching. I do hope that is why you are here this morning. People say, "I do like to hear a good message. It makes me think." That is a good reason because the Scriptures are designed to make us think. They are contrary to the spirit of the age in which we live so they

make us face up to issues and ask questions about things. This is a helpful reason for coming to church.

Some like the preaching, of course, because it makes them sleep! Someone has said that preaching is the art of talking in someone else's sleep. That may be true, although I must say that I have never observed much of that going on here. If the sermon is so empty of content that people drift off to sleep, I always feel that they ought either to arise greatly strengthened, or awake greatly refreshed! One man said that the sermons he listened to reminded him of the coffee can at home which had on it the words "vacuum packed!"

None of these reasons are really wrong (except the last one, of course). But whatever may be the reason you come to church, most people feel they come for a good reason and that their reason is the correct one. Yet, even then, there is a wide range of expectations of what a church worship service ought to be. If we tried to choose everything that individuals wanted in a service, we would be engaged in endless controversy.

Some want more ritual. People have said to me, "Why don't you ever sing the doxology?" or "Why don't you have the Lord's prayer?" or "Why don't we recite the Apostles' Creed?" I have no objections to these additions. They are wonderful expressions of truth if they are done meaningfully. Perhaps, from time to time, we ought to add them to our service because they are rich in meaning. But some people can't feel they have been to church unless they have recited something like that.

Other people say, "No, what we need is a different music style. I don't like all these guitars. What I want to hear is a great organ thundering away. Then I can really worship." Young people, in particular, urge, "Out with the organ! We like guitars. They are the Lord's instruments." We had an elder once who actually proposed that we have 200 banjos leading the service. Fortunately, his request was not carried out.

There are some people who like less formality in the service. They want to encourage the raising of hands when people sing or pray and to feel freedom to do so. There ought to be such freedom because the Scriptures ask us to raise our hands at times unto the Lord. Some feel nervous about this and are unused to it. It looks like they have signed an "arms limitation" treaty. There are various desires in this regard and it is difficult sometimes to walk a middle course, as you can understand.

Some want a shorter message. They think all services ought to end promptly at noon. Anyone who goes beyond that is virtually criminal. Some want a longer message. They want more exposition because they enjoy it so. There are many different opinions. It sounds very much like a poem I ran across once by Sam Walter Foss on the various ways that people should pray.

"The proper way for a man to pray,"
Said Deacon Lemuel Keys,
"And the only proper attitude
Is down upon his knees."

"No, I should say the way to pray,"
Said Reverend Doctor Wise,
"Is standing straight with outstretched arms
And rapt and upturned eyes."

"Oh, no, no, no!" said Elder Slow,
"Such posture is too proud.
A man should pray with eyes fast closed
And head contritely bowed."

"It seems to me his hands should be
Austerely clasped in front
With both thumbs pointing toward the ground,"
Said Reverend Doctor Blunt.

"Last year I fell in Hidgkin's well
Head first," said Cyrus Brown,

"With both my heels a-stickin' up
And my head a-pointin' down.
And I made a prayer right then and there,
The best prayer I ever said,
The prayingest prayer I ever prayed
A-standin' on my head!"

I give you that, not to make you laugh, but because I believe it hits the proper note of worship. Worship should arise from a deep and urgent sense of need. We humans are designed for more than ourselves. It is what makes us worship. As the book of Ecclesiastes says, "God has set eternity in men's hearts." Deep within us all there is a cry for God. That is what makes us worship.

Both Scripture and the experience of the church through the centuries tell us that there are three essentials to a worship service: three things necessary to make corporate worship satisfying and fruitful, producing something worthwhile in our lives.

The first one is that we must come basically and essentially to honor and to praise God. God must be central in worship. We do not come for any other reason, fundamentally, than to express our praise and thanksgiving unto Him. As the psalmist puts it, "Give unto Him the glory due unto His name." God is our Creator. He made us. He fashioned us. He sustains us. We live and breathe because of his creative power. But more than that, he is our Redeemer. We would have destroyed all that he created, including ourselves, had he not found a way to solve the problem of our sin and guilt, to cleanse us and forgive us, and give us gifts of life, of truth, of insight and power which we would never have had otherwise. We come to thank him for those gifts, to praise him for his mercy, to express to him the glory due unto his name.

If this is not the fundamental element of worship, then the service quickly deteriorates. As many of you have experienced (as I certainly have), a so-called "Morning Worship Service" can become nothing more than a religious entertainment, a public entertainment. Today many people go to church services because they are entertained by them. They like the music, the snappy jokes, the clever comments made by leaders. It is almost like a theater where a stage play is being put on. But that is not worship, not in the biblical sense of the word.

Or perhaps a service deteriorates into empty and boring ritual, the same thing every Sunday. We know exactly what is going to take place. It is utterly predictable: we will rise at this point; we will kneel at this time; we will bow our heads; we will say these words. It can all become nothing but an empty performance, and people go away as empty as the service itself was.

Or it may be so man-centered, focusing on our needs, our desires, our feelings, that it becomes nothing but a narcissistic performance. That, too, does not satisfy the hunger of the heart. We must put God central in worship. We must come to glorify him, to give thanks unto his name. That does not mean that it has to be the same thing every Sunday. God is an infinite Being. He reflects many qualities and many different moods. Therefore worship services ought to be varied in their emphases. Most often, they should be a joyful celebration for all that we have received. A modern hymn we occasionally sing puts it beautifully:

Sometimes, Alleluia,
Sometimes, praise the Lord,
Sometimes gently singing,
Our hearts in one accord.

Some services ought to be a solemn time of heart-searching, a time when perhaps a passage of Scripture powerfully portrays our broken humanity or the beauty and glory of the Lord and the whole congregation is made solemn before God. Some of the Psalms reflect this, the majesty of the Lord and the beauty of his holiness: "The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him."

Sometimes they may be characterized by a sense of grateful thanksgiving. Perhaps, we have been delivered as a nation from some crisis. I well remember after the Cuban missile crisis that many church services reflected a sense of a burden lifted, a peril removed, a danger evaded. We were, properly, grateful to God for that. Maybe it will be a local event that awakens our deep gratitude. Certainly, from time to time throughout the year, there

ought to be opportunity for expression of God's marvelous goodness to us.

Now and then a service should be characterized by a comforting sense of reassurance. If we, as a people, have been made afraid or been threatened, we need reassurance; perhaps our faith has been shaken by some event. Many Scriptures are designed to quiet our fears and make us rest in God and know again that all will turn out well. That should be a repeated theme in many of our services in these troubled times.

Occasionally a powerful proclamation of a truth that addresses itself to the conscience will leave a congregation stirred, excited, and galvanized into action. Or a service may feature a giving of honor to someone, the recognition of how God has used a man or woman as an instrument of his grace. We had a case of that this morning with these grade-school boys who shared with us about running a race. We recognized their accomplishment, and it was delightful.

Whatever the nature of a service, it is determined by the events we are passing through as a congregation, or by the Scripture passage to which we have come and the theme that it presents; or by some obvious social problem or need that needs to be confronted and to have the light of the Word of God applied to it. But no matter what the theme, it all ought to be centered upon God's power at work, God's character as the fundamental basis of our lives, God's work of redemption, God's wisdom in applying it in many different ways beyond our ability to perceive. That theme, whatever it is, ought to flow through the music, the prayer, the Scripture, even the offering, and culminate at last in the preaching. Preaching ought to be the climax of a worship service because it is the time when the congregation, through the preacher, actually hear the voice of God. The preacher is giving us the mind of God about ourselves, our nation, and our problems. Preaching, therefore, ought to be the culmination of all that has gone on in a service. This has been well expressed by our dear friend, John R. W. Stott, one of the great preachers of our day.

Far from being an alien intrusion into worship, the reading and preaching of the Word are actually indispensable to it. The two cannot be divorced. Indeed, it is their unnatural divorce which accounts for the low levels of so much contemporary worship. Our worship is poor because our knowledge of God is poor. And our knowledge of God is poor because our preaching is poor. But when the word of God is expounded in its fulness and the congregation begins to glimpse the glory of the living God, they bow down in solemn awe and joyful wonder before his throne. And it is preaching which accomplishes this. The proclamation of the Word of God in the power of the Spirit of God that is why preaching is unique and irreplaceable.

I would say a hearty "Amen!" to those words.

Now the second element that worship must contain if it is to be worthy is that it must involve a recognition of the body of Christ; and an opportunity to grow in knowledge of one another, of our needs, our problems, our hurts, our pain, our distresses, our joys, and our thanksgivings. There must be a time when we enter someone else's life who is sitting beside us. We must grow in unity, in a sense of belonging, of caring, and of loving one another. That is why we make time for you to greet those around you. We do not want anyone to feel lost or lonely, or a stranger in our midst, that no one talks to them or cares for them. This is the commonest complaint about church services. Folks go away and complain that no one spoke to them. They may say, "I have been going to that church for weeks and no one has even asked my name or said a word to me." That is a failure of worship!

Worship must include the body of Christ. We belong to each other. We are part of a worshipping congregation together. I believe [the motivation to do this is awakened by the worship of God. You see this all through the Scripture and you often see it in human experience. When a congregation worships God truly they also begin to be concerned about each other. When you love God, you will begin to love your brother. John points this out in his first letter. He says, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." We are so designed that we express our love for God by our concern for each other.

Remember what Jesus says in that great passage in Matthew 25 where he describes the events that will ensue when he comes again. He will sit on his glorious throne and gather before him all the living nations which he calls "the sheep and the goats." Sheep are true believers and goats are apparent believers, but not real ones. He is going to distinguish between them, to separate the goats from the sheep. How does he do it? The test is,

what did you do or not do to each other. He will say, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, you have done it unto me." What does this mean? By helping others you have worshipped God. That is the test of true religion.

We are also exhorted in the Scriptures to pray for, to comfort, to encourage, and to admonish one another. That wonderful text in Hebrews 10 which we read this morning said:

Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but encouraging one another.

I remember visiting the University Presbyterian Church of Seattle some years ago and listening to Dr. Bruce Larson. He was telling the people that Christians ought to be like the great sand cranes of the Midwest, these birds that fly through the skies together in a vee formation. He said there were two unique qualities about them. First, they are always changing leadership. One bird is not always the leader for they each take their turn. Second, while they are flying they honk to each other. They are encouraging each other, "That's fine! You're doing great! Keep it up!" That is what Christians ought to be doing encouraging one another and helping one another in their walk.

Another passage of Scripture that which speaks directly to this is found in Colossians 3.16-17:

Let the word of Christ dwell within you richly; as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Notice the elements of worship there. Preaching and teaching "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom as you teach and admonish one another." Then there is singing "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," sharing together in a mutual expression of faith through a song or a hymn. Then there is serving "Whatever you do in word or deed, let it be in the name of the Lord Jesus," serving one another in that way. That ought to be a part of every worship service, a recognition of our unity in the body of Christ.

The third element essential to true worship is to recognize afresh the ultimate end of relating to God and relating to each other. What is that purpose? What does worship prepare us for? The answer is: to serve the needs of the world! The church is here to teach and bless and help the world. God's ultimate objective is the world this unredeemed society around us, these people without faith who are stumbling blindly through life and destroying themselves in the process. There is plenty of hurt also in the church, but there it is being cured and corrected in order that we might learn how to help people out there, in the desperate conditions of life.

Remember that wonderful scene in Isaiah 6 where Isaiah sees the greatness and glory of God, high and lifted up with his train filling the temple. The angels bow before him, crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy." Isaiah falls on his face and declares himself unworthy, "Woe is me, for I am undone! I have a dirty mouth. I am a man of unclean lips!" And God sends an angel with a burning coal to cleanse his mouth. After that, Isaiah says, "Lord, here am I. Send me!" That is what worship ought to do for us. It ought to make us ready to say, "Lord, here am I. Here is a need that I am aware of in our community. In my neighborhood there are people who are hurting and need help. Here am I. Send me!"

That is why we take an offering in church. It is not just to pay the expenses of the church, although it does that. It is designed to permit you to share the ministry that reaches out to those in distress around us. That is also why we pray for each other. It is why we hear reports of missionary activities, of various local ministries to inform us of where people need help, because we are being equipped to help them.

To draw this to a conclusion, let me just say that the test of true worship is threefold. You can ask yourself these three questions: First, does worship help me experience God's presence in beauty and power in a manner true to his word? Am I in touch with the real God? You can have worship experiences that do not reflect the reality of God. They often reflect God in a perverted or distorted way. They may minister to your emotions, but

they do not teach you anything about the real God. A true worship service ought to send us out feeling that we have been standing in the presence of the real God. We know something more of his greatness, his mercy, his compassion, and his love.

Second, does worship foster a sense of unity in the Body or does it damage it? Do I go out feeling closer to my brothers and sisters, more understanding of them, or do I go out angry and upset at them, ready to cut them off and have nothing to do with them? The purpose of worship is to increase the love and unity of the body.

Third, does worship motivate me to take practical steps to help others? Do I feel stimulated, motivated, to do something about the woman down the block who has no one to help her with her shopping? To help that young teenager in our neighborhood who is causing so many problems? Could I talk to him, not to bawl him out but to be a friend? Whatever the need may be, am I motivated to meet it?

Let me close with these words from the first chapter of James:

If anyone considers himself to be religious, and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself, and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

That is true worship. Worship ought to do that for us. Ask yourself: Do I get help in these areas? Do I understand more about the greatness of God and his mercy and his love? Am I stirred to gratitude because of what I have heard? Do I sense a close companionship with other believers? Do I see them, struggling as I am, to work out various problems. Do I want to do all I can to encourage them and help them? Am I stimulated to do something practical this week to bring this all about, to help someone, to serve and to minister to those who are in trouble in this troubled age? That is what true worship is before God.

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Various Scriptures
November 13, 1988

The Secrets of God

by Ray C. Stedman

In preparation for a series of messages from Ephesians 1 through 3, it will be helpful to consider a subject which is always of prime interest to believers---the authority of the Scriptures. Why do we accept the Scriptures as the Word of God and as the authority in our lives?

I hope you recognize that authority is always the ultimate question. In any issue we discuss, we finally must resolve it on the basis of authority. We can't get away from that, although we might like to. Many of us cherish the fond illusion that if we only had the opportunity we could set aside everybody else's thinking and do our own. We say, "I want to come to my own conclusions." We don't want anyone else to influence us. But we are kidding ourselves when we talk that way, because of course we can't do that. There is no way by which we could possibly spend the time necessary to think and study through everything ourselves. We must accept authority. We do it all the time. If you are a stranger in a town and somebody gives you directions, you accept them as an authority in that area without question, because you think they know more than you do, even though you have never met them before. If you read a road map or refer to the owner's manual of a new appliance or even read a newspaper, you are constantly accepting statements on the authority of others.

Therefore the final issue always is: "What authority do you have?" I hope you have learned already that a Christian resolves his puzzles and riddles and the difficult questions of life on the basis of the authority of the Word of God. The final right we have as human beings is to choose the authority we are going to obey. That is

all. We must obey some authority. We must submit to some master. And the final right---really the only right---we have, is to choose which master we are going to submit to.

Here in Peninsula Bible Church, and among the Christian community around the world, the ultimate authority is the Scriptures. "The Word of God" we call it. This book, the Old and New Testaments, is the revelation of the mind of God---God speaking to man. Therefore, what it says is final. It is superseded by no other authority. It is challenged and rivaled by no other. There is nothing which approaches it, in the mind of a Christian. It is unquestionable because it is God himself speaking---the ultimate authority in all of life.

Well, somebody says, "That is fine for you Christians. You accept that by blind faith. But how do you know the Bible is the Word of God?" There are many very legitimate approaches to answering that question. We might discuss the uniqueness of the Bible in its unerring ability to foretell human history. Or we might invoke the authority of Jesus Christ---and of course all final authority rests there. Even the Scriptures are acceptable to us only because of the authority of the person of Jesus Christ.

But the approach I want to discuss this morning---and what to me is the most remarkable and convincing evidence that the book I have in my hand is God's revelation of ultimate reality, of final truth---is the fact that here in this book I find revealed about life certain truths which are essential to me or to any person in order to live life as it was intended to be lived, and which I cannot find anywhere else---no other source gives them to me. They are certain essential elements which I must know if I am going to handle life properly, and which I cannot learn anywhere else. Not in all the libraries or universities of earth, nor in all the research of science, nor in all the thinking of philosophers---not in any of the investigation of human knowledge and wisdom---can I ever find the truths which are hidden here. These are what mark this as God's book, the essential book about life. And it is some of these I want to bring before you.

In 1 Corinthians 2, the apostle Paul is saying this very thing to the Corinthian believers:

"When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

**"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him,"**

God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man 's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him ? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

He says that among the mature we speak or impart a hidden, secret wisdom, which none of the rulers of this

age know anything about. When he refers to the rulers of the age, he does not mean governmental authorities, necessarily. He is talking about the leaders of human thought---the philosophers, the statesmen, the molders and fashioners of world opinion, the poets, the politicians---those who lead people in every realm of life. And he says, "They do not know these secrets of God. And because they don't know them, they make the most atrocious blunders. They are constantly making mistakes---terrible, ghastly, costly mistakes which injure and damage thousands and millions of people. "But," he says, "God has revealed these secrets to us, by his Spirit. They are imparted to those who are filled with the Spirit. Those who possess the Holy Spirit can hear and understand these secrets of God." Paul calls them the "depths" or the "deep things" of God.

It is these same things which later on in 1 Corinthians he refers to as the "mysteries" of God. In chapter 4, verses 1 and 2, there is a beautiful statement describing what a Christian is:

"This is how one should regard us [Christians], as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy"
[faithful to their task].

We know what a stewardess is, in this day of aviation. And a steward is the male counterpart---a dispenser of necessities, who gives out meals and tickets and information and all the other things necessary to any traveler. This is the idea Paul conveys regarding Christians. Christians are said to be stewards of the mysteries of God. We are caretakers, custodians, of God's secrets, dispensers of them---not to keep them for ourselves, but to practice them and distribute them to a waiting world which is falling apart because it doesn't understand how to handle life the way it ought to be lived. Therefore it is essential that we understand these mysteries.

Now, even Christians struggle a great deal in their lives. The knowledge of these secrets doesn't remove us from conflict. We all have grave problems. I have discovered that you can fall through the roof even though you are a pastor of a church! You can be confronted with puzzling and baffling experiences you don't know the answers to. These secrets do not exempt us. But one thing they do---they enable us to find the solutions, and to handle the circumstances which come. And without them we are unable to do so.

I am greatly concerned at how many Christians exposed to the truth of God are still unable to handle life as it is thrown at them. That is why I have chosen to bring this message---in order that we might understand these secrets, and give ourselves to this matter of becoming faithful stewards of the mysteries, the secrets, the hidden wisdom, of God. T. S. Elliot described life this way: "All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance. And all our ignorance brings us nearer to death. But nearer to death, no nearer to God. Where is the life," he asks, "that we have lost in living?" It is possible, is it not, to lose life while you are living it because you don't know the hidden wisdom, the secrets, the mysteries of God.

Mysteries, in Scripture, are not "Who Done Its". They are not insoluble problems, strange and mysterious riddles nobody can grasp. They are secrets hidden from the general public, but available to those who are in the inner circle because they are willing to be taught by the Spirit. And they are essential to life. As we take up some of the more important of them we need to realize that I can touch upon them only briefly in the time available. But they are not unfamiliar themes. They have been preached here many times. They are set before you constantly, so they won't be new and startling. But what you should think of as we go through them is: "How much do I know these? How much can I handle this kind of truth? How much can I impart it? How much is it showing up in my practical daily existence?" That is where these secrets become available to the world around.

One of the greatest secrets scattered throughout the Scriptures is what you find referred to repeatedly as "the mystery of the kingdom of God"---the secret government of earth, if you like. This is the fact that in the midst of the world around us, with nature and people and books and trees and houses and all the other visibilities of life---right in the midst of it, permeating all of it, and governing and controlling everything---is a secret, invisible kingdom. It is the kingdom of God. God is in control of history. He is governing human affairs. He is behind creation. He made nature.

I am always disturbed, whenever I go someplace like a national park, to hear the rangers say, "Nature did this, and nature did that." But, nature is what is there. So if you say this, what you are really saying is that nature

made nature, that "nature" produced what you call "nature". That is senseless. It doesn't mean a thing. Nature does nothing. Nature is what is produced, not what is producing. It is God who produces nature. But sometimes even Christians use that phraseology because we are falling heir to the philosophy of the world about us which tries to obscure the kingdom of God and act as though it isn't there.

Men don't want to think of God as being present. Yet without this knowledge of the kingdom of God and God's control of human events and human lives, including yours and mine, even to their most intimate details, life becomes meaningless, empty, and devoid of purpose. We feel worthless, useless. And the older we grow, the less reason we seem to have for living. If you want purpose in your life, you must begin by recognizing the fact of this mystery, of this secret kingdom, this rule of God in the midst of human affairs. Then things will begin to fall into place and make sense. Without it, life is mere existential despair.

That despair has spread throughout the world in our day. Men deny the existence of this secret kingdom. But they are constantly falling apart at the seams because they have no meaning, no purpose, no reason to exist. This feeling is perhaps best described by the high priest of humanism, Bertrand Russell, who recently died. He wrote, "Brief, powerless is man's life. On him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless to destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way. For man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day." What a gloomy statement! What dark, rank pessimism!

And yet that is all you can see in this universe. It is nothing but a cold, cosmic machine, cranking on its relentless way...if you don't recognize the kingdom of God as Jesus revealed it---the heavenly Father with his heart of concern for his own, his intimate knowledge of even the hairs of your head and every other part of your body and being. This is the answer---this secret of God.

But to translate this into your daily experience is absolutely necessary. It is one thing to talk about it at church. But what about tomorrow at work, and in your home, and among the neighbors, and in the realm of politics? Do you see the kingdom of God there? Do you see God's iron-clad grasp of human events there as well? Do you see his ruling and overruling hand, his ability to control and manipulate, and to bring about his purposes through tears and darkness and sorrow? Well, that is what makes the difference between meaning and meaninglessness in life.

Then there is what Paul calls, in 2 Thessalonians, "the mystery of lawlessness". How we struggle with this! Who hasn't asked, "Why did this happen to me? Why do I have to go through this experience? Why does cancer suddenly strike a dear one?" You must face these questions. "Why should injustice prevail? Why do wars continue their senseless destruction?" Man wrestles with injustice, evil, and the inability to make real social progress---and always has. Why is it that we are still grappling with the problems the Romans struggled with in the days of Julius Caesar? We haven't learned a thing more than they about how to solve them. And back even to the dimmest recesses of human history they were wrestling with the same basic problems. Why? Where has all our vaunted education---the heights of human wisdom---brought us, when we haven't been able to solve any of the basic problems? Why is this? Why is it that politicians can never be trusted to keep their promises even the best of them? Of course a lot of demagogues run around making promises merely because they want to get into office. It is amazing each year how people fall for that, never seem able to see through those who make promises and change them with the wind in order to get elected. But there are some good politicians, too, who make promises they fully intend to keep. And they promise what they sincerely want to deliver when they get into office. But when they get there they can't do it. Why?

The answer of Scripture is that there is a mystery of lawlessness. There is a malevolent being called Satan, prince of a great kingdom of darkness and evil, a kingdom of millions of beings like himself who are in headlong stampede against the government of God, in revolt and rebellion against him, and who are intent on wrecking and smashing and mangling all the love-born plans of God for the human race. And they know how to do it! You will never understand life, and you will never understand the conflicts you have in your home between yourself and your wife or your children or your parents, or with your neighbors or anyone else, until you understand this secret, this mystery of lawlessness. You will never be able to do anything effective about it. You will constantly be merely treating the symptoms which keep reappearing all the time unless you begin

to understand how to use weapons which will aim at the real source of trouble, as Paul tells us in the sixth chapter of Ephesians. Without this knowledge there is no explanation of history. There is no realistic way of dealing with current problems. There is no solving of harmful or hurtful relationships between human beings. You will never solve the problem of the Communist threat to the world, or anything else, until you understand the mystery of lawlessness.

Exactly parallel with that is what Paul calls "the mystery of godliness". In 1 Timothy he says, "Great is the mystery of godliness." This is the answer to the mystery of lawlessness. God has a secret which, if you learn it, enables you to handle this mystery of lawlessness. You can never escape the struggle, but you can win! That's the point. You don't have to be defeated. You don't have to be torn apart and discouraged and bored and jealous and envious and anxious and fretful. You can win, by means of the secret of godliness. It is also called "the mystery of the gospel" and in another place "the mystery of Christ and his church". It is simply the fantastic, radical principle that God intends to live in man. Man is to be the dwelling place of God. And, through the cross and the resurrection, God has set aside man's guilt and provided for his weakness and impotence, and has given him a way of handling life as it comes---through the power and the activity of God himself, living in you. That is the mystery of godliness---the greatest secret the world has ever heard of!

And it is waiting for Christians to demonstrate---so that when you get upset or anxious or attacked, you don't react as a non-Christian would. You don't retaliate or spill out a torrent of angry words in return. You don't strike back, you don't get even. But many, many Christians evidence the fact that they haven't yet learned the mystery of godliness, simply haven't really learned this secret. They may know it intellectually, but they haven't committed their lives to it. And yet that is what changes life. That is what revolutionizes society. That is what God calls us to learn.

It is the answer to guilt. How many of you get up in the morning and, first thing, feel a sense of guilt about something you didn't do but should have, or something wrong you did do the night before? Do you know how to handle it? Do you know how to divest yourself of that sense of guilt and to step out, free, forgiven---God's man or God's woman?

Do you know how to handle the sense of feebleness you feel whenever you are challenged with something too big for you? Do you know how to avail yourself of God's power to meet that challenge? Without this secret we become victims of life instead of victors. Much already has been taught here about that over the years, and doubtless much more will be.

But now we must move on to another mystery. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says to these men and women who are facing life and death,

"Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed."

There are many passages in Scripture which speak of that change, of what God is going to do in the future, what he is preparing us for. This is what explains what happens to us in our lives. This is why we can take the sorrows and heartaches and injustices which come. As Paul tells us, "This slight, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." And, "The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

All this points to that great theme which, Paul tells us in Ephesians, is behind all of God's work---that in the fullness of time he may gather together all things in Christ, and harmony and unity will be restored to the universe. The second law of thermodynamics, which insists upon decay and loss, will be reversed, and things will get better and better and greater and greater and richer and richer and higher and higher to an infinity beyond our comprehension. This is what puts hope back into our discouraged lives. Life is not without meaning. This is the secret of it. There is no more encouraging secret in all the world than to understand this mystery of God's working in the future.

Finally, we stand before the mystery of God himself, this mighty Being, this wonderful God---three persons,

yet one God---whose ways are different than our ways, greater and higher, who teaches us to lose life in order that we might gain it, that if we are going to live, we have to die, that if we are going to reign, we must become a servant of others, that if we are going to become rich, we must accept poverty and loss, who constantly rules with undeviating justice, and yet with warm, heartfelt, absolutely unending love. No wonder Paul says, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." At last we must cry out with the Apostle as we stand before the greatness of God and say, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" What a God! What truth!

The thing that grips me at this moment, and I hope it grasps you, is the fact that to us---we plumbers and carpenters and doctors and bankers and housewives and laborers and construction workers and secretaries---to us have been committed the secrets of God. We are stewards of the mysteries of God. They are given to us in order that we might understand them and begin to live on them ourselves, and then by that demonstration to impart them to others around us, so that all of life begins to be changed. Do you have any idea how dark this world would be, how completely hopeless life would be, without the slightest bit of relief, were it not for the dissemination of these secrets of God through the centuries already ---by Christian people? And we have a responsibility to our own generation to be stewards of the mysteries of God. "Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."

I share with you something which has been troubling me. I am disturbed at how few of our people really have habits of personal Bible study. We all love to come and listen to these truths expounded here. We love to read the messages in printed form, and some are studying them. Some are using them as they are intended to be used---as guidelines to prompt your own study. But many are only coming and drinking it all in, but never going beyond that---merely listening---perhaps a few changes apparent here and there, but nothing very much.

Now, let me say something out of the depths of my pastoral heart: You will never be a faithful steward of the mysteries of God that way. You will never be able to help another. You will never be able to demonstrate these secrets in your own life until you personally begin to dig deeper into the Scriptures yourself, and find them out for yourself. It is only as you take these guidelines and begin to translate them into your own terms, into your situation, in your home, where you live, that these truths begin to come alive, and the community starts sitting up and taking notice that here indeed are people who have learned to live in a wholly different way. Only thus can we become faithful stewards of the mysteries of God. The ultimate demonstration is what takes place down in the hurly burly of life, right in the blood and the sweat and the tears of the marketplace and the home and the school and wherever we are.

This is what makes me know the Scriptures are the word of God. They solve the problems of life, explain its puzzles. And yet they are still beyond us, still challenging to the intellect. I have been studying this Bible for more than thirty years, but I still often feel as though I have just opened the book and it is flashing its new insights, revelation, and knowledge into my mind which simply dazzle me and challenge me and make me pause in humility to give thanks to God for these marvelous, delivering truths. What a ministry God has committed to us! My challenge to you is to ask yourself how faithful a steward you are of these great secrets. These are the riches God has entrusted to us to disseminate through our lives to others. May God help us as we face them and answer these questions: How much do you know of this yourself? How much has it gripped your heart and changed your life?

As we close, I would like to ask you for a moment to pray silently before God and answer whatever the Spirit of God is asking your own heart. I don't mean to condemn. God does not condemn. But sometimes he wants us to take an honest look at ourselves and see where we are, and to renew our commitment to allow him to change us and make us faithful stewards of his mysteries.

Prayer

Our Father, we ask you to forgive us for the neglect of your Word. What a fantastic treasure of knowledge is here in these pages! How much we need to give ourselves to it, Lord. This is what you have put us here for in this brief span of earthly life---that we might learn these eternal truths which will flash in glory forever through the endless reaches of eternity. And

our lives will be reckoned as worthwhile only as we have grasped them and understood them and begun to practice them. Lord, teach us, then to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God. Help us, Father. We accept your immediate forgiveness for our failure, but we want to go on from here, Lord. We don't want to be fettered and impotent through ignorance or faithlessness. We want to be strong and genuine and healthy and whole and wholesome, imparting health and strength to others as well. Through us, Lord, heal the blight of humanity around us--the curse and the darkness and the corruption and the despair which is so evident about us. Work through our lives to heal many, we pray, and above all, make us faithful stewards of these secrets. As ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Catalog No. 3000

1 Corinthians 2:4:1, 2; and 15:51, 52

THE COMING OF JOY

by Ray C. Stedman

I would like for you to meditate with me on the announcement of the angel to the shepherds in Bethlehem. If you have not already seen the fine musical production *His Love Reaching*, I hope you will see the last performance of it here tonight. Those of us who have seen it were blessed by it. I especially appreciated the attempt it made to take us back in imagination to that scene in the fields of Bethlehem, in the darkness of night, where the angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to some unexpecting shepherds. He scared the living daylights out of them. That is what it says---in a rather loose translation. They were terrified, and rightly so. for this was a sudden appearance of a supernatural figure.

I don't know what the angels look like. Scripture does not describe them very carefully. The best description we have of the appearance of angels says that they are like young men dressed in white garments. Those were the angels that appeared at the resurrection. Never once are they referred to as having wings. I don't know where that idea came from, unless it came from the concept that angels are free to move about rapidly, and to us that suggests flying.

But the angel suddenly appeared out of the darkness of the night. Around him shone the radiance of glory---a nimbus---as the glory of the Lord shone round about the shepherds. And as the Authorized Version puts it, "they were sore afraid." Luke 2: 10:

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

Thus the birth of God's long-awaited redeemer was introduced to a darkened, weary, and exhausted world. History tells us that the time of our Lord's birth was indeed a time of weariness and widespread despair among men and among the nations of the earth. The civilizations of that day had all played themselves out. This is how Matthew Arnold describes the world into which the Lord came:

On that hard, pagan world, disgust and secret loathing fell.
Deep weariness and sated lust made human life a hell.

It is striking that the human emotion that was first encountered by the angelic messenger was that of fear. Men were afraid in that day. They were afraid of many things, as they are today. There was Herod the Great on the throne. Herod was cruel and was able to accomplish his wrath upon whoever was the object of his disfavor. He had personally put to death many, even in his own family, because of their antagonism to his plans. Also there were the Romans, too, with their proud legions, marching up and down across the face of the earth, holding everything in a severe and iron bondage. Many wars broke out and the economy was uncertain. The people were afraid.

Perhaps the most striking thing to us about this story is that we can so easily put ourselves back into that situation of fear, for by far the dominant mood of the hour today is that of fear. The other day I was watching a television news story on how senior citizens today are afraid to go out of their homes and must lock themselves into their apartments for months on end because of their fear of being assaulted, mugged, injured, or killed if they step outside their door. As you know, things have come to such a pass that policemen must ride our city buses and trains in order to protect people from danger. Crime has mounted to such a degree that people are afraid to walk the streets.

It always amazes me that anyone should really think that we have made any progress in solving the basic problems of humanity in all these two thousand years. I am almost tempted to laugh out loud when someone talks to me of the great progress we, as human beings, have made when we are still working on the same problems they worked with two thousand years ago. The movies of our day are reflecting the uneasiness that is in people's hearts---movies such as *The Omen*, *Jaws*, *King Kong*. Such disaster movies all reflect the sense of impending doom that is so deep in the hearts of people today. All the mini-wars that break out, like the one in Lebanon today, betray the increasing tension among the great powers of the earth as they move toward a certain conflict that everyone knows is yet to come. As we watch Jimmy Carter putting together his Cabinet, we do so with mingled apprehension and hope, not sure what will happen. We are told by the economists of our day that all we can look forward to is more inflation, higher taxes, high unemployment, and an ultimate, certain collapse. Then, to top it all, we in this beautiful Bay Area are waiting for the great earthquake.

Yet the first word of the angel to those shepherds in the field was "Fear not. Be not afraid." I do not think any greater news can come to us than that announcement. It came to them, as the angel went on to say, because a Savior was born in Bethlehem---a Deliverer. Because of the presence of a Deliverer, they need not be afraid of anything. You and I know how frequently we draw the parallel between the coming of Jesus as a babe in Bethlehem and the coming of Jesus into the human heart. Even our carols do this. The third verse of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" says,

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in.

Every Christmas season we remind each other that it is not enough for Christ to have been born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. What really counts is Christ being born in the human heart. Your Bethlehem is when Christ came to you and was born in your heart. It is that remarkable parallel that constitutes the good news of Christianity today---that Jesus can be born in us as certainly as he was born in Bethlehem. Therefore, to us, the angel stands to make his welcome announcement: "Fear not. Fear not, for unto you is born this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Last summer I learned that the words "Fear not" appear in the Bible exactly 365 times. Did you ever wonder why? Did you ever wonder why we are not to fear? The reason, of course, is that a Savior has been presented---a Deliverer, a rescuer, one who is adequate to free us from any threat and danger in any situation. That is why the shepherds were told not to be afraid. It did not make any difference what Herod or the Romans would do, or what the clever, manipulative minds of men would try to set in motion; there was a Deliverer, a Savior among them. A Redeemer had come who would change the situation and use it for his own glory and bring them through. Therefore the announcement of the angel was "Be not afraid."

Some of you saw a rather dramatic illustration of this last week on television if you watched the three-hour dramatization of *Victory at Antebbe*. We saw again the story of that remarkable episode of last July when the hostages who were captured by revolutionaries and held at the Ugandan airport were rescued by a daring Israeli raid. You who saw that show recall how much fear there was in the hearts of the hostages as they waited for almost certain death, knowing that a great game of gambling was being played on an international

level with their lives at stake. As the deadline neared, it seemed almost certain that they would be ruthlessly sacrificed. How they feared---and they showed it in various ways. Some, unable to contain themselves, went into hysterics. Others were quietly sobbing away in corners, gripped with fear. Then came the moment of victory, when, without their expecting it, without any realization that it was about to happen, their rescuers were there and their cruel conquerors were wiped out. In the plane as they were returning to Israel there was nothing but joy---wild, abandoned joy---because that is what the heart always feels when it is set free from a threatened danger. Joy is the result.

I think this suggests to us that what the presence of Jesus in our lives ought to bring us, as Christians, is the absence of fear and the presence of joy. That is what it is all about. And it is not intended to be a once-for-all experience. I know that many of us look back to the moment of our conversion as a great moment of joy. We had a sense of deliverance, a sense of freedom, a sense of release. But this is intended to be an ongoing process. We don't face dangerous and frightening situations just once or twice in a lifetime; we face them every day. Anytime something strikes terror in the heart or grips us with the cold hand of fear, anytime we are anxious and troubled and weary, anytime something seems to threaten us or our loved ones is a moment of danger. And for that moment---for that moment---we have a Savior, a Deliverer. Therefore the continuing word of God to us who have such a Deliverer is "Be not afraid."

That is why the chief mark of the Christian ought to be the absence of fear and the presence of joy. We have often quoted the description of a Christian as "one who is completely fearless, continually cheerful, and constantly in trouble." And how that fits! This is not to be a once-for-all experience, but one that is continuous, day-by-day. It is that presence of joy and absence of fear that marks our genuine Christianity and proves that we really are what we claim to be.

I think this is what is missing oftentimes in our evangelistic endeavors today. I am not against many of the movements that try to tell the great story of Christianity by various ways and means. But I tell you this: none of these movements or methods will ever mean a thing unless they are backed by a life that has this mark of genuine Christianity---the presence of joy and the absence of fear. Paul said in Romans 14:17:

"The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit..."

Therefore that ought to be the mark of every Christian, that same sense of being free, of being delivered because the Deliverer is present. And as we look at him---not as we seek for the feeling or look for the joy, but as we concentrate on the Savior, as we remind ourselves of who he is and what he came to do and what he can do---then we will discover again that same wonderful fulfillment of the angel's announcement. We need not be afraid. And there will break upon our hearts and faces a sense of continuing joy. Friedrich Nietzsche, the atheistic German philosopher, made this surly remark to some Christians one day; "If you want me to believe in your Redeemer, then you've got to look a lot more redeemed." That is true, isn't it?

Just last week we went through another death of one close to us. For the last three or four Sundays we have had to announce a death that touches us deeply. This was a very dear and beloved friend, one who many of us will remember with love for many years---Ed Stirm, one of the original founders and elders of PBC. Ed had a stroke this past week and, without pain or struggle, was taken into the presence of the Lord. We had a memorial service for him Friday morning, when those of us who knew him well gathered together. At the close of it, Bill Gwinn, Ed's son-in-law, representing the family, stood up to share a few thoughts. It was a triumphant occasion, not a time of sadness. It was a time of fond remembrance and rejoicing, and of sorrow, only in the sense of facing the years without Ed around and missing him.

When Bill stood up he told us something that the pastor at his church in Santa Cruz said last Sunday. Not knowing that anything like this was to happen, the pastor had talked about the basis of the Christian's happiness. He said that Christmas was a time of happiness, but that Christmas is not what makes us happy. And if your family is all gathered around you at Christmastime, he said, the presence of all your loved ones gives you joy in your heart. But if that is the sole basis of your joy, what happens if one of those loved ones is taken away? Will your happiness remain?

Bill said he didn't think much about it at the time, although the thought stayed in his mind. When his father-in-law, who was as beloved to him as his own father, was suddenly taken that week, Bill said, "Well, the loved one was taken away, but the happiness still remains." Our joy does not come through circumstances. We welcome happy circumstances, and we thank God for them. But if we could see what our lives would be like without Jesus Christ for even one moment, we would never cease to praise God for every single blessing that comes into our lives. It all comes from his loving, gracious hands. But what if the loved ones were gone? Would the happiness remain?

No matter what the trial may be, the promise of this verse is that we have a Savior, a Deliverer, especially designed to handle that problem, a Savior who is with us always. If we remember that, and look to him, he will take us through it. He does not promise to take the problem away, but he says he will take us through it. He will strengthen us to face it and will give us courage and peace and joy in the midst of it. Therefore the promise of the angel was "Do not be afraid, for I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people [not to everyone, automatically handed out, but to anyone]. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

This is what Christmas must mean to us. And all the days of the year that lie ahead are to be met by the fact that we have in our midst and in our hearts, if we have come to know him, a Savior, a Deliverer, a Rescuer, Christ the Lord. All authority has been given unto him, in heaven and on earth. No event and no circumstance can come into our lives that will be more than he can handle, more than he can take us through. It is that knowledge that gives the heart peace and puts joy upon the countenance.

Catalog No. 3018
Luke 2:10-11
December 19, 1976

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

by Ray C. Stedman

This morning I want to do what we seldom do here---that is to speak to the guests who are with us more than to our own people, our own family. We meet as a family here each Sunday morning. We believe that God has brought us together---many different people, of all different ages, and from various levels and groups of society. We have many visitors from Sunday to Sunday, and we welcome them. They are always welcome, but we don't try particularly to talk to them. We believe that this gathering is for the benefit of Christians, for their instruction in and understanding of what we have in Jesus Christ, and of what the word of God is to mean to us.

But on Easter Sunday we are delighted to have a great many other visitors with us, and we are happy to welcome you. And this time I'd like to talk to you who are here as visitors. I think it is wonderful that we have "Open House" once a year on Easter Sunday, so that people can come and see what is going on. And I'm glad that it falls on Easter by tradition, for this is the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, the great central truth of all Christian faith.

And yet I think that it is rather strange that it should fall on this day. There are many aspects of the Christian faith which I find are admired and respected by a lot of people who are not Christians. The idea that God is love is a welcome truth, even though it is taught only in the Bible. It is not taught in nature; it is not taught in history. But it is taught in the Scriptures, and many people admire and welcome that truth even though they never go to church themselves. There is the idea that we are all one family of mankind, that we are related to each other and share human life together, that no one is really different from anyone else in the sense of being more or less than equal. Then there is the idea that there is forgiveness of sins, and a release from guilt. All these ideas which are so central to Christian faith are welcomed by many, even though they don't come to church.

But the one thing I find that people most often stumble over is this suggestion that Jesus actually did rise from the dead. Many people look upon that as somewhat akin to the legend of Santa Claus---that it is something fun to pretend, that it gives life a little more color and zest, but that you can't dream of really taking it seriously. I don't know whether you think that way or not. Some of you may be feeling, "Well, what difference does it make? Even if he did, it's not going to make any difference to me---or if he didn't. I'm going to go to work tomorrow just as I always have. I'm going to do the things I usually do. It's not going to make any difference to my family or to me, or to my attitudes or my daily life, whether Jesus did or didn't rise from the dead."

We're glad you came this morning, because we'd like to say to you, as a group of Christians assembled here, that we believe that it did happen, that it isn't a legend, isn't a myth. It isn't merely a nice idea that Christians have, but it is something which occurred in history. It is a fact, and it produces a change. In fact, everyone in the world is affected by the resurrection of Jesus. Nobody can live unchanged by that great fact. If it didn't happen, your life is going to be changed tremendously. And if it did happen, your life is going to be changed tremendously. It is, as the Bible makes clear, the central fact of history. Nothing is more important. And everything is different, depending upon whether this did or didn't happen. I'd like to think with you a little bit about this great fact, and consider with you what life would be like if Jesus did not rise, and what would life be like if he did, and what effect it would have upon you.

We believe that there is a great deal of evidence that our Lord did indeed rise from the dead. But we are not believers simply because it is a nice thought, because it gives us a little something to hang onto when we are about to die. No, we are not believers because this has been traditionally taught. We are believers because we have examined carefully the tremendous evidence which exists, evidence which again and again throughout history has been examined by thoughtful, careful, logical minds, and which again and again has convinced even those who set about to destroy the idea or to show how weak and illogical it was. We believe that there is evidence in the documents which exist from the first century and which say that this happened. There is great evidence also in the witnesses who were there and who persisted long after the event in bearing unceasing testimony to the fact that they saw Jesus after he had risen. It wasn't an illusion, and it wasn't an hallucination. And we believe that there is tremendous evidence in the changes which occurred and which can't be explained in any other way except that this dramatic event did take place. I'm not going to go into the details of that this morning. There are many books you can read which will substantiate it for you.

But what I would like to face with you is this question: "What if it didn't happen?" Now we aren't the first ones to face that question. In fact, the apostle Paul, among others, faced that question in the first century. There were many then who said, "Well, we can't be sure. This is such a fantastic claim that you are making---that one could actually rise from the dead, break the bonds of death by himself and come back again."

Paul took up that question in one of his great chapters. In 1 Corinthians 15 he says that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then to all practical effect, Christianity is a waste of time, that your time here this morning and mine as well is just a big waste; that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, though Christianity says some very brave and noble things and puts them in rather beautiful language at times, nevertheless, it is really all a pipe dream with no basis in fact, it is just the wishful thinking of people who are tired with all the grief and heartache of life and want something beautiful to cling to, but it really is not worth anybody's time; and that the New Testament is the account of a deluded dreamer who thought he had powers he didn't have, who thought he was somebody he really wasn't, and who kidded himself and a group of other people into thinking he was someone else.

If this is the case, then all wonderful writings which many people have appreciated in the New Testament must be thrown aside---the Sermon on the Mount, for instance. After all, it says things which are contrary to the way we naturally think. It exalts and highly values principles which most people think are unworkable. It says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit---i.e., the bankrupt people, the people who have come to the end of themselves, who have realized they don't have what it takes to handle life---blessed are they." And you know that we don't usually think that way. The world is basically committed to the policy, "Blessed are the pushers, the aggressive people, the self-confident, the ones who know what they are doing." But Jesus says the opposite. And if he didn't rise from the dead, then that message isn't worth the paper it is written on, and we ought to

forget it. And Paul's expression in 1 Corinthians 13 which everyone loves to quote---"Now abide faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love"---that is merely sentimental nonsense. Love isn't strong at all. Might makes right.

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead we would really have to eliminate the New Testament entirely. You can't take just a part of it and say, "This I'll accept, but the rest I won't," because it all hangs on the fact that Jesus was who he said he was and could do what he said he did. And if he didn't rise from the dead, that is not true. And of course, the Old Testament has to go, too, because its predictions all look forward to One who is coming, to Someone who at last is going to achieve what man has never been able to realize. All its rituals point to a greater sacrifice, all the deaths of animals and all the blood are pointing to Someone who was going to come and who would be the real sacrifice. And all its dreams and hopes and longings expressed in the beautiful poetic language of the prophet Isaiah and others, pointing to a golden age among men, are all reduced to dusty, archaic stories which really have no meaning, mere beautiful words, that's all---God's words---which don't mean anything.

And if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then of course we really don't have any hope beyond this life. We really don't. The grave is the end. This brief life is all that we have. There are a lot of people who believe that today. Let me put it in the eloquent words of Bertrand Russell, one of the spokesmen for those who do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus. This is what he says life is like:

The life of a man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, toward a goal which few can hope to reach and where none may tarry long. One by one as they march our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent death. Brief and powerless is man's life. On him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way. For man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day.

That note of despair is sounded increasingly today, as many are asking the question, "Is there anything beyond?" and they conclude that death is the end. Joan Baez sings, "We are but orphans in the world of no tomorrow." And if Jesus did not rise from the dead, we do not have any hope. In fact, Paul says so: "We are of all men most miserable." We don't have any hope beyond the grave; we are just kidding ourselves if we think there is anything else.

Furthermore, we don't have any release from guilt and fear. Forgiveness of sin is a meaningless expression. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then we are locked inescapably into our past, and we can't change it or do anything about it today. No power can deliver us from the fatal tendency within each of us to do what we don't want to do, and to fail again and again to achieve what we want to achieve. We all do that, don't we? And if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, there is no way we can change it. We are locked into our sinful humanity and there is no way out. We are doomed endlessly to repeat again and again the sad story of history.

And then, of course, you can't believe that God is love. That phrase has no more meaning than the bumper stickers you see around lately which say, KSFO LOVES YOU, or the assurance we are given by a local savings and loan association, "We care about you." What difference does it make? If Jesus did not rise from the dead, there is no reason to take those words seriously at all.

So you can't merely go on unaffected and unchanged. If the resurrection didn't happen, then this whole business of Christianity is a joke, a big fraud, and we ought to forget it and get on with trying to get to the top of the heap in the best way we can.

But, what if he did? If Jesus rose from the dead as the Bible says, and there is one who has come back and told us what lies beyond, if Jesus did break the bonds of death and come out of the tomb on that first resurrection morning, and if all the simple story which is so artlessly told in the Scriptures is true, if it really happened, then what does it mean? Well, the first and most obvious thing is that it means that Jesus is still alive. He is still around, still available---this beautiful man who lived in such a way that he captivated the people of his day and shook them to the core by the way he lived and things he said and did, by the

compassion of his heart and the honesty of his life which would strip a religious hypocrite naked right before the eyes of a crowd, who could not abide falsehood and untruth but was always tender and loving and compassionate toward those bound up with their own guilt and problems, their own evil. If Jesus rose from the dead, he is still around, still available. He still can meet us in the same way.

His promises which he uttered are valid promises: "Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "He who follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." "I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." This means that freedom from guilt, and power to conquer our failures and our weaknesses are still available to men. And that has been the Good News for twenty centuries---that in coming to Jesus Christ, men and women find ability to rise above this locked---in evil within us. And though we don't do it perfectly, and at times fall back into evil, for nobody yet has presented a perfect pattern in doing this except Jesus, nevertheless, the healing begins to take place. Changes occur, and life is different.

Here on this platform at the Good Friday service a young woman stood and told us how, all her young life, she had been searching for a way to fulfill herself. "Find yourself!" That is the cry of today, isn't it? "Oh, if I could just find out who I am and be myself!" She told us how she had tried to do that. She joined this cause and that cause, this radical movement and that one. Her search led her into all of them, ending up with Women's Lib. She thought each time that she had found the answer, thought it would release her. Then at last she found Christ. And she told us with a glowing face, with such obvious truthfulness, what this discovery had meant to her, how every aching void of her heart was filled. And though the problems often were there---yes, plenty of them, more than ever---nevertheless, the answers were available within---peace, joy, a sense of direction, of quiet fulfillment. You couldn't hear her tell of this without understanding that it was true. Here was one bearing witness to the resurrection of Jesus. In the stirring words of Tom Skinner, the black evangelist, to twelve thousand young men and women at the 1970 Urbana Conference in Urbana, Illinois:

Proclaim liberty to the captives. Give sight to the blind. Set at liberty them that are bruised. Go out to all the world and tell men who are bound mentally, spiritually, and physically, "The Liberator has come!"

That is what the resurrection of Jesus means. It means that the grave is not the end of the road; death does not have the last word. As Paul put it, "To depart and to be with Christ is far better." That isn't just a faint and glimmering hope for Christians. That isn't merely something nice we say when we get close to death, in order to steady us so that we'll die well. No, that is a robust, positive certainty in thousands and thousands of Christians' hearts as they come to the end of life. They look forward to it, they anticipate it with welcome joy. In fact, I heard recently of a Christian man who was told by his doctor that he was about to die, and it made him so joyful that, by the doctor's own testimony, the joy of spirit that he felt kept him alive for two more weeks! This is because Jesus rose from the dead, and his words have meaning and validity in our lives. And he has promised, "Because I live, you shall live also." And we sing it, "Jesus lives, and so shall I. Death! thy sting is gone forever." That is why Christians have something to hope for, to hold onto, to be confident of, as we face the last issue of life.

Then, of course, if Jesus rose from the dead, it means that the value of your life and mine will be determined by our relationship to that resurrection. In the book of Acts we are told that the apostle Paul came into the city of Athens, the great university center of his day, the city of Pericles, of Demosthenes, of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle---the great minds of that day and this. And there, in this center of learning, in the midst of all the monuments to beauty and art and truth which still are found in that city, the Apostle stood and said to them that all of this represented nothing more nor less than the strugglings of men to try to find truth in the midst of life, and yet their search was ineffectual, it hadn't brought them anywhere, it hadn't solved any ultimate problems. He said to them, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead."

This means that every life here this morning, every one here, ultimately will stand before the risen Lord Jesus. He is the Lord of the world. Jesus is Lord, whether men know it or not. We live in his universe, we must

abide by his rules. We must live life on his terms. There is no way out of that. And ultimately our life will be judged, examined, on those terms. If you link your life with the world and its ways, live for its pleasures and its praise and its values, you will ultimately find yourself joined to what the cross of Christ brought to a jolting halt. And, as someone has said, "Hell is nothing less than truth known too late." John says, "If any one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

But if we begin to live in the power of Jesus' resurrection, in the fact of it, which God has set as the basis of life, we will learn to live in the world, right in the midst of it, right up to the hilt---not withdrawn, not isolated, not in a monastic Bible-City experience---right in the midst of it, but on a different basis: drawing upon his forgiveness every day to recover from our failure and to stand again accepted in his presence; drawing upon his strength by which to meet the demands which life throws at us, so that we are never suddenly caught short without adequate resources with which to respond; drawing upon his love, the grace of a risen Lord who knows us, understands us, and has made provision for our weakness and failure and who picks us up again and carries us through---not away from the situation but right through the midst of it!

When we do this we discover that "the world passes away and the lusts thereof; but he who does the will of God abides forever." So we would like to say to you as our visitors this morning, that there is no joy like a Christian's joy. It is so different! It can well up in the midst of tears. There is no peace like the peace of God, which defies circumstances and passes understanding, so that when you have no business being peaceful, you are. There is no love like the love of Christ, which forgives and heals and restores. Savonarola, of Florence, Italy, hundreds of years ago said, "They may kill me, but they can never, never, never tear the living Christ out of my heart!"

That is what we would like to say to you today. We don't live perfectly. The church is always a kind of clinic where people are being healed. We are in all stages of the process of healing. There is a deep and deadly sickness loose in humanity which tears people up, eats out their hearts, destroys them from the inside---even though everything looks great on the outside. But that sickness is what Jesus came to heal. And here we are, being healed. But we are in all stages. Some are just barely beginning, and the evidence of disease is all over among us. So don't look for perfect people here. But we have found the One who has the answer, and he is working it out. It isn't an instantaneous process---one touch and it's done. It is something which is happening day after day, week after week, hour by hour.

God has fulfilled his word; the promises are true. We offer them to you. All we can say to you is that we hope you find Jesus Christ our Lord. He himself says, "Behold, I stand at your door and knock; if anyone hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him, I will come into him---and live with him, and he with me." And we would just like to say, "That is true! Jesus lives, and so do we." And we thank him for it.

Now we are going to stand and sing that hymn in closing: "Jesus lives and so shall I, Death! thy sting is gone forever," and as we do, we invite you, if you have never done so before, to simply ask Jesus Christ to come into your life. Open your heart to him and respond to his invitation.

"Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast---unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me..."

"...Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been

raised, your faith is futile and you are still in you sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive..."

...Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."
"O death, where is thy victory?"
"O death, where is thy sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

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THE SHAKING OF THE EARTH

by Ray C. Stedman

Having concluded our series of messages on the Upper Room Discourse, Secrets Of The Spirit, I hope to begin soon a new series on the book of Jeremiah. Meanwhile, I'd like to bring a number of single messages on various subjects. The first is based upon a passage in Hebrews, the closing words of chapter 12:

"See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. His voice then shook the earth; but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken, as of what has been made, in order that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire."

This passage tends to sober us, because it speaks of the shaking of the heavens and of the earth. There is something chilling about the thought of the shaking of the earth. A week or so ago I was sitting with Dr. Henry Brandt on the porch of his cabin on the shore of Lake Michigan. As we were talking together, looking out over the waters of the lake, he said, "Do you see how close the shoreline is to the cabin? When we moved here ten years ago, the waters were forty to sixty feet further out. I asked, "What made the change?" He told me, "No one seems to know. When they built the St. Lawrence Seaway and opened the Great Lakes to ocean-going vessels, many thought that a great deal more water would go out to the ocean than before, and that the water level of the lakes would drop. The interesting thing is, the exact opposite has happened. Gradually the level of the Great Lakes has risen. [That represents a tremendous volume of water, for as many of you know, Lake Michigan is almost 500 miles long and some 60 to 100 miles wide. And it is only one of five Great Lakes.] But no one really seems to know what is causing it. The only explanation they can think of is that something must be causing the beds of the lakes slowly to rise or tilt." As I sat there I got an eerie feeling,

and I looked around to see whether there was access up the hill behind us, if suddenly the process should accelerate!

The Scriptures speak of a time, as we draw near to the end, when there will be a physical shaking of the earth. In the book of Revelation a key event, described repeatedly throughout that book of images and visions, is a great earthquake, so tremendous that the very foundations of the earth are shaken and every mountain and hill is removed from its place. That is a guide to the understanding of the book, for as you read through those visions, you find them returning again and again to the great earthquake which will wind up the course of human events in this age.

But when the writer of this passage speaks of God's shaking of the heavens and the earth, it is a different kind of shaking to which he is referring. He reminds the readers that once God shook the earth when he spoke from Mount Sinai in the giving of the Law. This was the time when the Law, coming to man, shook the nations of the world, shook their very foundations. Now, it is true that when God spoke from the mountain, the mountain itself shook and trembled like a leaf in the autumn wind, billowing smoke and fire. And the people were amazed and trembled with great fear when they saw this entire mountain shaking, as a symbol of the effect of the Law coming to men and nations throughout history.

And now the writer is quoting from the prophet Haggai, reminding them that there would come another shaking. "Yet once more," God says, "I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." If you look back to the prophecy from which that was taken, you will find that Haggai was looking forward to the coming of Messiah, the coming of Christ. This will be the time, he says, when God will shake not only the earth but the heavens as well. And this will be a shaking which no one can avoid. The warning of this passage is, "Do not refuse him who is speaking, for there is no way to avoid the shaking that is to come."

The last word we have from the hand of Paul, as he writes from the Mamertine dungeon in Rome, to his young son in the faith, Timothy, is that most of his friends have forsaken him, that many to whom he ministered have turned away from him, and he sees all that he built apparently beginning to collapse. But he reminds Timothy that the Spirit of God had said expressly that in the latter days perilous times should come. And he goes on to describe them---times of shaking, times when everything will be upset and all that men have counted as permanent and lasting will be overthrown, times of confusion and upheaval.

Many people have taken the phrase "the latter days" to refer to the time just before the return of Christ. But if you look at that phrase in other places in Scripture, especially in the book of Hebrews, you find that "the latter days" or "the last days" refers to the entire age between the first and the second comings of Jesus. We have been living in "the last days" since our Lord was here on earth. What the Spirit was saying is that during this whole age there would come repeated cycles of perilous times when God would shake the earth and the heavens, and things would be upset and confused, times of upheaval. One of the comforting things this passage sets before us is that the One who does the shaking is God himself. God shakes up the earth, shakes up the people.

I do not think there is any doubt that we are presently in one of those shaking times, and have been for several years. We have entered into one of those perilous times when all that we would normally have counted as strong and steady is being shaken and overthrown. I don't mean events such as we saw last week---the overthrow of the government of Chile. Such episodes have been almost continual in the record of human history. The toppling of thrones, the changing of empires, are really incidentals, not the essential developments. When I speak of the shaking of that which seems to be permanent I am talking about far more important matters.

What are the things being shaken today? First, and probably most evident to us right now, is the great shaking occurring in people's confidence in human government. We have been involved in the Watergate investigations during these long summer months. Few of us have failed to see how that whole matter has served to inhibit and stymie and prevent the proper functioning of government. It has been like a huge, paralyzing hand laid upon governmental operations. And regardless of how you may view it or what sympathy you may have for those involved, one thing is evident: Watergate has shaken the people's confidence in the operation of government. Men who were selected for high office and who people were confident would make moral

decisions, have proven to be untrustworthy. Yet everyone knows that these wrongful decisions were ones that they themselves might have made, had they been put in the same offices. The weakness which has been manifested in Watergate is the kind which is difficult even to recognize when it is happening to you, and many of us might have gone right along with it.

The inability of our government, and of other governments in the world, to control the inflationary spiral, resulting in terribly high prices and the undermining of our economic foundations, has shaken people's confidence in government. We see ourselves in the grip of economic forces too vast to manipulate or to control. Even with the best of intentions and the widest of knowledge, men seem unable to reverse the trend of what is happening today. This represents a shaking of that which we thought to be solid and dependable.

You see the same effect in the world of science and technology. I remember a few decades ago when it was thought that all these new inventions coming so rapidly upon the scene would bring us tremendous progress in the solving of human ills and social problems. I can go back at least as far as the advent of television! Everyone thought it would be wonderful to have entertainment and newscasts right in our homes, merely to turn a knob and have the world in our living room. Now we know that television has brought a curse along with its blessing. Too much exposure tends to make us artificial, turns us into robots. We lose the capacity to develop our own creative skills of recreation and entertainment.

We are even more frightened by some of the other things science has brought us, knowing that our cities are glutted with traffic, our skies darkened with smog, and our waters poisoned. No one seems to be able to stop it or to reverse it. We realize now that science has not been the benefactor we thought it would be, but has brought with it ills so tremendous they appear to be Frankensteinian monsters, threatening our very existence. This has shaken people's confidence.

As you are well aware, a very definite shaking of our time is evidenced in the change in moral standards. What we once thought were irrevocable, steadfast standards, by which any decent people would live, are now being challenged, overthrown, and cast out. We see a tremendous shaking in the very foundations of the nation, as families are breaking up and the divorce rate is skyrocketing---not only in those marriages of a few years' standing, but increasingly in those which have endured more than twenty years. And we wonder what is happening to our family life as, more and more, the philosophy of the day is that marriage is not important at all. "Unmarriages" are springing up all over, in which people choose to live together without any legal ties. There is widespread acceptance of this kind of arrangement. And sexual explicitness has come into the media, graphically portraying now what never would have been allowed in public even a few years ago. We see the shaking of the foundations in this area.

And perhaps more dramatic than any other development today is the rise of the occult, the return to witchcraft, black arts, and the open and acknowledged worship of demons and dark powers which influence and possess men. The rise of outright demonic possession is being found on every side. I wonder if we realize what dramatic changes have occurred in our nation. Look back across the almost two hundred years of American history and you find that at no other time in the history of this nation has there ever been this kind of outbreak of demonic powers. There has been a guard or shield over this nation, and other nations of the West, which somehow has inhibited and prevented this kind of attack. We could always have traveled to India and Africa and other places and found this, but now it is here at home in America. And California is the worst area of all. Why is this? It is part of the shaking of our times---this dramatic breakthrough of demonic forces which is frightening people and giving rise to many new cults and bizarre practices.

As we look ahead we tend to be shaken ourselves by these shakings of the earth and of heaven. But this passage is intended to comfort us, for it says that this shaking comes from the hand of God. It is God who shakes the heavens and the earth, not the devil. He is only the instrument of God to do this. God is doing the shaking, and he is doing it for a very great purpose described for us in this passage:

"Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken, as of what has been made, in order that what cannot be shaken may remain.

This is what God is working toward. He allows the shaking to come in order that what cannot be shaken may again become visible to men. One of the great encouragements of this day is to see that this is exactly what is happening. As the writer goes on to say, "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken," he underscores one of the things that cannot be shaken today: the sovereignty of God.

This truth is emerging today in a new and fresh way, more than at any time in my memory, as men are beginning again to see God's hand in history, God at work among men. You can see this fact emerging in all these areas I have just covered. For instance, in the nation, as a result of the shaking of the confidence in men who were elected to office, and the resulting distrust of the democratic process, there is gradually coming into this nation once again a consciousness that righteousness and truth are important, and an acknowledgement that no nation can really stand unless it is based upon a people who love justice and righteousness.

We have lost this for some time. A decade or so ago a great wave of "super-patriotism" swept across this country. People began to run up flags and put reproductions of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution on their walls. An effort was made to convince people that these were the undergirding of the foundations of our nation, that we had to look to these human documents to support this nation and make it strong and steady once again. But you don't hear much of this anymore, because God has allowed the foundations to be shaken, and men are now beginning to see that no human document is the explanation of a nation's strength. It is not the democratic processes or the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence that will hold us steady in the day of sweeping tumult. Rather, it is the righteousness and truth that people love which will do it, and the fact is that only men and women who are committed to these values can be trusted in the hour of pressure. Once again people are seeing this clearly.

The same is true in the realm of education and technological training. The revolt of youth just two or three years ago shook this nation, but it helped us to see that in educational processes we cannot indulge in the bizarre and untried. And although we must return to what has proven itself, the emphasis must no longer be on material values but on personal values---love and harmony and peace. The gauges of success are no longer big cars and expensive homes and luxurious provisions and furnishings, but rather a family which relates lovingly to one another, does things together, and shares life. These values are coming back into our educational system partly as a result of the shaking of our times.

Even in the realm of morals this shaking has produced tremendously helpful developments. The shaking of the foundations of sexual morality is now beginning to produce an awareness of the true purpose of sex. Even churches, which have been so dead and dull in this area are now beginning to take a healthy view of sex and to teach their people what it was intended to be. I walked into a Christian bookstore not long ago and stood there looking at all the books that were available on the subject of sex, books which were wholesome and biblical and helpful---and detailed, not in unwholesome, but in right ways. I rejoiced, for it took me back to my own early Christian youth when I was given the only book available to Christian young people on how to handle sexual drives. It was called *The Way of A Man With A Maid*. I read it again the other day, and I threw it down in disgust! It is one of the most perverted treatments of sex I think I've ever read. It distorts the whole biblical picture, makes sex appear to be dirty. Yet that was the commonly accepted textbook on sex when I was a young man. No wonder God shook us up in this area, and made us take a good look at what we had been thinking and the way we had been acting.

Out of the shaking is coming a realization of the things which remain and which cannot be shaken because they are based upon the fiat of God, the decrees of the Creator. One of the things which cannot be shaken is the realization again of the true nature of the church. It is so encouraging to see that Christian people are finally beginning to realize that the important thing about a church is not the building program. Just a few decades ago churches were knocking each other over to see who could come up with the most expensive, luxurious building. They were bragging about the softness of their carpets and comfort of the pews, the lushness of the furnishings, and the newness of the electronic marvels available for amplifying voices. Now, fortunately, we hear very little about this, for there has come a return to the fact that the church is not a building but people. A church is not functioning properly simply because it pays its bills on time and is able to send money to support a missionary program. It functions only when its people share a real and genuine faith, visible in their neighborhoods, when homes are being healed and families are coming back together, when long-standing arguments and divisions between church members are being broken down and love is being manifested.

I have recently been in the northwestern states which, as many of you know, are a citadel of conservatism in churches. It was so encouraging to see that in place after place congregations are forgetting about emphasizing their minor doctrinal differences with other churches, forgetting about labels and titles and "reverends", and all this kind of nonsense, and are returning again to the emphasis of the New Testament. Thank God for the shaking, because it produces an awareness of the things which remain.

And this is true in the whole realm of righteousness. As I look back at the church as I have observed it through several decades of life, and if I try to see it through the eyes of the watching world, I see that what most people have observed in the church is self-righteousness--judgment and condemnation for certain practices, sharp and harsh words toward things which people commonly do. One of the most helpful trends of today is that this is disappearing. Christian people are now beginning to realize what has always been true: sin does not consist merely of drunkenness and lechery and licentiousness and sexual misbehavior. Far worse are criticism and bitterness and resentment and jealousy and quarreling among believers. And we stand under the judgment of a holy God just as much for these sins as do those outside the church for the others. We have not a finger to point nor a stone to throw.

People are coming back again to an awareness that the only righteousness God will accept is that based upon his forgiveness. If there is any area of our life in which we have never been forgiven, it is there we are offending the Spirit of God. If there is an area about which we are saying, "Well, I've never done that kind of thing; I wouldn't do that!" it is there we are grievously hurting the Spirit of Truth. Righteousness consists of that gift of forgiveness which comes when one has known himself to be a sinner before God. That is why our uptightness about hair styles and modes of dress and bare feet is disappearing. We are beginning to realize that these externals are not important; it is what we are in our hearts before God which matters. So the sovereignty of God and the centrality of the cross remain unshaken. The fact emerges again and again that human life is never realized until it comes to the end of itself. This explains the "Jesus Movement", and all the other encouraging signs of the return of the life of the Spirit in America. We are once again understanding that there is no hope in man. That is what the cross says: "No hope in man." God is doing his work.

In the early Fifties I had the joy of working with some boys, five in particular, who attended high school here in Palo Alto. I have followed them with great interest through the years since. One is Brad Curl. I heard from Brad just this week. He is now a middle-aged businessman in Washington, D.C., where he operates an art gallery. If you are ever in Washington, look him up! It is the Curl Galleries. He wrote,

Lynn [his wife] and I are studying Ephesians together. It's fantastic! We have a Father who is really tremendous! From most external observations, the world is going to hell. But here he is, in the middle of his creation, determinedly accomplishing his objective of shaping a family for himself. It costs him, and it costs us, both. But he is relentlessly getting it done. What a determined Friend we have, and what a heart of love!

That is what is emerging more and more in the shaking of our time--that there is no hope in man, and there is no power in self, that dedication and discipline are not enough to find answers to the problems we face, that merely knowing the principles of life by which to act is inadequate, that the proper actions cannot be carried out except by a reliance upon the power of God at work within us to motivate us and empower us to do it. We cannot merely take a list of things which ought to be done and determine to do them. More and more the message of the cross is coming through to us: "There is no power in self." We cannot grit our teeth and clench our fist and say, "I AM GOING TO DO IT!" and get it done. We are like Paul, as he cried out in Romans 7, "For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Once again the answer comes--we are delivered by the activity of God at work within us: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Then the cross says, "There is no fear in love." The answer to fear is to understand the love of God for us, and his availability to us. That is why Paul can exult as he does in Romans 8: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" I love that, don't you? And as the writer of Hebrews puts it, "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you.' Hence we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?'" Jesus answers his frightened disciples again and again, "Be not troubled. Let not your hearts be troubled. Be not afraid. Fear not,

for I am with you." This is the word which cannot be shaken today.

What should our response be? The writer of Hebrews says two things. First, "Therefore let us be grateful"---grateful hearts, praise and thanksgiving to God that we have a place to stand when all around is being shaken. Has your home been shaken this year? Mine has. And it is great to have a place to stand which cannot be shaken. What praise rises from my heart to God for the unshakable things which cannot be removed! When everything else begins to rock and shake, when our foundations are trembling and there is upheaval on every side, how grateful we ought to be for things which cannot be shaken.

The the second thing---not only grateful hearts, but responsive wills: "Let us offer to God acceptable worship." Here we are this morning, gathered together to worship God. What will be acceptable to him? Certainly not perfunctory, mechanical worship. He doesn't want us just sitting here waiting for the meeting to get over so we can go do something else. Jesus said, "They who worship God must worship him in spirit and in truth." Worship is the whole man aimed at God, the whole man looking toward him in thanksgiving and praise. And not occasionally, but continually. As Paul puts it in Romans 12, "...by the mercies of God...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual [acceptable] worship"---bodies available to him, ready to respond to needs around us, to respond to the plea for help in the Sunday School, and to your neighbor's need for encouragement, and to your children's cry for direction and love, ready to respond to your husband in his hour of despair, and to your wife when she is feeling neglected and worthless. That is what the acceptable worship of God is all about. "Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire." He envelops life like a great flame, burning away---either destroying us or purifying us. Love is a fire. The love of God, touching our lives, is either going to burn us up and destroy us, break us apart in the shaking of the foundations, or it will steady us, strengthen us, establish us, and purify us, burning up the dross in our lives. This is the God with whom we have to do. So let us come to life with grateful hearts and responsive wills in the name of Jesus, in this hour of the shaking of earth and of heaven.

Prayer

Once again, our Father, we are grateful for what your word reveals to us about what is going on in our life, in our families and homes, and in our nation and world. Help us to respond as this word suggests---that we not refuse him who is speaking, for we cannot avoid the shaking which is occurring. Lord, let us take a firm stand upon those things which cannot be shaken---the love and government of our God, the greatness of his being and power, and his mercy toward us---and with grateful hearts give thanks, and make ourselves available to you this day. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Hebrews 12:25-29
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WHEN STONES CRY OUT

by Ray C. Stedman

Two weeks ago I was in Israel and, "in company with my companions", was driving from the little village of Bethany, on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, down across the Kidron valley, and on up into the temple area of Jerusalem. We were, in effect, retracing the path our Lord took in the so-called "triumphal" entry, when he mounted the colt of an ass in Bethany and rode down across the face of the mountain, through the Kidron valley, and up into the city. He was preceded by a crowd who threw palm branches into his pathway, praising God. I was thinking of that episode as we drove along, and an incident from the account in Luke's gospel came into my mind. Luke says,

As he was now drawing near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees in the multitude said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples. " He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

The scene has changed since those days. There are many buildings around Jerusalem now which were not there then. The Mount of Olives is still there, and a large part of the Garden of Gethsemene, but many other things have changed. As we rode along that road I thought of this scene, and I was sure there were some other things which had not yet changed. I wondered if perhaps among them were the very stones to which Jesus made reference in this passage. Stones do not get around much! And I was thinking of how Jesus said that if the disciples should remain silent, the very stones would cry out.

I have never heard a stone cry out, at least I do not think I have---or perhaps I have. While I was in Spain recently, meeting with a group of pastors, one of the pastors amused himself and the rest of us at a meal by dipping his finger in water and rubbing it around the rim of a drinking glass, and it began to sing. Glass is a form of stone, and perhaps this is the way stones cry out. But I am sure of this---if the stones in our Lord's day had cried out, they would not have done so as clearly and as articulately as these disciples did. Stones are not made for crying out. Therefore if they make a sound, it must be a garbled or a less articulate sound than a human voice can make.

I wondered what Jesus meant by this statement. One thing is clear. This was an occasion which called for praise. This was a very singular moment in the history of Israel. I do not know if you are aware of this, but when our Lord was riding down that mountain into the city of Jerusalem, it was an historic event, in fulfillment of several prophecies of the Old Testament.

The prophet Daniel, hundreds of years earlier, had been given by God a certain calendar of time which was marked off precisely to determine the date when the Messiah would present himself to the nation Israel. And according to the reckoning of Sir Robert Anderson, former head of Scotland Yard, an English layman with a great knowledge of the Bible, the precise date on which Daniel's prophecy was to be fulfilled was this day.

According to the actual time which had elapsed, if Israel had been aware of it, this was the predicted hour, to the very second, in which our Lord was to present himself as King to Israel.

Zechariah had predicted that Israel would see their King coming to them, "humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass." That prediction also was being fulfilled in this moment. Here was an hour toward which the prophets had looked and which they had longed to see. It was a strategic time in Israel's history, and Jesus, as he came over the hill, wept over the city, saying,

"Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation."

This was a prediction of the fall of the city under the Romans, a terrible time of judgment. So this is a time of crisis when this incident takes place. And as the disciples come over the hill they feel singularly moved by the Holy Spirit to begin to praise God for the mighty works he has done in this nation, which they have seen at the hand of Jesus, and to bless God and cry out, "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest." The hour called for that kind of proclamation. As Jesus makes very clear, it was necessary to do this. So if the disciples had not done it, the stones would have cried out.

I think this is one of those strange parables-in-action you find frequently in the life of our Lord---times when he said things which had symbolic meaning. I do not think we need to miss the fact that this is a parable of something which is happening today, a parable of universal application, beyond this scene of the "triumphal" entry.

In other words, what our Lord is saying here is that there are truths which God wants his children to proclaim, because they are the ones best fitted to do it. They understand the mighty works of God. They know who it is who is behind these things. They understand the meaning of these events. They are the ones set apart by God to proclaim these great truths and to help the world see God's mighty works and understand what he is doing.

But what if they will not? "Well then," says Jesus, "the stones will cry out." That is, that which is not designed for this purpose, which is not particularly prepared for it, will begin to utter these truths. I believe that in a very real way this is what we are seeing happening in our own day, and what has happened many times in the past. There are truths which God desires to be uttered. There are forces at work in humanity which need to be explained. And only the church has the explanation.

But if the church will not say what God wants it to say in the hour of crisis, then that which is not equipped or prepared or able properly to do it will begin to utter sounds. In other words, the world, secular thought, will begin to examine these things. Men and women, oftentimes intelligent and educated, but blinded, unable to see reality, unable to see truth as it is in its total perspective, who do not approach life from the standpoint of divine revelation but approach it from the limited, narrow view of man, will begin to examine these same forces at work and will try to explain them. But the explanation will be dulled and distorted and twisted, and so will affect humanity adversely. Yet the fault is with the church, because it did not, or would not, proclaim the truths made available to it. This is always happening whenever Christians neglect the revelation of God. In our day, as in the days of the past, we are neglecting truth which we ought to be heralding abroad.

I picked up a book not long ago by Dr. John R.W. Stott, the famous pastor of an Anglican Church in London, a great communicator of Christian truth. Many of you have heard him speak or know of him. The title of this book is *Our Guilty Silence*. It is a development of this theme, focusing on the idea that the church has withheld the gospel from the world. We have not proclaimed the great, marvelous, delivering, liberating truth which is inherent in the good news of Jesus Christ. Because we have failed to evangelize in this sense we are guilty. Our silence has condemned men to death and misery and darkness. Stott is perfectly right about this. The church at large has not properly spoken in these terms, and we need to hear that voice.

But as I read the title of that book, I thought of it as applicable in a larger, even wider sense. Not only the delivering truths of the gospel, but also truth in general needs to be proclaimed. Aspects and viewpoints of life which do not necessarily touch directly upon salvation, as such, still are contained in the word of God. I would like to share with you certain areas where I feel this applies. I urge you, as I am urging myself these days, to be more alert to opportunities to speak of these great, mighty works of God, to explain them in terms of the Scriptures, and to make clear their provision for solving the problems of human life. And do this not only in church, but out wherever you work---at school, at the shop, at the office, in your home. This is God's desire for his people today---to proclaim, in the midst of life, the mighty works of God, and to give an explanation of the forces at work, so that the world might understand what is happening to them.

One such area which is very evident today is the whole realm of sex, and the understanding of what this strange, mighty force, this urge to merge which is so present in humanity, is all about. What is it provided for? It is God-given, and yet, what is it? I find there is a great deal in the Scriptures on this subject, from Genesis through Revelation. The whole book is replete with explanation of this strange force---what God intends it for, how it finds its culmination in marriage, and what marriage really is. But because the church has been so grossly negligent in developing this theme as it is found in Scripture, we are subjected to terrible extremes of its treatment by the world. The "stones" cry out, begin to try to speak on this subject, make a lot of noise, but are not very helpful. This is why we see the world lurching drunkenly from side to side in this area.

One of the philosophers---I think it was Kant---describes humanity as like a drunk going down a narrow alleyway. He lurches from side to side, bouncing off one wall and then the other. This is a vivid way of portraying what is happening in human life. Many have noted how we tend to swing from extreme to extreme. There is a pendulum-like movement in history. The pendulum swings so far in one direction, then goes back as far in the other direction, back and forth. This strange, sweeping movement between extremes is the course which history describes humanity as taking throughout all its long centuries.

Why? Because oftentimes the church, the people of God who have the truth about these forces, is silent, or says little about them. Therefore people do not know how to interpret these things and are unable to understand. Sex is certainly one such area. We swing from Victorian prudishness---trying to pretend sex does not exist, even to a degree of squeamishness in which people would call the legs of a piano "limbs"---to the other extreme of excessive permissiveness, wherein sex saturates everything we do---it is thrown at us in our advertising, and in everything around us; the beauty of marriage is broken down and marriage is made to appear as though it is merely a convenient way for people to live together but has no importance in itself. This happens because the church has not spoken out on the subject.

Now, by "church" I do not necessarily mean only this congregation here. I believe, under God, that we have made some really valiant and helpful efforts to speak out in these areas recently. And we have already seen some wonderful results. But I am speaking in terms of the church at large, the church of our day. As I travel around I see some of the terrible results of the failure of the people of God to declare the mighty works of God right where they are.

Take, for instance, the whole realm of the knowledge which Scripture reveals about Satan and the dark forces which are at work in this world to govern and to regulate human events. It is given unto us to declare this, to explain why humanity seems periodically to be gripped by anarchist revolutionary movements, with the resultant blood and lust and war and crimes mounting up to frightening levels. Why is this? As long as we deal only with the symptoms of this, as the world would do, we are not very helpful. We need again to talk freely and openly about what the Lord Jesus, and all the apostles, and all the prophets of the Old Testament revealed to be true---that there are spiritual forces in high places, wickedness entrenched, and that these manipulate the minds of men and implant demonic ideas and philosophies which are picked up by the writers of today, spread through the media, and widely believed.

We ought to speak up about these matters, and help people to see the truth about them. Otherwise, we will find the world again falling into two extremes---either wild occultism, with people thinking that life is operated by the influence of the stars, and going in for seances, horoscopes, spiritism, black magic, and the worship of demons; or excessive intellectualism, in which people try to rationalize everything and make of life a kind of super-psychology, thinking that there are certain hidden forces latent in the human spirit, in the subconscious or superconscious, which control us and which must be brought to light and developed, and that life can be explained only in those terms, without reference to the age-long battle and conflict going on between the Spirit of God and the spirit of evil. You see, it is up to us to speak the truth, not merely here at church but out where we live.

Take the realm of nature. We are now seeing the extreme of natural pollution in our day. We are battling with this terrible ecological upset and disaster which is threatening our planet---pollution of our streams and air, the depletion of our natural resources, etc. We are seeing the other extreme of a return to the worship of nature, manifesting itself in all kinds of food fads and in a love of primitive living in which people want to return to nature entirely.

What is the reason for this? It is because the church has been almost totally silent about what the Bible has to say about nature, the world and the universe in which we live, how it operates and why it operates the way it does, and how it is designed to reveal that which is going on in the spiritual realm---the natural reflecting that which is occurring in the realm of the spirit.

It is up to us to declare that. No other persons can. Without that knowledge, man tends to exalt science to such a height that it becomes almost a form of worship, even though the scientific method, though it has validity in many areas, cannot operate in certain realms of life. For instance, science has nothing to say about purpose in living. Yet purpose is one of the ingredients we must have or we cannot live. We must have a sense of meaning. Science does not give us that. Science reduces us to tiny, insignificant atoms, crawling around on a small planet in the midst of the vastness of space. It takes away all sense of meaning and purpose and significance from life. But that is a violation of the laws of nature.

On the other hand, while man must be given a sense of meaning and significance it must not be to the extent that it results, as we have seen happening in our day, in an exaltation of man, in a new humanism, a spirit

which says that man is the master of all things, is in control of all of life and can run all things. The reason these two extremes exist and govern so widely in human thought is that the church has not said what man is, who he is, and what nature is.

One of the most penetrating examinations I have ever seen in the realm of natural knowledge is found in the book of Job, chapters 38 and 39. I suggest you read them and see if you can pass that examination. How much do you know about nature, about what makes it work and how it operates? Job was put to the test. And there are questions in that passage which no scientist can answer today. Man's knowledge is too limited.

Then, in the realm of authority, the Bible speaks volumes. But we do not speak much at all. As a result there has arisen this whole idea of nationalism, whereby the nation-state is made supreme. We are seeing a revival of this in our day. Not long ago the church was so ignorant in this area that the church itself was swept by a wave of supernationalism and tried to identify the gospel of Jesus Christ with American patriotism. Those two concepts do not belong together. One impinges upon the other, it is true, but they are not the same thing. That kind of distortion in the church is but a reflection of the distortion of the world.

We can go on in many areas along this line. I have become so aware of the terrible weakness which prevails in the church because we have been ignorant of the whole matter of the impartation of spiritual gifts. Everywhere I go I find leaders, pastors, theologians, and others who never seem to have realized that the Spirit of God is ready to equip, and has been equipping, his people with gifts which enable them to function in a ministry of their own. They treat these passages as though they were to be relegated to the first century only, or were in no way pertinent to our day.

In Spain I spoke to a group of pastors who were bug-eyed in amazement at the idea that we would take seriously the teaching about the gifts of the Spirit found in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. But when they began to see that this is God's intent for the church in any age, they began to come alive with a new excitement, realizing that they could now discover what God has already given them in terms of resources in their own congregations. Many of them went back to their congregations with a new hope and a new light in their eyes, because they had found out truth which had been hidden in the church for decades and decades.

The greatest truth which God has to impart to man, I am convinced from my study of the Scriptures, is what the Bible calls "the New Covenant", the new arrangement for living which God has made possible to his people. We are not merely to try to do our best to serve Christ, to mobilize all our human resources and put them at his disposal. The believer's dedication to God is not the primary call of the Spirit. Rather, the New Covenant is the understanding that God himself is pleased to live in us and to work through us. He is ready to do everything he demands of us, and to utilize us in the process. Our wills and minds are involved in it. We still make the choices, but he does the work. The power comes from him. And there is no demand made upon us in the word of God which we are not capable of meeting---if our reliance is not upon ourselves but upon God, who is ready and able to give to us power to do it if we are ready and willing to step out and start doing it. This great truth is able to transform people, to transform congregations, and to turn the church into a powerful army, "...bright as the sun, terrible as an army with banners", able to accomplish tremendous things. But the New Covenant has been relegated to silence in so many parts of the church.

What I am saying is that it is necessary for us to learn again to speak out about these things. How can you be what God wants you to be, and utter the truth he wants you to declare, if you do not know the Scriptures yourself? This is why it is so incumbent upon you that you learn, really learn, the Word. Paul writes to the Corinthians,

"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."

The "mysteries of God" are those sacred secrets that human life needs in order to operate properly, which are given to us in the pages of the Word, which will save life from boredom and dullness, and transform it into excitement and electric adventure in Christ. This is what we need again to display before the world. Paul wrote to Timothy, "I write these things so that you might know how you ought to behave yourself in the church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth."

Did you ever think of the church that way? The church is the pillar, the support, and the ground, the foundation, of truth in the world. It is as the church declares these great, unshakable facts of life that the world begins to obtain light in its thinking, and is able to handle properly some of the knowledge it discovers as it investigates various aspects of life. This is what Jesus surely meant when he said, "You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world." And if the world is in darkness, it is because these truths lie hidden, not only in the church, but oftentimes to the church. We need to discover them again and begin to proclaim them---again I stress, not only here but out where you live.

A man told me this morning about attending a sales meeting in the Midwest. It was not a Christian meeting at all. In fact, as far as he knew, the speaker was not a Christian. It was a meeting designed to stir up salesmen and to promote the selling of a product. But the lecturer had evidently been exposed to spiritual truth, and in the course of the meeting he kept bringing it out, but not labeling it as Christian. He said, "One of the things you must remember is that if you are going to affect people and lead them in the way you want them to go, you must be their servant. You must serve them, meet their need." This Christian man listening nudged another Christian sitting close by and said, "That's the teaching of Jesus! Where did he learn that?"

I do not know where he learned it, but there is where it ought to be taught. It is in places like this that we again can show people how men are to operate. And as they learn more and more of that they will see more and more the wisdom of the word of God, which says that the natural mind can never encompass God. The searching of man will never discover God. The wisdom of man is foolishness with God. Only that marvelous truth encompassed in the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus, ultimately, is able to make sense out of life.

There is where the church stands in the world today. I call to your mind again, as I call it to my own mind, that as our Lord looks at his church, his body, his people in this world today, what is he saying? "If these hold their peace, the stones will cry out."

I would like to ask Dr. Henry Brandt, a dear friend visiting with us, to come and dismiss us in prayer.

Prayer

Lord, we are thankful that we can come together and contemplate the possibilities and the responsibilities which each of us has. I pray that as we go, we will be your mouthpieces, that we will make an effort to understand this Word and make it known. Help us to avail ourselves of the resources that you died to give us, and to make ourselves available. Lord, we thank you that we can depend on you, and that your power is ours. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Luke 19:3740

HOW TO KILL A LION ON A SNOWY DAY

by Ray C. Stedman

I want to do something this morning which I have done only once or twice before in all my twenty-three years at Peninsula Bible Church---to repeat a message I have given here before. I do this for two reasons. First, this has been a very heavy week for me. I have already preached or taught or lectured some twenty-two hours this week, and so have had very little time to work on proper preparation of a message. Rather than present one half-prepared I would much rather do this. Second, I feel this message is much needed. I do not think I have known a time when more people have been going through deep trouble and tribulation and pressure. We have seen a sample of it this morning in the prayer requests over which we have just prayed. And I feel this would be an appropriate message for such a time. So I apologize to those of you who have heard this message

before---and remember that you have---but I hope that, like wine and cheese, it will improve with age!

I have chosen this passage in 1 Chronicles because it deals with a very practical problem in our lives, one which every one of us wrestles with from time to time. I want to be both practical and helpful---that is what Scripture is for. And this passage deals with the problem of how to kill a lion on a snowy day. Now, you have had that problem this week, I know! You may not have recognized it, but I am sure you have had it. As we get on into this text I am sure you will agree with me. It deals with that problem, along with a couple of others, and I think we will find it helpful.

"And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was a valiant man of Kabzeel, a doer of great deeds; he smote two ariels of Moab. He also went down and slew a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. And he slew an Egyptian, a man of great stature, five cubits tall. The Egyptian had in his hand a spear like a weaver's beam; but Benaiah went down to him with a staff, and snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear. These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and won a name beside the three mighty men. He was renowned among the thirty, but did not attain to the three. And David set him over his bodyguard."

You notice this is in the days of David the king. There are two groups of men mentioned---the thirty, and the three. These three mighty men, whose names are given in preceding texts, were the leaders of all the armed forces of Israel, the "Joint Chiefs of Staff", if you like. Then there was another band of thirty men who were the commanders of various divisions within the military. It was among these thirty men, chosen from throughout the ranks of Israel, that our man Benaiah the son of Jehoiada became prominent. He was made captain of David's bodyguard. He was chosen for that position of honor close to the person of the king because of three great events which had happened in his life, three deeds of valor for which he was widely known throughout the nation.

The first was that he smote two ariels of Moab. If you are reading from the King James Version you will notice that it says "two lion-like men of Moab". This is because the King James translators did not know what this word meant. Nor, in fact, did the translators of the Revised Standard Version. For this word in Hebrew is one of the very few of which we have lost the meaning. We do not know what it means. The King James translators noticed that it was somewhat similar to the word for lion. So they translated it "lion-like", feeling that this would be as close as they could come. But it does not mean exactly that. So when the Revised translators worked on this passage they said, "Well, let's not translate this word at all. We don't know what it means, so let's just admit it, and anglicize it, i.e., take the sound of it in Hebrew and put in in English." So that is why it is ariel, for that is what it sounds like in Hebrew.

But no one knows what an ariel is. The King James translators made what you might call a "holy guess" at it. If I may take an unholy guess, I would suggest that the word probably is some kind of military term, referring to a troop unit of a particular size, like a company or a platoon, and that this man had won fame because he encountered these two units, whatever they were, of the military of Moab, and single handed, put them down. Whatever it does mean, it was a notable deed. He was widely recognized as a mighty man because he had smitten these two ariels of Moab.

Another deed for which he was known was that he went down and slew a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. That, too, was a notable deed. A lion is a very ferocious adversary. He met him in a very difficult place and slew him, and was recognized as a man of valor because he had dared to face a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. We are going to come back to that incident in a moment.

The third great deed for which he was known was that he met an Egyptian, a man of great stature, five cubits (about nine feet) tall. That is about the same size as Goliath, for slaying whom David won fame. This man had a tremendous spear, like a weaver's beam. Unfortunately we are not acquainted with that terminology. A weaver's loom had a tremendous beam on it, usually about six or seven inches thick. That is what this man's spear was like. We might liken it to a flag pole or a telephone pole. At any rate it was a formidable weapon. And Benaiah the son of Jehoiadah met this huge man with this great spear and, using only his staff, somehow knocked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, seized it, and slew the giant with his own spear, for which he

won great fame in Israel as a man of valor.

"Well now," you say, "that's all very interesting. But what on earth does it have to do with me? How does this relate in any sense to me? It is an interesting story, and certainly he was a great man, but I don't see how this helps me." But, you see, this is one of the glories of Scripture. Paul tells us in Romans 15:4, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction," and these tales in the Bible are not merely Sunday school stories, or even myths and legends recorded for our entertainment. They have meaning and purpose for us. They apply to us.

For instance, it is interesting to note that these three enemies whom Benaiah overcame are all used in Scripture as types, or symbols, of enemies of the believer today. "Benaiah smote two ariels of Moab." Who was Moab? In the Old Testament we find that the Moabites were a tribe living on the borders of Israel who were related to the Israelites. Back in the book of Genesis we are told that Lot, when he fled from Sodom, hid with his two daughters in a cave. There, in a rather shadowed episode, we are told that Lot was made drunk by his two daughters and that, in his drunken stupor he sired children by each of his own daughters. One was Ammon, and the other was Moab. Ammon, by the way, is the one for whom the capital city of present-day Jordan was named. So the Moabites were closely related to the Israelites and grew up beside them. But they were always enemies of Israel, wherever you read of them.

This is used throughout the Old Testament as a picture of something which is true of us. We have an enemy within us, to which we are related. In the New Testament it is called "the flesh". It is referred to as our "self-life", the "old life", and by other terms like that. But it is related to us. It is part of us. We cannot get rid of it. It lives in the back room of the house of our life, like a poor relative. We are ashamed of it, but we cannot get rid of it. And so Moab is a picture of the flesh throughout Scripture.

"And he slew an Egyptian." Egypt also is used as a type or picture of an enemy throughout the Scriptures. Do you know what it is? Egypt was the leading nation of the world of that day, the country which was looked up to as the source of worldly power, with its vast armies and tremendous temples, its pharaohs and their pomp and circumstance, its libraries and accumulated wisdom. All this is a picture of the superficial impressiveness, the empty glory of the world and its ways. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he was taken up on a high mountain and shown all the kingdoms of the earth, with all their power and glory. That is what is symbolized by Egypt. The Israelites, many of them, longed to return to Egypt. They had forgotten the bondage, the slavery, the cruelty, the tears and the heartache of Egypt, and remembered only its comforts, its conveniences, the "leeks and onions and garlic and melons" of Egypt. What a picture Egypt is of the world and its ways--its philosophies, its pursuit of pomp and prestige and pride and status! So this incident is used as a vivid figure of a man who overcame the world.

But then there was the lion. I am sure you have guessed by now what the lion symbolizes. Remember that Peter tells us outright: "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Here is an enemy who is sinister, and who, like a lion, has tremendous majesty and authority and power, and is out licking his chops, looking for something to eat, "seeking whom he may devour". What a picture!

Who among us has not been confronted with these enemies? There they are---"the world, the flesh, and the devil". We have felt the pressure of them, seen the attack of the flesh, our relative, Moab, sneaking up on us when we are least aware. We have felt the pull of the world, its attractiveness, and have wanted to be involved in it and thought we were missing something if we were not. We have felt it draw us away as we have longed to go back to Egypt. And at times, I am sure, we have sensed a tremendous dread of the devil, felt frightened, terrified by this powerful adversary.

We don't have time this morning to deal with all three of these in detail, so I would like to focus on this central story of the killing of the lion, as I think it has great significance for us. Certainly this was the most dangerous of the enemies recorded here, for a lion is the most powerful of beasts, the most ferocious of adversaries. There are several things said about it which we want to note. We read that Benaiah slew a lion---a lion, not a leopard, not a wild hyena or a boar of a buffalo, but a lion.

Why a lion? Well, it is not for nothing that the lion is called the king of beasts, because it is indeed a very powerful animal. I have read that a lion is able, with one blow of his paw, to smash the human skull just as you would break an egg. He would slap you and your skull would cave in. Yet the bones of the skull are among the strongest structures of the body. A lion is able, with his teeth, to bite through any bone of the human body, including even the thigh bone. With one crunch of those jaws he could smash that bone. And to face that kind of ferocious beast at close quarters is a tremendously daring thing to do. That is what Benaiah did.

As a boy I used to wonder what would happen if a lion and a tiger got into a fight. For years I would play that over in my imagination and speculate about the outcome. Until one day I happened to see a movie exhibited by Dr. Louis Talbot. He had been in India on an occasion when a lion and a tiger had somehow accidentally fallen into the same pit. Someone was there with a movie camera and filmed the whole thing. I tell you, I watched with great interest as this battle went on! These cats circled one another, one would lash out at the other, they would spit and snarl and leap about in that light way cats have. Then suddenly they would grapple together and roll about, spitting and biting. It was tremendous to watch! Then, quicker than the eye could follow, something happened, and the tiger appeared to cave in. He simply fell down. The lion had caught it at just the right moment, had slapped it on the side of the head, and had crushed its skull. That was the end of the battle. So that was the adversary Benaiah the son of Jehoiada met on the day when he slew this lion.

Do you know that every one of us has a lion in our life? This, for Benaiah was the worst possible foe he could meet. And you and I have something like that don't we? You have something---and it flashes into your mind as I say these words---which is the worst possible foe. It is something you have dreaded, something you have been afraid of, something you have thought might happen but have wished would not. It had been there on the horizon of your thinking, always threatening, and you have been wondering if it were ever going to happen. The worst possible foe, the thing you have dreaded more than anything else---that is the lion in your life.

Maybe it is a quite different lion for the person sitting next to you, or for me. Maybe it is a physical disease or affliction---a heart attack, brain surgery, cancer. It may be some terrible, crushing disappointment, some loved one taken from you so that you are left alone. Maybe it is the fear of being financially ruined. Whatever it may be, the lion is the worst possible foe in your life.

Benaiah met this lion, and he met him in the worst possible place. He met him in a pit. If you are going to fight a lion, certainly the one place not to choose is a pit, where you cannot get away, where you are at close quarters with this lion and there is no escape. If I were to fight a lion I at least would want to be out on a plain where I could take certain steps---preferably long ones---to get away! I would feel like the man who was caught stealing watermelon out of a patch. The farmer fired at him, and when his friends asked him, "Did you hear those bullets?" he said, "Yessir, I heard them twice---once when they passed me, and then again when I passed them!" That is the way I would feel about a lion. I would want to be out where I could run. But you cannot run in a pit. Benaiah met the worst possible foe in the worst possible place. Have you ever been there? Have you ever run into this terrible thing you dreaded to have happen, and found there was no way to avoid it? You could not go home to mother, could not take a vacation, could not do a thing. You had to face up to it. There was no way to get away.

But also notice that Benaiah met this lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. That made it a very treacherous situation---the worst possible foe, in the worst possible place, under the worst possible circumstances. You folks who grew up here in California have no idea what snow is like. I grew up in Montana where, as we often said, we have only two seasons: Winter and August! We know what snow is like, and what snow does. I have been in snow up to my chest-cold, numbing snow-just walking out in the back yard. One of my favorite delights, ever since I came to California, is to sit on my patio on a warm winter afternoon and read all about the blizzards back east! Snow numbs the fingers and makes it difficult to handle weapons. Snow makes footing treacherous and slippery. And snow blinds the eyes. You have all read about snow-blindness. The brightness of the sun upon the snow can actually destroy your vision temporarily. All these factors were involved in this battle when Benaiah the son of Jehoiada met the lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. He met the worst possible foe, in the worst possible place, under the worst possible circumstances.

And do you know, as I speak of this, I think that right now this is where God has me. I am going through something like this right now in my own experience. Something I have dreaded all my life has happened. Something I did not want to see happen, felt would be the most hurtful thing which could happen, has happened. I cannot escape it, and have to deal with it at a time when I have lots of other pressures, lots of problems. It is not an easy time to do it. It is the worst possible foe, in the worst possible place, under the worst possible circumstances. Are you there too?

Well, the thing we want to know is, how did he win? The whole focus of this story is that Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was able to kill this lion. He slew him! How did he do it? Is that the question you are asking? The passage does not seem to tell us, does it? The account seems merely to give us the incident without telling us anything about how it happened. There again is the wonder of the Scriptures. We are told in the book of Proverbs, "The glory of God is to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings is to search it out." And God never tells us something like this without hiding the answer for us to find, if we will but look for it. And this is what he has done here. He has hidden certain clues in this story which tell us how Benaiah the son of Jehoiada won this battle.

The answer, of course, if you think about it, is that Benaiah was able to do this because that is the kind of man he was. He was indeed a mighty man of valor. It was not the deeds he did which made him that way. He was already a mighty man of valor. The deeds simply revealed what he already was. He had what it took. He was that kind of man. These deeds simply made it clear to everybody else that he was that kind of man.

In the Bible, when you want to know what a man is like, look at his name, because biblical names are deliberately designed to give you a clue to the character of the individual. There is much evidence for this throughout the Scriptures. You know how God often changed a man's name when he changed his character.

"Jacob" meant "usurper, supplanter," and God changed his name to "Israel," "prince with God," when Jacob went through a transforming experience in his life. He changed Abraham's name from "Abram," "exalted father," to "Abraham," "father of a multitude." He changed Sarah's name from "Sarai," "dominating", to "Sarah," "princess." Jesus changed Peter's name. He said, "Your name is Simon, but I'm going to call you Peter, for I'm going to make you into a rock." "Peter" means "rock." And Saul (which means "asked") of Tarsus was changed to "Paul," which means "little," when he became a Christian. So God changes names when character changes. If you want to know the meaning of a man, look at his name.

In the book of Isaiah we learn that Isaiah had two sons to whom he gave special names in order to teach the people something. One was called "Shearjashub", the other "Maher-shalal-hashbas". Can you imagine calling that boy in to lunch? His name means "hasting (is he) to the booty, swift (to the) prey", and it was a testimony to the people of Israel that God had declared Israel to be a spoil and a prey to the nations around, and that he was inviting the nations to hasten in, to hasten to the spoil and to the prey. "Now is the time to come in and take this nation." Ah yes, that was the word of warning. But the other boy's name was a note of hope. It means "a remnant shall return." That is what God taught his people through those names.

There is a similar instance in the book of Genesis in a name which God chose to teach a lesson to a whole generation. The whole world was taught by the name of a single man. His name was Methuselah. He was given that name by his father, Enoch, the one who "walked with God, and was not, for God took him." Enoch didn't start walking with God until he was sixty-five years old, when his son was born. He named him because of something God taught him at that time. The name signifies it. It means "when he dies it will come". What will come? The Flood. Can you imagine how they watched him everywhere he went? "Where's Methuselah? Keep your eye on him. We don't want him falling off a cliff, because when he dies it will come." Everybody knew that. Sure enough, you can see from the account that the very year Methuselah died, the Flood came. And the grace of God is revealed in the fact that Methuselah was the oldest man who ever lived! Nine-hundred sixty-nine years they watched him. But when he died, the Flood came.

What does this name mean---"Benaiah the son of Jehoiada"? That is a clue to the kind of man he was. Well, there is an interesting thing about it. This man was well-known in David's day, and is mentioned often in Scripture. But in almost every instance, with only one or two exceptions, his name is listed as "Benaiah the son of Jehoiada". So his father's name is important, too. If you take the meaning of those two names, in the

order of seniority, you get the secret of how to kill a lion on a snowy day. Jehoiada means "God knows", and Benaiah means "God builds". Those twin truths are the secret of how to meet a lion, the worst possible foe, in the worst possible place, under the worst possible circumstances, and win. Remember to rest upon the facts that God knows, and God builds.

God knows where you are. He chose that place for you. That is the revelation of Scripture. God put you where you are, and therefore he knows. He knows all about you. Jesus said that the hairs of your head are numbered. He knows what you are going through, and he brought it about. "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose," Paul tells us in Romans. And he not only knows what you are going through, but he feels what you feel. God knows how you feel. That is one of the most comforting things to realize when you are upset, when somebody has done you dirt. When you are angry, or remorseful, or impatient, or are tempted to be bitter, or have been betrayed, or have been hurt--God knows how you feel. The writer of Hebrews tells us, "We have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses." We do not have the kind of God to come to who says, "Oh, don't bother me! Your little troubles---what are they to me?" No, no. We have one who "in every respect has been tempted as we are", who has been where we have been, and knows how we feel.

On my way to Europe recently I was reading the story of Corrie Ten Boom, that remarkable Dutch woman who has traveled around the world telling the story of her years under the occupation of the Nazis in Holland, when she and her family were put in a concentration camp. I was reading this account because I was going to visit her home there in Holland. In fact, I bought a watch at her watch shop. The Nazis had taken her and her sister and had put them in a concentration camp under horrible conditions, along with thousands of other women. One day, after a terrible series of degrading experiences, these women were marched out single-file and, one by one, were made to take off all their clothes and stand absolutely naked before a group of Nazi doctors, arrogant men, who showed their contempt for them. These modest, refined women had to stand stark naked before these examining doctors, and it was a terrible wrench to their spirit. Corrie says that she turned to her sister, Bessie, and said, "Bessie, remember, Jesus was naked on the cross." And her sister turned, and her face lit up with a smile, "Oh, that's right. Oh, that helps!" God knows. He knows how you feel.

Ah, but more than that, he builds. He has a purpose in mind. He knows what is happening and he is using it to work toward an end. That is the glorious thing, isn't it? Out of all the record of Paul's heartache and sorrow and privation and pain and suffering, "This light affliction," he said, "is but for a moment, and is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," and, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." And this is not only in heaven some day, but now. Those who go through heartaches, pressure, problems, tribulation, always emerge, when they are in God's hand, softened, chastened, mellowed, more loving, warmer, more compassionate. God is building---that is the whole point. This is the secret of survival: God knows, God builds.

In 1895 Andrew Murray was in England suffering from a terribly painful back, the result of an injury he had incurred years before. He was staying with some dear friends. One morning while he was eating his breakfast in his room, his hostess told him of a woman downstairs who was in great trouble and wanted to know if he had any advice for her. Andrew Murray handed her a paper he had been writing on and said, "Just give her this advice I'm writing down for myself. It may be that she'll find it helpful." This is what was written:

In time of trouble, say, "First, He brought me here. It is by His will I am in this strait place; in that I will rest." Next, "He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace in this trial to behave as His child." Then say, "He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow." And last, say, "In His good time He can bring me out again.. How, and when, He knows." Therefore say, "I am here (1) by God's appointment, (2) in His keeping, (3) under His training, (4) for His time."

That is how to kill a lion on a snowy day.

Prayer

Thank you for this truth, Lord, which leaps at us from an obscure incident in the Scriptures,

which shows us that all these things have been designed for our instruction, that we may know how to face life and live as you want us to live. May it strengthen us in the hour of trial. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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BOILS AT CHRISTMAS

by Ray C. Stedman

The old Christmas carol tells us to "Deck the halls with boughs of holly... 'tis the season to be jolly," but I have noted, as I am sure you have, a very strange and somber mood this Christmas. The energy crunch has kept all the decorations from the streets, and not many houses are showing bright lights either. It is a rather dull and gloomy Christmas in comparison with those of the past. Most of us feel the somberness of this occasion, especially as we read in the newspapers the chilling stories of cruel and ruthless murders occurring in many places today. We know that famine is spreading in the Sahara, war clouds hang over the Mideast, and corruption in politics still occupies the front pages of our newspapers.

Many people today are asking, very honestly, "What is there to celebrate about Christmas?" Perhaps many of you are facing personal sorrow in your own lives, feeling pain and tragedy. And despite the joy of family reunions there is an inner pain and darkness. I had lunch this week with a man who told me he had all the outward marks of success. He was eminent in his profession, had a beautiful home and a lovely family---all these things that people count as important. And yet inwardly he was filled with a constant agony and a sense of self-doubt. Many are feeling this way. "Where is the joy of Christmas?" they say.

Well, for an answer to that question I would like to turn to the record of the deepest human agony found in the pages of the Bible---the book of Job. You know the story of Job. What happens to him is one of the most agonizing records of history. This man lost all the things which humans count as necessary in life. All that men count important or worthwhile this man had, and then lost. It is an amazing story of disaster which strikes the human spirit.

As the book begins, we are given a look behind the scenes, where Satan gained access to Job and then, on a single day, caused tragedy to strike in this man's life. All the wealth and possessions he had were swept away as disaster after disaster hit him. His herds and flocks were stolen or killed, his houses ruined and demolished, and then, as a crowning blow, all of his children, seven sons and three daughters, were killed in that one day. What a tragic day that must have been! We read today of families being wiped out in a single airplane or auto accident and know the heartache and trouble that must bring to loved ones.

But this was not all. As you know, Satan went back to God and asked permission to afflict Job personally, physically. So there came upon Job a terrible siege of boils, loathsome running sores, which persisted week after week after week. Anyone who has ever had a boil or carbuncle knows how terribly painful it is. Here was a man who had them from head to toe. He sat in the ash heap and bemoaned his fate, and felt abandoned by all his friends. Even his wife finally reached the end of her endurance and patience. She turned from supporting him in his agony and reproached him, told him to curse God and die. Job sat alone in the ash heap bemoaning the terrible lot which had befallen him, and saw no reason for it, no explanation of it in his life.

Finally, to make matters worse yet, he had three friends who came to comfort him. They sat there for a week without saying anything, which was wise, but then they began to talk. Their argument was in just one direction---that suffering such as this can result only from hidden sin, and that Job was covering something up. That unjust accusation simply wiped out his human spirit. Feeling himself so unjustly treated he cries out in his agony to God. He summarizes his difficulties in chapter 19, beginning with verse 13:

**He has put my brethren far from me,
and my acquaintances are wholly estranged from me.
My kinsfolk and my close friends have failed me**
[the very ones he looked to for comfort---in fact, a little earlier in this book he calls these three friends "you miserable comforters"];
**the guests in my house have forgotten me;
my maidservants count me as a stranger;
I have become an alien in their eyes.
I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer;
I must beseech him with my mouth.
I am repulsive to my wife,
loathsome to the sons of my own mother.**

**Even young children despise me;
when I rise they talk against me.
All my intimate friends abhor me,
and those whom I loved have turned against me.
My bones cleave to my skin and to my flesh,
and I have escaped [i.e., escaped death] by the skin of my teeth.**
[That, by the way, is the origin of this familiar expression.]
**Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends,
for the hand of God has touched me!
Why do you, like God, pursue me?
Why are you not satisfied with my flesh ?**

So he cries out of his anguished heart for his friends simply to leave him alone, at least to have the grace to leave him alone in his agony and his painful suffering. But to Job the worst thing of all, you realize as you read through this book, is his feeling that he cannot reach God with his cries, and that even if he could, the greatness of God is such that it would overwhelm him and he would not even be able to explain how he feels. This causes him a terrible sense of frustration. So he cries out in verse 23,

**Oh that my words were written!
Oh that they were inscribed in a book!**
[Job did not know that this prayer would be answered. He was merely hoping that his words might be written down so that someone, sometime, might be able to understand what he was going through.]
**O that with an iron pen and lead
they were graven in the rock for ever!**

Such was the gloom in which this man lived, as many of us are feeling gloom and despair in this day, although perhaps not to the same extent.

But suddenly a light breaks in through this gloom. In the next few verses there is something which occurs several times in the book of Job. Out of this terrible sense of agony and anguish and frustration and weakness and despair and anger Job feels, suddenly a light of hope and of faith is born. Light breaks into his gloom and darkness, and there is a sudden dawning of faith. This is what we have in the very next verse:

**For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at last he will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then from my flesh I shall see God,
whom I shall see on my side [or, "for myself"],
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.**

Then the light fades, he sinks back into the gloom, and he begins to cry out again,

"My heart faints within me!"

But for the moment there has been a brilliant breakthrough of light into his darkness, and Job sees two remarkable things. He sees that the ultimate answer of God to the agony of men is to be the coming to earth of

a *goel* (that is the Hebrew term Job uses, pronounced "go-el"), a kinsman-Redeemer, a Redeemer who would be related to him. You find this word frequently in the pages of the Old Testament. It is in the book of Ruth, where Ruth comes out of Moab and begins to glean in the fields of Boaz and, to her astonishment, she learns that Boaz is her kinsman, related to her through marriage, and that he therefore can act as a kinsman-redeemer, as one who has the capacity, the ability, and the willingness to heal her hurt, change her circumstances, and deliver her from her troubles. This is what Job saw the coming of a *goel*, a kinsman-Redeemer, who would have the strength and the ability and capacity to deliver.

And linked with this was Job's realization that this would work its way out through a death and a resurrection. He says, "After my skin has been destroyed [i.e., after his body has died], then 'out of' [or 'apart from'] my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall beh old, and not another." Then the light fades and Job sinks again back into his gloom.

The amazing thing is that in this flash of light, in the midst of the darkness of this man, in his ancient world, there was a revelation of the two great causes for celebration in the Christian faith. Here is the message of Christmas---an incarnation. There shall come a *goel*, a kinsman-Redeemer to earth. And here is the message of Easter, the resurrection from the dead, when the ultimate solution to man's problems will find expression in the resurrection of the body, and man shall enter into the life God intends for him.

On this occasion, of course, we are interested in this glimpse Job had of the message of Christmas. When Jesus came to earth that first Christmas, he came as the *goel*, the Redeemer of man, but as the Redeemer who is one of us, is related to us. This is the great truth Job saw in that ancient day. We do not know how long ago Job lived. The book tells us that he was a citizen of the land of Uz. No one knows for certain where Uz is, although I suspect it is down in that part of the Persian Gulf where the Arabs are now holding much of the oil of earth. Many scholars feel that this is the oldest book in the Bible, that Job lived long before the days of Moses or even of Abraham. And yet, looking down across the running centuries, he sees that the hope of the solution for man's agony is to be the coming to earth of a kinsman-Redeemer, One who would be related to us.

When Jesus was born in a manger in Bethlehem of Judea, the shepherds were told that he who was born would be a baby, a man, a human being like us, related to us, and thus would be one who would share our anguish, who would share our pain and our sense of frustration, and would understand it. And when he came, he came into a world like our world today. Sherwood Wirt, the editor of *Decision* magazine, has captured the mood of that first Christmas very exactly in this description which I took from a Christmas card I received from him,

The people of that time were being heavily taxed, and faced every prospect of a sharp increase to cover expanding military expenses. [Does this sound familiar?] The threat of world domination by a cruel, ungodly, power-intoxicated band of men was ever just below the threshold of consciousness. Moral deterioration had corrupted the upper levels of society and was moving rapidly into the broad base of the populace. Intense nationalistic feeling was clashing openly with new and sinister forms of imperialism. Conformity was the spirit of the age. Government handouts were being used with increasing lavishness to keep the population from rising up and throwing out the leaders. [How contemporary!] Interest rates were spiraling upward in the midst of an inflated economy. External religious observances were considered a political asset, and abnormal emphasis was being placed upon sports and athletic competition. Racial tensions were at the breaking point. In such a time, and amid such a people, a child was born to a migrant couple who had just signed up for a fresh round of taxation, and who were soon to become political exiles. And the child who was born was called, among other things, Immanuel---God with us---the *Goel*, the Kinsman-Redeemer.

That is the message Job saw, which illuminated and alleviated for a brief moment the agony he was going through. God eventually met this man and, though he did not answer all his questions, he resolved the conflict within his heart, and the story of Job ends on a happy note. A man came to one of our pastors the other day and said, very excitedly, "Did you know that Job has a happy ending?" So it does. God met this man. But what Job was permitted to see, in the gloom and despair of his heart, was the ultimate solution to the problems of human agony---whatever it may be---that One would come who has the capacity to take hold of the problem---and do something about it, work it out...but work it out through a process which would involve a death and a resurrection to follow. This is God's process. This is what Job saw. He could put his troubles into

the hands of One who was capable of handling them.

This is what the message of Christmas ultimately is to us. Last Sunday I was listening to the radio broadcast of the service at the First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley and I heard Pastor Earl Palmer describe to his audience Rembrandt's painting called *The Adoration of The Shepherds*, Rembrandt's interpretation of the visit of the shepherds to the babe in Bethlehem. It is a simple scene in a stable, and there in the foreground are the mother and child, with Joseph in the shadows in the background. Peering over into the manger where the babe is lying are the shepherds, with their sheep scattered around them. They could not leave the sheep in the field, they had to bring them along. Arching above the manger the artist has painted a ladder which suggests, in the shadows it casts, the form of a cross. Rembrandt was too great a painter just to put a cross in, with no justification in terms of the picture itself. But the ladder subtly suggests it. And on the beam against which the ladder rests is a rooster, the symbol of betrayal. The artist is suggesting that it is by means of the crushing inner agony of betrayal, and the outer agony of crucifixion, that the One in the manger would become the world's Deliverer and Redeemer.

But the striking thing about the picture is that the light illuminating the whole scene is not coming from outside but from the manger where the babe is lying. There is no halo over the babe, such as medieval painters often employed, but the light which illuminates the faces looking in is streaming from the manger. Their faces are put into sharp relief as they look down, and you can see that the light is coming from the babe himself. That is Rembrandt's very remarkable way of saying that the story of Christmas is the story of light in darkness.

The prophet Isaiah had said that a light would break out upon those who sit in darkness. And through the centuries since, this has been at the heart of the Christmas message. There is a light in the darkness of men's experience. All hope shines and gleams from the manger. And men begin to see the answer to their problems there, for that babe is God's Goel, our Goel, our Kinsman-Redeemer, One who shares life with us, with its ache, its agony, its pain, its betrayal, its heartache. All that makes up the suffering of men today he understood, he entered into. The world into which he was born was a gloomy, dark, hopeless world, where men lived in misery, by and large, a condition to which the world of our day is again rapidly declining. But what those who put their trust in him learned, the glorious good news which broke out upon that dark first century, was that there was One who was capable of taking whatever problem a human being was involved in, and doing something about it!

You see, a kinsman-redeemer undertakes to work out the solution to the problems all on his own. He comes into the picture only when the person who is suffering has reached the end of his own resources. As long as a person in Israel had resources of his own he was expected to use them to help solve his problems. But when he reached the end, where there was nothing left, then he could count on his relatives. And among them would be the one who would be the kinsman-redeemer, one who would undertake the responsibility of delivering him from that difficulty. And this is what Job cried out in the midst of his pain---"I know, I know that my Goel is alive, and on the earth at last he shall stand. And when the worms have destroyed my body, when my bones and skin are gone, then out of my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and not another"---a personal, face-to-face confrontation with the One who was his Kinsman-Redeemer. This is the message of Christmas.

This last week I have heard half a dozen stories of people who were on the verge of suicide, who had given up, did not want to live any longer because of the overwhelming pressures of the world in which we live. Then some Christian had somehow been brought into the picture in each case, and had told them of Jesus. They each had made that personal commitment of faith which had related them to the One who came at Christmas, and the miracle occurred once again, as it has occurred so many times. There came that restoration of inner strength, the impartation of peace and joy within, and the beginning of the gradual working out, sometimes in strange and unanticipated ways, of the difficulties and the problems which oppressed them, and which had seemed so insoluble at first.

That is the message of Christmas, is it not? Here we have a Goel who can take our problems and work them out. He will lead through death, the death of our present circumstances, to a resurrection beyond. And all this is ours, if we will have him. All God's blessings, and all the victories he has won, are always made available only through faith. You can go through Christmas without him. You can try to work out these problems

yourself, if you like. God will let you do it. But if they bring you into a sense of despair, and you still will not turn them over, yield them to the Kinsman-Redeemer to work out, they will crush you, destroy you, and perhaps your life will be at stake. But if you respond to the offer of God and by faith enter into a personal relationship with this One who lives as our Goel and is able to take on the difficulties of our circumstances, you will find that he, as he has done with millions of others, will lead you out of that difficulty. He will give you peace and joy and a sense of oneness with him, will strengthen the inner man and deliver the outer man in his own way and time, as has happened literally to millions and millions of others.

There may well be many among us here this morning who have been coming to this church for some time, and faith has been awakened in your hearts. You have been coming because you feel there is an answer to the difficulties of your life and the problems you are going through, but you have not yet come to that moment of commitment when you hand it over to the One who alone has the capability of working it out. If you are such a person, I would like to ask you simply to hand over those problems, and your very life, to this living Goel, this Kinsman-Redeemer who is able to undertake for you. And out of the gloom and darkness and despair of your life, hope will be born afresh and anew.

Catalog No. 3137
December 23, 1973
Job 19:13-27a

THE ANSWER TO DEATH

by Ray C. Stedman

I have always been glad that, in California, Easter comes at the most beautiful time of the year. I have just left wind-swept Kansas, with a stopover at the Denver airport where I found myself in the midst of a howling late Spring blizzard. Snow was falling heavily, the ground was covered with it, the landscape was bleak and wintry and barren. And it was cold! We left there and flew west into the beautiful sunshine and glorious springtime of California. In some such way the resurrection of Jesus confronts us with a Springtime of hope and life, in contrast to the darkness and coldness of death.

One of the strange phenomena of our day is the way that we, in this latter part of the twentieth century, are returning to the fashions and activities of the late nineteenth century---going back to the Gay Nineties. We men are growing beards and moustaches, and dressing in the fashions of nearly a century ago. When I first wore the outfit I now have on, somebody told me I looked like a Mississippi riverboat gambler! Another of the nineteenth century practices which is returning today is an interest in and preoccupation with the theme of death. Someone has pointed out that in the nineteenth century sex was a taboo subject, one which was not to be mentioned in public, nor even in private. Not much was published on sex. Death was the theme which occupied people then. There were many books written on the subject and a lot of studies about it. Of course, in the twentieth century sex has been the theme, and death is something which one doesn't discuss in public. But in just the last year or so we are seeing a return to the subject of death. We have satiated ourselves with the subject of sex---hardly anything is left to be said about it which has not been said. Perhaps for that reason men are returning once again to an investigation of the theme of death. This was highlighted by the publication in the past year of six serious studies by secular writers on the theme of death. Perhaps feeling the lessening force of religious faith in America, these secular writers are seeking to come to terms with death---apart from revelation.

Everyone knows that there are only two inevitabilities in life: death and taxes. The supreme question today, it seems, is not so much what you believe about Easter, but whether or not you have filed your income tax return. At least that is what many think. And so on this day before the IRS filing deadline, it is surely appropriate to consider the more inevitable of those two---not taxes, but death. For resurrection has no meaning if you do not view it against the background of death.

I once saw an artist's painting of the "descent from the cross"---the taking down of the body of Jesus from the cross. I was struck by the way he had captured the fact of death in the body of Jesus: the gaping mouth, the protruding teeth, the glazed eyes---he was indeed dead. One day I stood by the naked body of a teenage boy who had taken his own life. As I stood looking at that body, dreading the moment when I had to go back upstairs and try to give some comfort to his mother, I felt what the disciples must have felt as they took the body of Jesus down. I was angry. I felt the stupidity of it, the waste of youth and beauty which death represents. What an insult to the human spirit death is! How we fight it in our thinking! How senseless and stupid it appears to be to cut off all the worth of life. Yet how frustrated and helpless we are before it.

Tom Howard, who is a professor at Gordon College of Theology and Missions in Boston, Massachusetts, has captured something of the way humanity feels in the presence of death, in these eloquent words:

Like a hen before a cobra, we find ourselves incapable of doing anything at all in the presence of the very thing that seems to call for the most drastic and decisive action. The disquieting thought, that stares at us like a face with a freezing grin, is that there is in fact nothing we can do. Say what we will, dance how we will, we will soon enough be a heap of ruined feathers and bones, indistinguishable from the rest of the ruins that lie about. It will not appear to matter in the slightest whether we met the enemy with equanimity, shrieks, or a trumped-up gaiety---there we will be.

Something of that sense of inevitability, of helplessness, of hopelessness, grips us all when we confront death, whether it be our own or that of a loved one. I want to share also with you the words of a distraught father who is telling us of his reaction to the death of his son. He says,

The rays of a late morning South Carolina sun struck me full on the face as I stepped through the door of the hospital. The squint of my eyes, however, was not occasioned by the rays of the sun; it was the visible display of the anguish and despair that wracked my very life. I had spent several hours with my sobbing wife. Now I was about to keep the appointment that would prove to be the emotional climax of the day my world collapsed. On my way to the appointment I stopped at a diner to have a cup of coffee and to bolster my courage. I was oblivious to everything except the appointment that awaited me. Leaving the diner, I made my way to a large white house, located on a corner in Columbia, South Carolina. I followed the owner into a large room, where he soon left me alone. I slowly made my way across a thick rug on the floor to a table on the far side of the room. Upon that table was a white box. I stood before that white box for endless eternities before I finally summoned enough courage to look over the top and down into the white box, at the lifeless body of my son. At that sight my world collapsed. I would have given up all of my academic and athletic awards. I would have given up the prestigious executive training program that I was engaged in with one of the largest international oil companies. I would have given anything. For the first time in my life, I had come to a hurdle I could not clear. My world collapsed.

Surely that was something of the feeling which possessed the hearts and minds of Mary and Martha when they were facing the death of their brother Lazarus. John tells us in the eleventh chapter of his gospel that they sent for Jesus at that moment, but that he, in some strange way, did not hurry to their rescue but waited for two days, until he was sure that Lazarus was dead. When he came, he saw them weeping and mourning, and he caught the sense of anguish and heartbreak in their lives. John tells us that as Jesus watched them he wept with them. Twice in the account John says that he was greatly moved as he felt the hopelessness and the anguish that death causes. But it was there that he said to Martha those words which have been quoted at a million gravesides ever since:

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

And Martha, unable to rise to the full revelation that he had given, said, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world." That is as far as her faith could go. But those words of his have stood as a lighthouse in the midst of the darkness of death for all the centuries that have followed. Many have clung to them as they themselves have come to the hour of their death. "I am the resurrection and the life he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." There is great mystery in those words. I do not think anyone fully understands them. Indeed, they sound a bit contradictory. How can Jesus say "if he die", and at the same time say "he shall never die"? How does one die, and yet not die? We do not fully understand. Our Lord seems to intimate that death

can come, and still not really be death. He also seems to indicate that some will never die. Perhaps scholars are justified in feeling that here he was suggesting what Paul later states will be the experience of those who are alive and remain when the Lord shall return. But whatever he means, there are two things very clear in what Jesus said at that moment. First, he himself is the total master of death in all its forms. "I am the resurrection and the life," he said. Death, in the presence of Jesus, is no longer death. As Paul would later say, it loses its sting; the grave loses its victory. Death, in the hands of Jesus, is robbed of all its terror. And though it may take an outward form, it is no longer death as we think of it. For in the presence of life, death can no longer be death.

Jesus, you remember, most often called it merely "sleep". When Jairus' daughter lay dead, and Jesus came, he looked at her and said, "She's asleep." They laughed at him. But he called her back to life. And when word reached him that Lazarus was dead, he said to his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep." They said that was good, for then he would recover. Jesus said plainly, "No, Lazarus is dead." But just as we do not fear sleep, those who are trusting him do not need to fear death. And within moments, Lazarus himself, dead four days and already stinking, as Martha bluntly put it, was restored to them and was walking, talking, and living among them again. Jesus, the master of death, says, "I am the resurrection." What he points out is that the answer to death is not the resurrection, but Jesus. Jesus himself is the answer. It is not merely the fact or the hope of a resurrection. "I am the resurrection and the life." What he means is that no one can hope to escape death unless he is related to the conqueror of death, Jesus of Nazareth.

All through the centuries, men have tried to penetrate the veil of death, have tried to guess at what lies beyond. Not only Christian writers but secular writers and members of other religious faiths have tried to set forth what lies beyond death. Even the most pagan have tried to find at least some hope. For the human spirit resists the idea that all we are will be cut off and ended---annihilated, exterminated---at death. Somehow it does not make sense. It insults us. And so the human spirit is always ready to grasp at the slightest straw of hope that there is something beyond the grave. Perhaps it is described as a kind of nirvana, as an experience apart from the body, as some mystical, "spiritual" experience. There are many guesses at what lies beyond the grave.

But Jesus points out that, though there is resurrection beyond the grave, unless it is resurrection in relationship to him, it is not worth experiencing. For he himself tells us that there is a resurrection unto life, and there is one unto judgment. There is a resurrection of the just, and a resurrection of the unjust. The Bible seems to indicate clearly that after death we are all resurrected in one way or another, that surely no one ceases to exist at death. That is the clear and unequivocal statement of the Scriptures, both in the Old and the New Testaments. But the point our Lord is making here at the tomb of Lazarus, and which comes to us with such sharp significance on this Easter morning, is that only in Christ does death lose its sting. Only then does the grave forego its victory. Death has spread its slimy fingers over our race from the very beginning, from Adam right on down to the present day. Like many others, I have stood beside many graves, have seen the heartbreak and anguish that death causes. I have stood beside the beds of those who were dying. And only in the case of those whose faith was fastened upon these words of Jesus, and upon him as a person, have I ever seen light and victory and trust and confidence in the hour of death. Every individual awaits the certain coming of death. That is something no one else can do for us; we have to do it alone. Earth is rapidly becoming one vast graveyard, as generation after generation slips away. But there is one place where death has been met and grappled with and driven back, and it is that great theme which we celebrate today. If by faith in the promise of Jesus you or I stand with him in that place where he defeated death, then death need have no terrors for us.

I could recount for you many instances of those whose faith has triumphed in the hour of death. D.L. Moody, the great evangelist of the past century, said on his deathbed, "Earth is receding; heaven is approaching. This is my crowning day!" Many have felt that way, as they have come to the place of death. I have been at funerals which were so triumphant that people went away with spirits lifted up and faces radiant, as they sensed the triumph over darkness and gloom and despair and hopelessness of death, through the words of Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life." And when Martin Luther's daughter, Magdalena, was fourteen years old, she was taken sick and lay dying. Luther prayed, "O God, I love her so. But nevertheless, thy will be done." He turned to his daughter and said, "Magdalena, would you rather be with me, or would you rather go and be with your Father in heaven?" And the girl said, "Father, as God wills." Luther held her in his arms as she passed away, and as they laid her to rest, he said, "Oh my dear Magdalenachen, you will rise and shine like the stars in the sun. How strange to be so sorrowful, and yet to know that all is at peace, that all is well." It is this

hope in the hour of death which the resurrection brings before us.

Now, there are many other truths which gather about the theme of Jesus risen from the dead. There are many other aspects of it which touch us while we are still alive. I have always regretted that the world at large oftentimes seems to see and hear the gospel as though it is a message of hope only in the hour of death. But of course it is far more than that. Jesus died in order that he might live in us now, govern and control our life, and release to us that remarkable manifestation of power to live and act and do and be which in the Scriptures is called "resurrection power". Paul speaks of it in many places. In Philippians 3 he says, "...that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death..." And all through the New Testament you find that the resurrection of Jesus means something tremendous to us while we are alive. It is not something merely for the hour of death. Nevertheless, I do not want to minimize the great truth that when you come to death, as all of us must---the inevitable occurrence which awaits us, every one without exception, when, alone, you have to face that hour---then the only place of hope is in these marvelous words of Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life." There is no hope apart from that.

I know that this may sound like a morbid subject. But I also know that there is nothing which will make the resurrection of Jesus more real to you than to contemplate it against the background of your own soon-coming death. For you cannot escape, and neither can I. One day we must face this realistic fact which breaks into our existence whether we like it or not. And in that hour, the only hope is that you already have established, by faith, a relationship with the Lord of death, the Prince of life, and in that hour you are trusting in what he has promised to do. If you have established that relationship, you can face death, as many hundreds and thousands and millions have, without any terror at all---in fact, with a gentle anticipation, as Paul himself put it: "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, and death has no terrors at all. As you look forward to that time, I would urge upon you that you establish now the relationship which will rob that moment of its sting and take away the terror of death. The Lord Jesus said that he has made himself available by means of his resurrection to all who are open to him. He put it in these words: "Behold, I stand at the door [the door of your life, of your heart] and knock; if any one hear my voice and open the door [You must do that; no one can open it for you.], I will come in to him," he promises, "and will live with him [and more, die with him, and be risen again with him]." That is his promise. "I will live with him and eat with him, and we shall be one."

That is the great promise of Easter. This day has no meaning if it does not mean that---at least that---to you, if it is not the means by which you find the answer to the terror of your own death. But if you have come to that place of faith and trust, how wonderful it is! As the old song puts it, "There's a light in the valley of death now, for me, since Jesus came into my heart." I trust that any who have not yet come to know Jesus Christ as their living Lord and Savior will open the door of their life to him. By just a breathed word of prayer you can say, "Lord Jesus, come into my life. Be my Lord. Take me through the valley of the shadow of death." And he will answer, as he promised to do: "I will come in to him."

Prayer

Thank you, Father, for the promise of your Word. How many millions today are resting in perfect confidence and faith that this Word is true, and will carry us through all the darkness of death. Thank you for the support it gives in the hour of the deaths of others whom we love, for the comfort you can give to every aching heart in that time. And may those who have not yet passed from death unto life do so, even now. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Catalog No. 3138
April 14, 1974, Easter
John 11:25, 26

by Ray C. Stedman

This morning I want to do something that I seldom have occasion to do---to preach, not a passage of scripture, but on a subject. The subject I want to speak about is that of prayer and fasting. As I look over the congregation I see evidence of the need to preach on fasting, particularly. I do want to treat these subjects in a very serious way, because scripture does.

About a month ago, I received an invitation from Dr. Lloyd Ogilvie, pastor of Hollywood Presbyterian Church, to attend a weekend conference in Chicago with other Christians from all over the country. The entire time was to be spent in discovering ways to mobilize Christians, and in determining how to fulfill and obey the great promise that God gives to the nations in 2 Chronicles 7:14. This verse comes in the midst of Solomon's dedication of the temple, on that very solemn occasion when God promised that he would respond to certain conditions to be fulfilled by his people, no matter where they may be. That promise was given first of all to Israel; but since Israel is a model nation, it is intended to show us how God deals with all nations. It is a promise that is valid for all people, in all of time. The verse goes:

"...if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

The people at this conference met to discuss ways and means by which this could be brought to pass, that "this people", the people of God in this country, would fulfill the conditions of this divine promise. Represented at the conference were a great number of leaders from various parts of the country and a wide spectrum of evangelicals. Dr. Dick Halverson and Dr. Louis Evans, two Presbyterian pastors from the nation's capital, were there. Laymen from various organizations, Mr. Victor Nelson, from the Billy Graham Association, and Mr. Harold Lindsell, editor of Christianity Today Magazine, were there. One of the leaders of the charismatic movement, Derek Prince, was present, along with Jimmy Owens, who has written some fine musicals, notably one called *If My People...*, and Pat Boone, representing the Christians of Hollywood. (Now there is one of the neediest mission fields in the world!) Pat told us that being a Christian in Hollywood is like being Phyllis Diller at a Miss Universe contest. There were leaders of seminaries---the president of Trinity Seminary, the president of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and others.

The purpose of the conference was to find ways to bring about God's moving in this country. How do we turn our country around and remove from us some of the destructive things that are going on in our land today, destroying us as a people, breaking up our nation, and causing it to lose its impact in the world?

The two major emphases that emerged from the conference were the primacy of prayer and the place of fasting. Prayer and fasting are two powerful spiritual weapons which were given to Christians, both individually and collectively, by which we may influence history and change the events of our day. The one thing that came through loud and clear to each of us at the conference was that here is a power that has been utilized very little by the church. God has placed in our hands the very key to the whole struggle of the world as it tries to find its way out of an increasingly difficult and darkening morass of problems.

I want to look at prayer and fasting today, so that we might understand what God wants us to do and what mighty weapons are put in our hands.

With regard to the matter of prayer, I would like to turn to Paul's first letter to Timothy, beginning with chapter 2. First Timothy is a warm, intimate letter written to Paul's son-in-the-faith, Timothy, who has been charged with being a pastor and elder in the church at Ephesus. This young man is trembling and uncertain as to what he can do to fulfill this great responsibility, and Paul writes to give him instructions on how to behave and how to act in this demanding ministry. Chapter 2 deals with how to conduct public worship, and here are some very illuminating insights on what Christians are to do when they come together, as we have done this morning, to hear the Word of God and worship together. What ought to be the procedures that we follow and the emphases that we make? This is what Paul says:

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings

be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Paul makes it clear that Christians gathering together---such as we are this morning, seeking to advance the work and cause of God in the world, seeking to be an instrument by which God is able to accomplish what he wants---are to give themselves first of all to prayer. Now when he says "first," I do not think he is talking about first in order of procedure. He does not mean that the first thing you must do is pray. But I think it is clear from the context that prayer is first in order of importance. The most important thing you will do when you get together, Paul says, is to pray for all men, and especially for those in authority---kings, rulers, emperors, princes, presidents, governors, etc.

The reason for that priority is given to us in the logical development of this passage. Let me just point it out to you without attempting to expound the passage in depth. Notice that in verse 4 the apostle seems to gather up the goal of God in human history. He says, "God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

The order of this verse is interesting. If I were writing it, I would reverse it: "God desires all men to come to the knowledge of the truth and to be saved." It is significant that the apostle puts it exactly opposite. Ordinarily we think that men gradually come to understand life, and understand their problems, and understand the world around them in a slowly dawning enlightenment that finally brings them to see and hear the gospel. Then, after they have come to the knowledge of the truth, they are saved. But it is the other way around, according to this passage. Men need to be saved in order to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Look around the world today. What is really wrong is the profound ignorance of man. We do not understand what is happening, we do not understand our problems, we do not understand how to do things. We do not even understand how to run our complicated technological machinery in such a way as to avoid harming, polluting, destroying, and playing havoc in the world in which we live. We boast about our knowledge, but really we are gripped by a most profound and desperate ignorance. Nothing we do to enlighten ourselves, in terms of making education available, seems to help.

The reason, of course, is that there is something wrong with us. Men need to be saved; they need to be delivered from the grip of evil in their lives that warps their thinking and distorts their whole mental processes, making it impossible for them to understand. It blinds their eyes to what is going on in the world. Therefore, men need to be delivered from that evil.

This deliverance does not happen in a moment. We are introduced to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and then we grow in knowledge. Gradually there comes a dawning knowledge of basic, fundamental truth. This is what God is after. God's will is that all men should know about salvation.

Sometimes I am asked, by young people especially, about some certain event, some tragedy that has struck, or some terribly repressive injustice that has occurred, or some awful political system that is allowed to go on and on, such as the Nazi regime under Adolf Hitler. They say, "Why does God permit this? Why does he let these things happen?" This is probably the most frequently asked question of our day. "Why does God allow these tragic injustices, these horrible mutilations of human beings, and depredations of human rights? Why does God permit it?"

The answer is right here: Because God desires all men to be saved, he withholds his avenging justice. He could straighten it all out, he could easily end evil if he wanted to; he could stop this whole tragic process---or any single event---from occurring, but he does not. Why? Because he wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. He gives them opportunity. He restrains himself. There is probably no greater testimony to the compassion and the love of God for man than that very fact that God has, through all these centuries, held back his avenging wrath.

If God wants all men to be saved, then how does he bring it to pass? Paul reveals here that a condition in

society is necessary in order that "we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way," so that men may hear the gospel. The moment there is anarchy, strife, and violence in a community or in a nation, the ability to spread the delivering Word, the liberating truth of God, is diminished.

There is ample testimony to this today, both locally and in far countries. When the iron curtains of this world come crashing down, the opportunity to spread the Word of God almost immediately is diminished tremendously. God is interested in peace. God loves peace among nations. He promotes peace; he wants it. He is not the God of war and the God of anger and the God of wrath we so often paint him to be. The Old Testament tells us that he always moves to judgment reluctantly.

What God wants is peace. He wants communities that are tranquil and open for expression, especially the expression of the gospel. Our very Constitution, I think, is one of the most remarkable testimonies to the truth of those statements. What a tremendous document the Preamble to the Constitution is! It is good for us to hear it again.

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union [that is, harmony, unity between the states], establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility [that means peace at home], provide for the common defence [that means peace abroad], promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity [not only for us, but our children as well], do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

The Preamble to our Constitution is perfectly in line with God's desire for humanity and reflects strongly what Paul is bringing out here, that God desires peace. He wants us to "lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way."

Now, how is this kind of life promoted? Here you come to the heart of the matter. This is what prayer does. The prayers of Christians enable those in a community to live peaceable and godly lives. "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way." To underscore that, the apostle says, "This [praying for leaders and those in high positions] is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." God wants us to pray. Paul suggests four kinds of prayers:

First of all, there are prayers of supplication. These would be specific requests, such as we made this morning when we prayed about those two tragic incidents on the Stanford campus. Pray for all men, Paul says. Anyone, any need, any burden, any problem, any type of difficulty is included in that. We are to supplicate the throne of God.

Second, there are prayers. That is a more general term which means praying in general principles. My prayer this morning that God would put down the wicked and raise up the righteous in political office was this type of prayer. It was not specific; it was a general prayer that God would undertake in the country's need and in its government.

Then there are intercessions---praying on behalf of someone else. The word "intercedes" means to "fall in alongside of". This word has in view a kind of intimacy in prayer, a free and familiar holding up of people before a beloved Father, entreating his help on their behalf, interceding freely and boldly.

The final type of prayer is that of thanksgiving, gratitude. The older I grow, the more aware I become of how thankful to God I ought to be. I have begun to realize how much I have been taking for granted in my life. More and more God is showing me that I have no right to anything. All of these tremendous blessings that come pouring into my life day by day are given to me by the love and care of the heavenly Father, quite apart from any deserving on my part.

My wife and I just recently have been very thankful for feet. She has injured a foot and has been hobbling around and using wheelchairs. We have come to understand the value of feet more than we ever have before. What useful appendages they are! How much they are missed when one is taken out of service! The fact that you have two might make you think you had an extra one, but it is not so. There are no extras; when one is

gone, the whole process (f locomotion is hindered. So we are giving thanks for feet, and hands, and eyes, and for health, grace, strength, security, and protection---all these things.

Our thankfulness ought to be expressed constantly in praise to God. This is what the apostle urges us to do as we come together for a church service.

All this simply points out that the key to peace in a nation or community is put into the hands of praying Christians. They hold the key. I hope we will believe these words. They are not put here to sound nice. They are not just something to encourage a moment of prayer on Sunday morning; they are to help us realize the power and responsibility God has put in our hands.

On Friday I was having lunch with a friend in a little restaurant in Los Altos and heard a commotion outside in the street. We turned around and saw a sheriff's car going slowly down the street, siren blowing. Right behind it was a fire truck, and other trucks, all just swarming with high school kids blowing their horns, yelling, and waving banners. It was obvious they were on their way to a football game. I turned back to my friend and said, "Thank God for that."

My mind instantly had gone back to a few years ago when our high school campuses were anything but places of cheer and happiness. You would see unsmiling groups of kids standing around, looking grim, talking and planning all kinds of violence and depredations on campus, looking with contempt on an display of joy at a football game. Our high schools were grim places then, fear-ridden places. Many of them still are, I know, but it encouraged my heart to see some degree of sanity, of joy, returning to the high school campuses of our area. I know that in San Francisco and other cities many campuses still are frightening places where horrible things are happening. But things are a lot better than they were. There is some change. Why?

The only possible answer is the gracious moving of the Holy Spirit called the Jesus Movement that hit our campuses about five years ago. It was God fulfilling his word in Isaiah 59:19, "When the enemy comes in like a flood, he will raise up a standard against him." The spirit of God moved in and swept many bitter, disillusioned, fearful, angry young men and women into the kingdom of God. And what marvelous changes have come as a result of that! How much more could come if we were faithful in praying that God would do these things.

No one yet has understood fully why God asks his people to pray, but there is no question that he does. "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." This is what God asks us to do.

In 1960 I was invited to speak at a large conference of pastors from all over South Vietnam. This was before the Vietnamese war had really gotten under way. At that time there were only a few U. S. military advisers in Vietnam, but the country was already in great turmoil, and the Viet Cong were so strong that it looked like they were about to take over the country. Christians were very fearful that they were about to lose their freedom to preach. This was emphasized by the murder of one pastor who was on his way to the conference. He was waylaid by the Viet Cong and beheaded, his head allowed to lie in the dust of the road as a warning to the other pastors. Members of the Viet Cong were present in our meeting---they were pointed out to me as they sat scowling at us.

The pastors met at five o'clock every morning to pray. It was a moving experience to come that early in the morning and find five hundred men and women praying. They prayed together---all one voice. I could not understand the language, but missionaries told me they were praying for their country, praying for their homes, praying that God would spare their land. I was moved. I went off by myself to pray, stepping back just a few yards from the building, for you did not dare go back into the jungle area because the Viet Cong were there. I asked God to spare this land, to raise up some force that would keep the doors open for the preaching of the gospel in Vietnam. I remember thinking of Hezekiah's prayer in Isaiah. Hezekiah turned to the Lord and cried out in a moment of desperation, and God spared his life. Hezekiah lived fifteen more years. I thought of that prayer and said, "Lord, I don't know what your purposes are for this land, but if it please you, keep the door open for at least fifteen years. I pray that you will grant that."

I returned home, and, shortly after, the U.S. forces increased in number in Vietnam. I will not go into the subject of the war or try to justify all that was said or done there, but, nevertheless, the door was kept open. I had forgotten that prayer until last spring when Vietnam suddenly collapsed, despite the expectations of many that the country would remain open for several years. But it collapsed, and I remembered that 1975 is fifteen years from 1960.

I believe God answers prayers. I believe there are many, many instances today, in the past, and in the scriptures that encourage us to pray that God will move behind the scenes of a nation's history. By praying, we exercise a true patriotism by upholding the leaders of government, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives, that the gospel may have access to the land in which we live.

Linked with prayer, throughout the scriptures, is the subject of fasting in hours of special crisis in a nation's history. I know many people feel uneasy about fasting. It is always amazing how thoroughly ready people are to go along with any kind of diet that demands abstinence from certain foods. But when you call it a fast, they get uncomfortable.

All through the scriptures, in both the Old and New Testaments, God's people fasted. The Lord Jesus seemed to take it for granted that his people would fast. In the Sermon on the Mount he says, "When you fast, don't be like the hypocrites..." Jesus himself fasted. The apostles fasted. The early Christians fasted. Before they sent out new missionaries, they fasted and prayed. They fasted and prayed before they selected elders in the churches. There are many references to fasting all through the Old and New Testaments.

The purpose of fasting is to afflict our souls. Fasting is something that prepares us. It does not do anything for God; it is not something that he requires in order to act. It is something that helps us.

In Psalm 35 the psalmist says, "I afflicted my soul in fasting." And in Psalm 69 he says, "I humbled my soul in fasting." Fasting is a way of opposing that prideful spirit that is within all of us, that wants to be independent of God, that thinks we do not need God and God's power to act. Fasting opposes our confidence in our own ability. Furthermore, fasting seems to oppose self-indulgence, the love of ease that our flesh covets. It is a way of saying to your body, "Look, you're the servant; I'm the master. You need to be kept in your place."

Fasting is not a way of winning Brownie points with God. If you fast for three days, then say, "Now, Lord, look what I've done: I've fasted for three days; you surely ought to grant my request," you are bargaining with God. That is absolutely wrong, and scriptures speak against that attitude.

Neither is fasting an ascetic practice. It is a way of bringing yourself to the place of bankruptcy. It makes you feel your helplessness before God more thoroughly, and it enables you, therefore, in all honesty, openness, and sincerity, to call upon his omnipotence for aid.

At the conference we were invited to set aside one Friday per month, preferably the first Friday of every month, for a fast, that we might remember in prayer and fasting our nation's need in this critical hour of her history. I would like to urge you, individually and in groups, to take one Friday at month at least, and set it aside for a time of prayer for our nation's needs.

I want to close this by reading a proclamation by Abraham Lincoln, made when he was first elected President, in 1961. It reads:

Whereas a joint committee of both houses of Congress has waited on the President of the United States and requested him to recommend a day of public humiliation, prayer, and fasting, to be observed by the people of the United States with religious solemnities, and the offering of fervent supplications to Almighty God for the safety and welfare of these states, His blessing on their arms, and a speedy restoration of peace. And whereas it is fit and becoming in all people at all times to acknowledge and revere the supreme government of God, to bow in humble submission to His chastisement, to confess and deplore their sins and transgression, in the full conviction that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and to pray with all fervency and contrition for the pardon of their offenses and for a blessing upon their present and prospective action. Therefore I, Abraham

Lincoln, President of the United States, do appoint the last Thursday in September next as a day of humiliation, prayer, and fasting, for all the people of the nation. And I do earnestly recommend to all the people, and especially to all ministers and teachers of religion of all denominations, and to all heads of families, to observe and keep that day, according to their several creeds and modes of worship, in all humility, and with all religious solemnity, to the end that the united prayer of the nation may ascend to the Throne of Grace, and bring down plentiful blessings upon our country.

We almost have reached the place where it is impossible for the President of the United States to make a proclamation like that. That perhaps marks something of the drift of our land. Let's turn it back. God has placed it in our hands to do so. Let us be faithful to respond to the command of the apostle Paul to uphold the leaders of our country in such a way that God's blessing may rest once again upon this land.

Prayer

Our heavenly Father, we do thank you for the abundant blessings that have come to us. Thank you for the freedom that we enjoy this morning---freedom to gather here, freedom to preach and teach, freedom to open the Word, freedom to sing and pray without restraint. Thank you, Father. But how rapidly these liberties are being eroded, how quickly they are disappearing in a flood of immorality and pornography, vileness and filth, political corruption and scandal. Lord, we ask you to restore us. Forgive us. We have offended. Lord, we have grieved you. We Christians have failed to obey your Word. We ask you to forgive us, and to heal us, Lord. Help us to turn from our wicked ways; forgive our sin, and heal our land. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Catalog No. 3215
2 Chronicles 7:14

WHAT PRICE ABORTION?

by Ray C. Stedman

The problems of abortion yield themselves to solution only when viewed against the background of reverence for human life and its theological base, for (to quote John R.W. Stott), "Man is a unique creation, the object of God's loving care in both creation and redemption. The reason the Bible forbids the taking of human life, except judicially, is that it is the life of a human being with a divine likeness."

The humanist viewpoint, which views man as fundamentally an animal, gives us no reason to even confront the question, for if man is only another animal he can be treated like one, therefore there is no moral or spiritual question involved. But if, as the Bible declares, man is uniquely singled out to bear the stamp of God's image and to be the object of Christ's redemptive love, then destroying human life assumes moral and spiritual implications because it brings God into the picture and we face our responsibility to him and his unchanging laws.

"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image." (Gen. 9:6) This is the recorded decree of God---not because human life was cheap (the murderer's), but because human life (the victim's) was precious. This word from God bears witness to the value and sanctity of human life. This is the context in which the Christian views the problem of abortion.

I don't have to tell you how pertinent this subject is. Everybody is talking about it. But, as Christians, we must always come back to the scriptures for our frame of reference and try to settle such questions as this on the basis of what the Word of God says---regardless of what the world thinks and does about them.

To help us think it through, I'd like to point out what I think are the crucial questions on this issue and then summarize what I feel the scriptures give us to reach conclusive answers to these questions. Unfortunately,

this isn't one of those areas where we can cite passages that give us clear-cut answers. Our conclusions must be reached more from the standpoint of general principles than from specific statements. But I think the principles that apply are very clear, and we should not find it difficult to draw conclusions from them.

The first and perhaps the most crucial question is: "Is a fetus a human being at every stage of its development, that is, from conception onward? Is it to be regarded as human life from the very beginning?" The position of secular writers on this question varies widely. Some take the stand that a fetus is not to be regarded as a human being until it is actually born and that any arrest of its life before birth is not the taking of life. Others do not agree to that. Many people would say the fetus becomes human life at the point of "quickening," that is, the first time that the fetus shows life, jumps within the womb. Others say the fetus becomes a human life at the time when the heartbeat can be detected.

It seems, though, that very few secular writers would take the position that it is human from the point of conception, unless they are strongly influenced by moral or religious considerations. Roman Catholic writers might take that position. The position of the Catholic church has been consistently against abortion, but, like so much that is happening today in the Catholic church, the official stance is one thing, while its practice is quite another. Not much effort is being made to enforce the official position of the church due to the controversy raging today. Of course, Catholics would go even further, saying that even the act of contraception, of preventing conception, is proscribed by scripture, because it represents an aborting of God's will. But that position would find few Protestant defenders.

When we come back to the scriptures on the question of abortion, it seems to me that it is almost assumed in the Bible that human life is present in the fetus. It is like the argument about the existence of God: very little scripture could be used to answer the philosophical claim that God doesn't exist, because scripture assumes that he does. This matter is much the same---scripture simply assumes that human life is present in the fetus and that it is there from the beginning.

Of the Bible passages that deal with this subject, a noteworthy one is Psalm 139, which refers unmistakably to the fetus before birth. Remember that this Psalm deals with a man's search for his own identity. Let's read at least the first half of this Psalm:

**O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me!
Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up;
thou discernest my thoughts from afar.
Thou searchest out my path and my lying down,
and art acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
Lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.
Thou dost beset me behind and before
and layest thy hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high, I cannot attain it. (Psalm 139:1-6 RSV)**

"O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me." Notice the use of personal pronouns all the way through. "Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up..." This portrays the wonder of the psalmist at the incredible intimacy of the knowledge of God. He goes on to say that it encompasses even his thought life. He acknowledges that God knows him better than he knows himself, that he understands the inner workings of his being, the unconscious developments of his life, that he is far more aware of every intimate detail of a man's life than the man himself. God's knowledge of man is far beyond what man is able to know of himself and is therefore a source of wonder to him.

**Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,**

even there thy hand shall lead me
and thy right hand shall hold me.
If I say, 'Let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night,'
even the darkness is not dark to thee,
the night is bright as the day;
for darkness is as light with thee. (Psalm 139:7-12 RSV)

Notice verse 7: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" Here he's facing the implications of this knowledge that there is no conceivable state of being in which a human can exist (before he is encompassed in the body, after he is in the body, before birth or after death, or within the whole of life) in which God does not know him, and that there is no escape from the being and presence of God.

Then he comes to an actual description of his embryonic state.

For thou didst form my inward parts,
thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful.
Wonderful are thy works!
Thou knowest me right well;
my frame was not hidden from thee,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.
Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance;
in thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.
(Psalm 139:13-16 RSV)

"For thou didst form my inward parts; thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb." The Hebrew word for "knit together" really means "Thou didst unroll me." You know how the fetus is rolled up; it develops in this fetal position. The idea here is that from the very beginning God forms and begins to unroll the fetus. The psalmist is impressed by the wonder of this: "I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are thy works! Thou knowest me right well; my frame was not hidden from thee, when I was made in secret."

Do not be misled by the next phrase, "the depths of the earth." This doesn't mean that fetal growth takes place underground. It's really a poetic phrase that expresses something of the mystery of life. It pictures something that is hidden and therefore difficult to discover. While his life was at this stage, where it is difficult to understand or even investigate, God's understanding of the psalmist's being and identity was clear. Notice that there is no change in the personal pronoun: it is still "I" and "me" describing the fetal state, just as it is when he is speaking about himself as a grown person.

He says, "Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance." That is clearly the embryo. "In thy book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me when as yet there was none of them. How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God!" The language here attempts to convey the fact that there is no conceivable state of the human being that does not involve identity before God. This is strong evidence that, in God's view (and he ought to know), the fetus is a form of human life even in its undeveloped state.

Note that nature itself confirms this. If you find a seed lying on the ground and want to know what kind it is, you plant it and see. The seed never makes a mistake. Inherent in the seed are all the characteristics of the grown plant. This is true in all the natural realm so it seems logical that it is true in human life as well: the moment the fertilized seed is there all that it will become is inherent within it. Therefore, we conclude there is human life from the very beginning, from the point of conception.

Another reference that helps to confirm this view is Hebrews 7:9-10. It speaks of Levi as paying tithes to Melchizedek while he was yet in the loins of his father Abraham. Here, even the sperm of Abraham is regarded as having identity. Levi is identified even before he was conceived (and Abraham wasn't even his father---he was his great-grandfather). Yet Levi is identified as being involved in the characteristic acts of Abraham before he was even conceived.

And you can carry this line of thinking clear back to the fact that in some sense the whole race is found seminally in Adam in the same way. Here we are facing an almost unexplorable mystery of life---which is nevertheless true. That's why Paul can say in Romans 5 that we all sinned in one man, and he hangs a lot on that point of his argument.

Another strong confirmation of the human identity of the fetus is in the first chapter of the gospel of Luke. This is the story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth while both were with child.

"In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy..." (Luke 1:39-44 RSV)

Now joy is a human phenomenon. Elizabeth was six months into her pregnancy, "this is the sixth month with her who was called barren" (Luke 1:36). So at six months we see there was a clear expression of a human emotion within the womb. And Mary had just conceived---yet John in Elizabeth's womb is reacting to the person of Jesus in Mary's womb! This is a very strong point. A lot of the weight of argument lies right here. This is saying that Elizabeth's unborn baby sensed the presence of the Lord Jesus in Mary's womb---that's why it says that "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41), and "the babe leaped for joy" (Luke 1:44).

Here, we conclude, the emotion of joy is being expressed through the humanity of the fetus. Now this isn't just something that is imposed upon the fetus by God so that he makes it twitch, and then it is called a reaction of joy. That would make the terms meaningless; it must be that the fetus in some way feels and expresses joy. In another place, Luke 1:15, it talks about John's being filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb---and only human beings are filled with the Spirit. All this we take as evidence that scripture teaches that a human life exists from the very moment of conception.

Now we are coming to the second step. The first has been to establish that there is human life in the fetus. The second crucial question is this: "What does aborting that type of human life involve? Is it first-degree murder or is it considered a lesser crime?" At the outset we suggested that we should not regard abortion in the same way as we would view a man's deliberately killing another in cold blood. In other words, it isn't first-degree murder to arrest this kind of life, though it is a form of taking life. The fact that there is a lesser penalty prescribed for an act of manslaughter as opposed to an act of murder doesn't mean there is no taking of a human life in a manslaughter case. It means that the circumstances are such that there is less culpability involved.

We have concluded, I trust, that the scriptures say to us that the fetus is a person all the way. That's what Psalm 139 is saying. It uses the same personal pronouns for the fetal development before birth as it does after birth. I think we have to see it as a person. Now the lesser degree of blame attached to ending life through abortion is not because the fetus is not a person, but because it is more difficult to recognize it as a person. The degree of culpability is involved here. The degree to which a person acts deliberately and in full knowledge of what he is doing establishes the difference between murder and manslaughter. The basis for lessening the degree of blame for a crime is not the quality of life that's involved, but the degree of understanding of the value of that life. The scriptures, then, in my judgment, indicate that human life exists from the very point at which conception occurs. But abortion is to be regarded as something less than outright, deliberate murder. It doesn't bear that same degree of culpability if pregnancy is terminated.

That leads to the third question: "What effect does abortion have upon society?" Here again we have general principles set forth in scripture. That is, that when men act in ignorance (as Paul put it about himself), they are able to obtain mercy because they did things ignorantly, in unbelief. God's mercy does come in at this point; nevertheless, there are certain natural results that accrue which God does not set aside.

Despite the ignorance of man, there still is a penalty exacted by God---which we term "natural result" or "natural consequence"---that is not altered by mercy. Therefore, human society suffers the consequences of acts, like abortion, that are not a fulfillment of God's righteous will. The major thing we ought to bear in mind and to teach in a Christian stand against abortion is that there is an effect upon society. To a great degree the ignorance of men today about this whole matter of abortion is defended and preserved. We are being told that it is an individual matter and is justified on that basis: "Well, I haven't done any harm to anyone else. It's my body and I can do what I like with my own body." Christians have to come out and say, "Look, this is not true. No man is an island. We are all together in this, and what hurts one hurts all."

The hurt that affects society as a result of this, and which God exacts, goes clear back to the idea that if any man takes another man's life, by man shall his blood be shed (Gen. 9:6). In other words, violence begets violence. Thus, when there is a violent termination of life (which abortion is to some degree), this begets more violence in society; and when it becomes widespread, it becomes increasingly felt in society.

For example, a large percentage of the population in Japan is regularly practicing abortion. Does this mean that we can expect that society to reap bloodshed within itself? Yes, we can. The bloodshed can come about in various ways, some of which will be obviously abortion-related and some of which will not. For instance, it may take the form of a plague or of increased incidence of disease, It may even take the form of an outbreak of war, or an increased crime rate, or suicides. God is working within human society in all the various forms in which Satan, the "murderer," is permitted to exercise his will, and Satan is given more toehold in society as men give in at these points. Therefore, the devil is able to exercise his desire to murder in various ways. We can see this even now in the Japanese culture. They have tremendous numbers of traffic deaths, etc. For years Japan has had one of the highest suicide rates in the world. They've been involved in wars: in World War 2 God judged Japan as much as he did the United States.

An obvious example of this is the devaluation of life itself. If we consider the fetus to be non-human, then there's a decline in appreciation and understanding of the value of human life. And without a sense of the worth of human life, people act violently in a number of ways, one of which is the current loosening of abortion laws.

This is part of the larger picture, too, of the whole sexual behavior of humanity. Certain passages state that God judges society within that society itself and brings upon it weakness, death, darkness, and hurt, because of sexual immorality. For instance, "For this cause, the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience" (Eph. 5:3-6). Widespread sexual immorality of any kind always brings judgment on a society. Abortion is a form of sexual immorality arising from the widespread practice of sexual promiscuity.

Another example of this truth is in Hosea, where we read about the case that the Lord has against the inhabitants of the land. Hosea begins with their lack of faithfulness: there is no knowledge of God in the land. Then he says the result is swearing, deception, killing, stealing and adultery, and they use violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed (Hosea 4:1-3). Therefore the land mourns. The same progression---disengaging from God, sexual promiscuity, immorality, then violence, then the whole land infected---is what we see America going through today.

One further thing should be said on this: that there is a place for therapeutic abortion in individual cases: where, if a mother's life and a child's life is in jeopardy and it is a matter of saving one or the other, there is some warrant for choosing the mother as opposed to the fetus, because she is a more developed life, has more ties to life around, affects more people and so on. There is some justification in that. But abortion is certainly not justified in the case of the convenience of the mother versus the life of the fetus. That's another point entirely.

Sometimes, too, it's really hard to distinguish what would be additional justifiable cause for abortion: there are physical problems and emotional problems---and where do you draw the line concerning emotional problems? These are hard decisions for which we have no concrete answer from scripture. But this is something that Christians are going to have to wrestle with---increasingly so, and no matter how difficult the task---for we are to be "salt" in society.

THE LIVING HOPE

by Ray C. Stedman

Once again we have come to Easter, the most joyous celebration of the Christian Church. We are uncertain as to when Jesus was born, but Easter is tied to the unchanging movements of the heavenly bodies and they have not varied one iota since our Lord first came from the grave, so there is no doubt about the date of Easter.

It is a fascinating fact that every religion on earth has some kind of a spring celebration. In fact, the very word, "Easter," is the name of a pagan goddess who was associated with one of the spring festivals celebrated in Central Europe. I think it is only natural that these two celebrations---the celebration of our Lord's resurrection and the celebration of the return of spring---have merged, because in some respects the theme is the same: the emergence of life from death; the return of hope, warmth, joy and color to a weary, worn, barren and dreary world.

Now, perhaps, no writer in the New Testament captures so fully, in one short sentence, the glory of Easter than the apostle Peter does in 1 Peter 1:3:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Surely no apostle felt the death of Jesus more agonizingly than Peter. He had boasted that he would not leave him or forsake him, that he would stay true and fight for him even unto death. He meant so well, but he failed so miserably. When the moment came, a little girl's question upset him and melted all his bravado, and he denied his Lord. So to the appalling collapse of hope that all the apostles experienced in the death of Jesus, in Peter's case was added the shame and disgrace of his own denial. It is no wonder that the last view we have of Peter in the gospels is his going out into the dark of the night, weeping bitterly.

I am sure there may be some like that here this morning whose hopes have been crushed, whose dreams have been unfulfilled. Maybe just a few years ago you had glorious dreams of what you would like to be and what you would like to do, and now they are all faded away or collapsed about you. You meant to do well but you ended up wrong, somehow. We can even have bad days that make us feel that way. This last Friday was such a day for me. It is popularly known as Good Friday, but for me it was a "Bad Friday." It started out wrong. I woke up in the morning feeling a sense of burden about problems that I had that I did not know any solution to, and then things seemed to go wrong through the day. I came over here to look for the little podium that I use on Sunday mornings. It has been missing for several weeks and I miss it. I had the whole staff looking all over for it. Now that was a small thing, but it upset me. In fact, I said to one young man of the staff, "If I don't get that back, I'm going to resign as pastor!" Do you know what that kid said? He looked at me and replied, "Well, it's been nice having you around!"

Then I got a phone call from another member of the staff in whom I was somewhat disappointed about a matter, and we had a little misunderstanding on the phone. I got a bit huffy with him, and I felt bad about that. Things just were not going right! I came here to get ready for the Good Friday service and people showed up late. One of the speakers forgot he was supposed to speak, and when it was time for the service to begin I looked for the choir and could not find them! Everything went wrong, so it was not a Good Friday at all but a bad one for me.

But it is those kinds of moments and that kind of day that the resurrection of Jesus is designed to relieve and to help. Have you ever thought of it that way? We celebrate Easter and the great triumph of Christ over the grave---and it is a great triumph, a marvelous message and a great theme, justly celebrated---but I think we often forget that Easter also stands for the presence of Christ with us to meet the pressures of life as they come

to us day by day. I am sure Peter had that in mind when he wrote this text, for you recall that after the resurrection of Jesus we are told in the gospels that he appeared privately to Peter. We have no record of what he said or where it occurred, but evidently the sensitive heart of Jesus understood how Peter felt in the hour of his monumental failure and collapse of faith, and he sought him out and appeared to him and doubtless restored him to some sense of personal worth again.

We then have that wonderful scene in John's gospel where, by the shores of Galilee, Jesus appears again to his disciples and prepares a meal for them. He calls them over to it and, around the fire, Jesus asks Peter three times: "Do you love me, Peter?" "Do you love me?" "Do you love me?" Three times Peter affirms his love, and three times Jesus gives him back his ministry, "Feed my lambs; feed my sheep." Surely Peter had that in mind when he wrote this word, "By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

I want to take this from the Roman world of the first century up to our 20th century and the modern age in which we live, because if Christianity is true at all, then Jesus Christ is just as much able to meet our need for help in the hour of death or the pressures of life as he was in the first century. If that is not true, then this whole business of Christianity is a fraud. But I want to examine this for a moment and see if it is not true that Jesus is doing exactly the same today as he did then.

Peter speaks of the resurrection as giving us hope in the hour of death. It is a fashion today to explore what happens after death. A dozen books have come out recently that attempt to explore this area and give the testimonies of certain people who have allegedly died and come back to life. Usually the stories are somewhat similar. They all claim to have had an experience of passing through a dark tunnel to light beyond and being met by a "being of light" who says very kind and considerate things to them but always sends them back into this life to pick it up again and live a few more years. Now, I am totally unimpressed by those arguments. I find them seriously lacking in any credibility for two basic reasons. First, I question whether these people who experience this (though I am sure they are very sincere in what they remember), really were dead at all. By definition, death is the end of all bodily functions; the mind, the brain, the heart, all cease functioning at death. I find myself at a loss to understand how an experience which is supposedly gone through outside the body can leave an impression on the brain so as to be retained as a memory. How can that be? No one has ever explained that to me.

The second reason is that physical weaknesses are notorious as times when our minds begin to wander, to hallucinate, to imagine and to dream various things. Ever since I was a little boy I have always been able to tell when I had a high fever because a certain dream recurs at those times. It is always the same dream, a very mixed-up, confused experience that I have, and I know it is the sign of a high fever. It is not the sign of a heightened mental ability; it is the sign of a lowered ability, a lowered bodily function. So as I read books like this I am at a loss to understand how anybody can be sure that what they record is not simply the hallucinations and imaginings of a mind that is losing its grip on life and unable to function in the fullness that was intended for it. Whatever else you may think about it, I am sure it is clear that that kind of experience and testimonial leaves us with a very uncertain hope, a very flimsy and subjective experience, which can be no more than wishful thinking.

But not so with this Christian hope. The Scriptures everywhere assure us that when believers die there are three things that always are promised to them. First, we are given the assurance that we will not be alone in the hour of death. There will be a divine companion with us; a hand will steady us through this time. Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." We have that promise, whether we feel it or not, that we will not be left alone. He said to his disciples, "I will not leave you as orphans, I will not abandon you." Over and over we have this promise repeated in the Word that Christ will be with us in the hour of death. Many of the martyrs and those who have died have borne testimony to that fact. When D.L. Moody, the great evangelist, was dying, his last words were, "Earth is receding, heaven is approaching; this is my crowning day."

The second thing we are told is that we need have no fear about death. Christ promises to us that there is no ground for fear. I have been struck by the fact that in the Word of God there are 365 places where it says, "Fear not." (Did you ever wonder why that number?) And always the reason is, "For I am with you." Jesus said to his own disciples,

"Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14:1-3)

Those are strong words, and great assurance in the hour of death.

There are also many passages in the New Testament that give us assurance that beyond this life is the promise of greater functioning than we have ever known down here, passages that describe the glory to come and picture for us beauty of life beyond as a great and marvelous experience where we will be more alive than we ever were here. Paul says, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." "Well," somebody says, "how do you know that is going to happen? Those are beautiful words, but do you have any proof?" The answer, of course, is the very event that we celebrate today. This is the proof. Jesus Christ returned from death and gave us an answer. One who clearly and definitely died returned in a different dimension of living to guarantee to us that those who trust him will be carried through the hour of death without fail.

Now, it is clear that Jesus was dead. I do not think we need to debate that, though some have tried to question it. When the Roman soldier pierced his side with a spear, John's Gospel tells us, "blood and water came out." Any doctor will tell you that that indicates the circulation of the blood had long since ceased. He had been dead for some time, thus allowing the plasma and red corpuscles to separate so as to give the appearance of blood and water. Then he was taken down; his body was wrapped in grave clothes all around so he could not move, and a wrapping was bound around his head---as in the oriental style of burial---so tightly that it would have been impossible for him to breathe. He was laid in a tomb and sealed in with a rock, and left there for three days and three nights. So there is no question about death. And yet from that he returned.

Here is the difference between the resurrection of Jesus and the books we are reading about today. These people who supposedly died returned back to the same life they left, and they will die again some day. When Jesus Christ came back, he came back the same, but different. He identified himself to his disciples so that they had no doubt that it was he. Thomas was invited to put his hands in the wounds and see that it was the same body that was crucified, and yet it was not the same. There was a difference. He was glorified. He was living in a different dimension of life. When men are resuscitated they die, supposedly, and then come back, but it is said of Jesus that having died, he dies no more. He came back, not merely having resisted death and recovered from it, he came back having conquered death. He was the master of death and of Hades. This, therefore, is the guarantee upon which our hope rests as we must face, one of these days, our own death.

But that is not all. Peter speaks of this as a living hope, and "living" means it is something that comes to us every day; it is something that is available all the time. It is in that sense that I want to conclude this message this morning by showing you that Jesus Christ alive from the dead is the answer to all the broken dreams, the collapsed hopes of your life and mine, the pressures that we feel from day to day, the sense of our failure and the inability to perform as we would like to perform. In the New Testament you can see how these early Christians were filled with a constant sense of the presence of Jesus with them. Everywhere they went they did so with joy and optimism and expectation. When you read the book of Acts you see that from beginning to end it has a ring of triumph.

I have in my library a book called *The Empty Tomb*, and it is supposedly the letters (imaginary ones) of Caiaphas, the high priest, to Annas, his father-in-law, describing his reaction to the resurrection of Jesus. This is an imaginary account, but it captures something of the surprise that the high priest must have felt as he observed the behavior of these early Christians:

How they could one day plan and carry through a gigantic hoax, and the next day be themselves taken in by it, is another thing that utterly defeats my understanding. But that is what happened, and it changed them almost out of recognition. You could practically see them becoming new men before your eyes. Instead of the frightened, dispirited, weak creatures they were on the day of their leader's crucifixion, they were all at once transformed men of boldness, confidence and strength. Instead of being in terror of us as they had been, they did

not seem to care a rap for any threat we made or even for any action we took. They openly paraded their false doctrine in the very streets of the city and deliberately flouted our every effort to silence them. And still the perplexities continue to pile up.

There is no explanation of this strange behavior on the part of the disciples other than the fact that Jesus was risen and he was with them. Nobody could see him but he was there, and he was strengthening them, helping them, and ministering to them. You could take all these three promises that have to do with our death---the promise of his companionship, the promise of an absence of fear, and the promise of a greater ability to function---and you can apply them to every single hour of life if you know Jesus Christ. Now that is the great good news of Easter to me, that I am not left alone to face the problems of life without help.

A man said to me last week, "My marriage was about over and my wife and I were on the verge of divorce. I had given up all hope and didn't want to live anymore. Then I came to Christ. I met Jesus." Looking me in the eye, he said, "And he has given me a new reason to live." Now, that is the resurrected Christ at work. Just yesterday a woman said, "For years I was on a guilt trip in my life. There was never a moment that I had any peace, never a moment that I was free from the condemnation of a guilty conscience. Then I began to understand how Jesus loved me and that he is with me, and that he has made ample provision for every failure of mine. All I need to do is to acknowledge that failure and I experience afresh the restoration of his forgiveness. What a peace that has brought into my heart and life!" When Christ is in your heart like that, he gives you the power to do things that you do not think you can do.

A few years ago I knew a young couple that had just recently married. Shortly afterwards the man came to me and said he had left his wife. I told him, "You can't do that," but he replied, "I have. I'll never go back to her, either. I hate that woman, and she hates me. We don't want to see each other again." I said, "But you're a Christian. You can't talk like that." He said, "That's the way it's going to be. I can't stand her, and I'll never go back." "Well, you talk to the Lord about that," I told him. That's your problem, between you and him." A few days later he came back and said, "Well, I decided to go back." I told him I knew he would, and I asked him what made him decide this. He replied, "Well, I read in the Scriptures where it says that Jesus will be with me to help me. If he's going to go with me, maybe he can make it different." He went back to his wife; he forgave her and she forgave him. I have been watching that marriage now for a number of years and it is a beautiful marriage. They have been going through some deep trials and discouragement, together, shoulder to shoulder. What that young man could not do, and did not think he could do, he found he had the ability to do when he obeyed and reckoned upon the power of Christ to help him. That has been the story of thousands of people today.

I call attention, in closing, to the gateway by which this experience comes to us. How do you find Christ like that? Peter's answer is, "By his great mercy we have been born again unto as a living hope." "Born again." Those are familiar words today. Everybody is talking about them. Chuck Colson has been born again; Eldridge Cleaver has been born again; Larry Flynt has been born again; Dean Jones has been born again. What does it mean? It simply means there came a time when, in their emptiness, in their loneliness or despair or whatever it may be, they responded to the invitation of Jesus Christ to come into their lives, and they invited him in. Jesus came in, and he began to make these changes. They were born again to a living hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

Johnny Cash said, "A few years ago I was hooked on drugs. I dreaded to wake up in the morning. There was no joy, peace or happiness in my life. Then one day in my helplessness I turned my life completely over to God. Now I can't wait to get up in the morning to study my Bible. Sometimes the words out of the Scriptures leap into my heart. This does not mean that all my problems have been solved or that I've reached any state of perfection. However, my life has been turned around. I have been born again."

One of the men very influential in the conversion of Charles Colson was Tom Phillips, president of Raytheon Corporation. He said, "One night I was in New York on business and noticed that Billy Graham was having a crusade in Madison Square Garden. I went, curious, I guess, hoping maybe I'd find some answers. What Graham said that night put it all in place for me. I saw what had been missing in my life---the personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the fact that I have never asked him into my life and had never turned my life over to him. So I did it that very night at the crusade, and I was born again."

John Naber, who is our neighbor in nearby Menlo Park, said, "After thinking about it for three days I realized I needed Jesus Christ, and I accepted him. Now that my life has been turned over to Christ, I can function with an extra power bestowed by God."

Now, those are living, up-to-date testimonials of men who have found the truth of this 2,000 year old document to be the same today. Christ is alive. He is ready to meet us in the hour of death, but more than that, he is ready to meet us in the pressures of life. If you do not know him, you are going to have to struggle all through the weary weeks that lie ahead, doing the same old thing---hoping, and finding your hopes dashed, trying to be sincere, and finding it all come apart until you can put your life into the hands of the only One who is capable of handling it. That you can do in a moment of acceptance of his invitation to come into your life.

Prayer

We thank you Father for this great truth that Jesus Christ lives. He lives in many of our hearts this morning. He lives to forgive us, to sustain us, to encourage us, to strengthen us, to correct us. We thank you for his living life that guides us all the way through life to the end, and then does not leave us desolate, but takes us on through to that life beyond. For that we give grateful thanks, and pray that everyone here this morning may know him as a personal Lord and Savior. In his name we ask it, Amen.

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WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

by Ray C. Stedman

Nothing can capture for me the mystery and the beauty of Christmas better than the carols we sing. They have the power to recreate in my imagination the scenes of the first Christmas. They seem to be able to set the atmosphere: the crowded inn, the smelly stable, the sleeping city, the great star spilling its beauty down over the waiting earth, the lonely shepherds in the field, the blazing, sudden glory of the heavenly hosts breaking through the darkness, then the contrast of the stable in a cave with the sleeping babe and the wondering hearts that come to worship and kneel before this amazing wonder, Jesus Christ born on earth.

One carol we sing at Christmas asks the question,

"What child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?"

And the chorus answers,

"This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste, to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the son of Mary."

I am sure the shepherds asked the same question when they went into the stable on that first Christmas Day: "What Child is this?" But no one had an adequate answer. Mary, you remember, "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." She did not know what the answer was. You never can answer that question until you have the full record unfolded in the gospel accounts of the silent years in Nazareth and the coming of age

of Jesus, his baptism by John, the trudging up and down the hills of Galilee and Judea with his disciples, the teaching, the miracles, and finally, the last crowded dramatic week in Jerusalem that culminated in the cross and the blazing glory of resurrection.

And then it still was not over. There was the moment in Jerusalem when the Spirit was poured out upon the waiting disciples. The whole city was gathered to hear the great sound of a rushing wind in the wonder of Pentecost. It is only then you begin to get a full answer to this question, "What Child is this?"

For our Christmas meditation this morning I would like to read four verses out of the opening words of the Epistle to the Hebrews. These verses answer better than anything else in the Scriptures the question that is on the lips of those who come, "What Child is this?"

"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs."

Clearly, the central declaration of that passage is the twice repeated phrase "God spoke" to man. In times past he spoke by the prophets but now, the writer says, "he has spoken to us by a Son." That indicates that the answer to the question "What Child is this?" is that this Baby lying in Mary's lap in Bethlehem is the ultimate, the complete word of God to mankind. We never again will have God speaking to man after this birth at Bethlehem and the story of the life of Jesus. All that God wants to say has been said, and it is only up to us to hear and to heed what he says. That is why for twenty centuries we have never had another event like this, for God has spoken to us in his Son.

John begins his gospel on the same note. He says,

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things were made by him and without him was not any thing made that was made...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."

In the passage in Hebrews the writer surrounds this statement that Jesus is the Word of God with certain phrases that give five great reasons why the child at Bethlehem is God's final word to men. I want to simply point them out to you and we will let that be the basis of our meditation.

The first one is in the very first sentence,

"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets."

When you open the Old Testament you are reading the Word of God spoken to the fathers by the prophets. And it is a fascinating version. I hope you have come to understand and really value the Old Testament. What a marvelous book! How many different ways God spoke in that book: in dreams, in visions, in sudden appearances, in that wonderful act of inspiration that nobody fully understands where somebody speaking the words that come to his mind and heart is uttering the words of God.

And it comes to us in many different forms, as the writer of Hebrews says. You open Genesis and you have first, the very straightforward but majestic and moving tale of creation, of the fall, and of the flood. This is followed by the simple narrative of the lives of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Then the story of Moses and the Exodus and the thunderings of the Law, coming at last to the sweet singing of the Psalmist, the homespun wisdom of Proverbs, and the delicate tenderness of the Song of Solomon. Then the rest of the Old Testament is filled with the exalted visions of the prophets, these mighty men who spoke to times of crisis in the nation and yet lifted their eyes up and saw far beyond the horizons of time to great events that God was going to bring into being when the seasons rolled around.

Yet, when you finish the book and you have heard all the matchless oratory of the prophets, you still realize that God's voice has not answered the deep questions of the human heart. It is only when you open the gospels and begin to read of Jesus, who he was, what he did, where he went, what he said, how he acted, how he lived and the way he handled situations, that all the utterance of the prophets begins to merge into one great voice and we get God's final word to mankind. That is why I love the Sermon on the Mount so. I think it is the greatest message men have ever been privileged to hear. I hope you will spend 1979 studying it, reading again this marvelously condensed and purified statement of all that God wants man to know about life.

Not far away from where I used to live in Montana is what is called "The Three Forks" of the Missouri River, the place where three rivers flow together to form the Missouri. They rise up in the mountains in the western part of the State of Montana and they form this great river, the Missouri, that flows on down through Montana and then into North Dakota, South Dakota, through Missouri, and join the Mississippi along with the Ohio. Altogether this forms the greatest river system and drainage network that the world knows anything about. Now all these rivers drain out of hills and valleys and mountain ranges that are far separated from one another, and I always think of that when I think of the way the Old Testament has flowed together to form the one great voice that speaks in the New. All the various themes that God introduces to mankind in the Old Testament are brought together in the voice of Jesus. He is God's final word to man, greater than the prophets, fulfilling everything they have written.

Then the writer here points out that it is a greater word because Jesus forms, he says, the boundaries of history,

"...but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."

Now there is the beginning in the past: "He created the world"; there is the end of the future: He is "the heir of all things." When the writer says that he is looking on to the end of time. Every now and then someone says to me, "Where is all of this going to end? Are we in the last days? Is this the time when God is going to bring human history to a jolting, crashing end?" The answer, of course, is, "Maybe." But there is coming an end. If you want to know what it is, read what Jesus says. Read Matthew 24; read Luke 21; read Mark 13. There you have the words of the Son of God himself as to what is going to happen. It will all end, he says, when the Son of Man returns in his glory and establishes his kingdom upon the earth. He is awaiting us there at the end of time. He is "the heir of all things."

But he is not only the end of the future, he is the beginning of the past. Look backwards to the very creation and there you find him. The most wonderful thing that the Christmas story brings before us is this almost unbelievable statement that the Baby who lies in Mary's arms in a smelly cave in Bethlehem is the One who created the entire universe.

These nights I have been enjoying soaking in the hot tub out in our back yard and I have had an opportunity to study the winter sky as never before. I have watched Orion striding through the heavens and the planet Venus as it visibly moves across the sky and remembered that man is now trying to discover what is going on on Venus. We have launched some of these contraptions to go up there and report back to us what is happening. It is fascinating to watch Venus and imagine those machines, made on earth by the lowest bidder, and wonder if they are going to make it as they circle the planet.

But the thing that is most amazing of all is to remember that all that vast universe with its teeming millions of galaxies---it takes hundreds of thousands of light years to cross even one of them---was brought into being by the hand of the One who lies as a Babe at Mary's breast in Bethlehem! That is the universal testimony of scripture, by prediction in the Old Testament, by the statement of the gospels, and by the declaration of the apostles afterward. The whole of the Christian society came to recognize that great truth that the One who lay there in Bethlehem was the Creator of the world. He brackets all of time; Jesus stands at the end of every path upon which every creature and every human being who ever lived travels.

Now not only that, but the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus is the complete Word of God because he is the

master of the present as well. He puts it this way,

"He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by the word of his power."

That is an amazing statement. It is put in the present tense, saying that he is the One who is keeping things going right now. Stanford University nearby is the site of the Stanford Linear Accelerator, that mighty two-mile long atom smasher that runs back into the hills. It is a great lever with which scientists hope to pry the lid off the secrets, of matter and discover what is in the miniature world of the atom, the neutron, and the proton, etc. And some amazing things are coming out. They are finding secrets they never knew existed; they are discovering a complexity they never dreamed of, and they are finding particles that they cannot even invent enough names for. But one thing they are consistently discovering is that there is some strange force that holds everything together. They do not know what to call it, and they do not know how to identify it. They talk about a kind of "cosmic glue" that holds things together. Isn't it fascinating that here in the Word of God you have that exact kind of terminology used of Jesus of Nazareth? If you want a name for the force that holds the universe together it is very simple: His name is Jesus. He sustains the universe by the word of his power, or as Colossians puts it, "all things are held together by him."

That is not only true of the physical universe, including our bodies and all that we are, but it is true of all the other forces and powers in the universe. physical, psychological, social, spiritual, whatever, he is in charge of them all. After the resurrection, when our Lord appeared to the disciples by the Sea of Galilee, in the most forthright terms, simple, artlessly, he said to them, "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth." means he not only controls all the physical forces of the planet and the universe but he controls all the events that occur upon them. This is something Christians tend to forget. We get so used to seeing things through the secular eyes of the media and other propaganda forces around us that we forget that behind the events that fill the pages of our newspapers is a mighty controlling hand that is blending them all together, permitting some things to happen, restraining other things.

I have just been reading for my own enjoyment the story of the life of General Douglas MacArthur. It has been recalling to my mind those turbulent days of World War 2 when he was the Commander in Pacific; then his moving on to Japan where he became virtually the Emperor; then the days of the Korean War where MacArthur was the Commander there. It has been fascinating to me to relive those days and remember the headlines and the events that seemed so important and significant to us at the time. I remember how angry the whole nation became at President Truman when he dismissed MacArthur, and the tremendous, ecstatic response the General received when he returned, first in San Francisco and later in New York. The whole nation was almost groveling at his feet.

And yet as I read, those events seem far away and insignificant now. They do not seem to have much bearing on today. I know that these events that capture our attention today are likewise going to seem faded and trivial soon. Now many people are mad at President Carter because of what we regard as the betrayal of Taiwan, but it will all pass. We will soon see these as apparently insignificant events again. Yet they are not without meaning. The Bible tells us a mighty hand is shaping the destiny of nations and of individuals. All of these things have been in the power of him who sustains the universe by the word of his power.

Then the writer takes us even deeper, not only to these physical matters, these external visible things, but he takes us back now into the very depths of the human dilemma: the problem of human evil. He says,

"When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Jesus is the final and complete word of God to man because he has solved the deepest problem in human life--the problem of human sinfulness. Everybody today is asking, in the face of some of the tragic things that are happening, "What's wrong with humanity? What's wrong with life? Why is the world in a continual mess? Why are our papers filled with murder and violence and hate and corruption and darkness?" We were all shocked by Jonestown and by the murders of Mayor Moscone and Supervisor Milk. We were aghast with horror reading last night of a woman who drove her car onto the steps of the Statehouse in Trenton, New

Jersey, and threw the head of her mother, wrapped in a plastic bag, at a policeman. Why all this murder and violence and evil? The answer of scripture universally is, "Man's sin," or, to put it even more realistically and more helpfully to us, "Man's selfishness." That is what lies at the root of it all, the terrible taint that all of us possess that can never be washed away by our own efforts. Like Lady Macbeth, there are times we all want to cry out, "Out damned spot!" Yet it is never gone.

The amazing declaration of scripture is that the reason the Creator of the world became the Babe of Bethlehem was that he might make purification for human selfishness, that he might solve the insoluble problem and wash away the unwashable stain. The good news of Christmas, of course, is that every one of us who has found Christ, who has come to him and who follows him finds again and again that he has the power to cleanse us. He has the power to put away the guilt of the past, whether it is the past 50 years of life or the past five minutes of time; he has the power to cleanse it and wash it away and to set us on our feet again with a clean slate and a fresh page to write on every day, to live life again in the power and the grace of the living God. Now that is the greatest message of all. When he had made purification for sins (what agony. what terrible hurt is involved in that phrase), he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." Jesus is Lord: this was the early creed of the Church and it is the creed of all who come to know him now. He has solved that desperate problem of human life; he is in control and in charge of all human events.

I have always loved the words of the poet, James Russell Lowell, who puts it this way:

Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet 'tis truth alone 'tis strong;
Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne.
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadows,
Keeping watch above his own.

The writer of Hebrews says the final reason why Jesus is God's last word to man is that he has won the right to the worship of all creation,

"...having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs."

We always associate angels with Christmas. The angel chorus sang the praises of the Baby to the shepherds on that wonderful night when the heavens were opened, but they also are the ones who gather around the throne of the Lamb in the Book of Revelation and give praise and glory to him.

I want to read that account now that we might have it before us. It is found in the 5th chapter, verse 6, where John says:

"And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the the earth; and he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints; and they sang a new song, saying,

**"Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God
from every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on earth."**

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying

with a loud voice, " Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped."

That is the closing scene of all time. That is the one great event toward which the whole creation moves. All the events that crowd our newspapers are working out in some strange way, more mysterious than we can imagine, the end that is described here. Therefore, Christmas means to us the most momentous event the ages have ever seen, when the Lord of Glory became the Babe of Bethlehem in order that we might be delivered from our selfishness. That is what Christmas is all about. It is the opportunity for love to break out in our families, in our homes, among our friends, wherever we are, that the back of evil might be broken in our individual lives and we be set free to be the loving creatures God made man to be. That is why Christmas is always associated with warmth and love and joy and forgiveness, with healing and beauty and light and glory.

I hope as we close this service that the gratitude of your hearts will express in your own way in words to God what it means to you to have had the Son of God born in your heart as he was born in the stable at Bethlehem.

Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born,
Until he is born within your heart
Your life is still forlorn.

Prayer

Our Father, we thank you for the Lord of Glory. It is with very inadequate words that we seek to set forth the amazing wonder that he, the God of Glory, should give himself to come take the place of a helpless child and become a man that he might die for us to set us free and make purification for sins. We thank you for it. We pray that we will never forget it, that we are redeemed creatures, we have no value in ourselves, but in the One who loved us, who gave himself for us. In his name we pray, Amen.

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ARE THESE THE LAST DAYS?

by Ray C. Stedman

Surely no one alive is unaware of the apocalyptic character of the times in which we live. Everywhere there is a sense of impending disaster. The voices of the secular media, various Christian proclamations, etc., all are united in saying that something serious is ahead. Even young people, who do not have the experience of the past for reference, are nevertheless sensing a heavily clouded future. Perhaps this accounts for the rapid increase in teenage suicides. It may startle you to know that teenagers are now the dominant age group committing suicide today. They do not see any hope in the future.

Respected secular voices today reflect this growing despair. Eliot Jameway, an internationally known economist, recently said, "Humanly speaking, for the first time in my life I am afraid." Dr. Linus Pauling, the Nobel Prize winner, several years ago said, "The greatest catastrophe in the world will occur within 25 to 50 years." Dr. Margaret Mead, the late anthropologist, has asked the question, "Are we going to survive?" She said, "The major struggle of marriage is, who takes out the garbage? Does it matter who takes it out if we are not going to be here?" She asks again, "Are we going to be here? It is very doubtful. The whole world is in terrible danger. We could go tonight."

Malcolm Muggeridge, for years the editor of Punch magazine in Britain and now a prominent Christian spokesman, has detailed several symptoms of a collapsing civilization, not only of this present hour, but of times in the past as well. He says that one of the first signs of the approaching collapse is the breakdown of law and order since civilization consists of law and order. Muggeridge lists a second symptom as the excessive interest in eroticism, that is, the rise of widespread immorality and the fascination with sexual themes. He sees this as a kind of an unconscious expression of the fear of impotence---we are like children focusing upon our sexuality as some way of reassuring ourselves that our civilization has some stability and the capacity to perpetuate itself.

A third symptom he lists is the excessive need for excitement. In the days of the collapse of the Roman Empire, this was provided by the gladiatorial games held in the Colosseum. Today we get it from television, with its artificially-produced excitement, its violence, murder and sexuality. Muggeridge sees a fourth symptom in the enormously complicated structure of taxation and administration. No one seems to be able to do anything to reduce the complexity of it. Taxation and government will keep mounting to the point where it will become insupportable, until the whole economy at last collapses under the weight of it.

Finally, a fifth symptom is excessive and pervasive boredom---the sense of emptiness and meaninglessness. This, Muggeridge says, is the price of our materialism, the fact that we put so much emphasis on things. We are constantly barraged with appeals to buy this and buy that; if we only had this we would be happy, etc. All these are signs of a collapsing civilization.

Muggeridge has gone even further. In a speech given right here at Stanford's Hoover Institute last summer, he delivered an almost prophetic foreview of the collapse of Western civilization. I would like to share these closing words of his message with you:

So the final conclusion would seem to be that whereas other civilizations had been brought down by attacks of barbarians from without, ours had the unique distinction of training its own destroyers at its own educational institutions and providing them with facilities for propagating their destructive ideology far and wide, all at the public expense. Thus did Western man decide to abolish himself, creating his own boredom out of his own affluence, his own vulnerability out of his own strength, his own impotence out of his own erotomania; himself blowing the trumpet that brought the walls of his own city tumbling down. And having convinced himself that he was too numerous, labored with pill and scalpel and syringe to make himself fewer, until at last, having educated himself into imbecility and polluted and drugged himself into stupefaction, he keeled over, a weary, battered old brontosaurus, and became extinct.

Now we have to ask, what is the Christian reaction to that? Do these secular doomsayers reflect the conditions that the Scriptures say will prevail in the world immediately before the return of Jesus Christ? Are these the last days?

It is easy to answer that question with a hasty, yes. It is easy to compile from the Scriptures a few dramatic descriptive passages that would make most of us say today, "This is it. We are facing those very conditions." But I am rendered cautious in doing that, first, because I know that historically this has been done scores if not hundreds of times in the past. You can read back through a few generations of Christian life and for the last three centuries at least there have been groups that were absolutely sure that their days were the last days. Some of them even set dates for the return of Christ. Other groups have been sure, as they observed the appearances of their own times, that these were the days before the return of the Lord. Yet we know that all of them were wrong. Therefore, it ought to be a caution to us, it ought to give us pause, before we do the same thing in our own times and immediately pronounce that we are in the last days.

Furthermore, I am made cautious by the fact that scripture itself makes very clear that the last days began with the first coming of Jesus. There is a very strong sense in scripture that for twenty centuries we have been living in the last days---that these last days began with the coming of Christ. When scripture uses the term, "the last days," it is not talking about the time immediately before Christ returns; it is speaking of the whole period of time in which the life of the church has been going on, some 2,000 years.

Let me show you some of the passages that reveal that. Sometimes Bible teachers are not very fair in their use

of scripture. They tend to pick up a few passages here and there and call these the last days. They ignore other passages that speak very clearly about what these last days truly are. In the opening words of the letter to the Hebrews, the writer begins in this way:

"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."

There is the very phrase, "these last days." The writer says they began when Jesus appeared and spoke to men in his first coming, therefore the last days are still continuing. The writer sees them as going on until the ultimate end predicted in the Scripture; the whole period is known as "these last days."

Another well-known passage is found in the letter to the Romans. The Apostle Paul writing from Corinth, says in chapter 13, verse 11:

"Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."

It is clear from that that Paul speaks as though the end were almost upon the people of his day. "The night is far gone, the day is at hand. The hour has come," he says, "when our salvation, which we have been looking for, is almost upon us." Yet that was written in the first century. Twenty centuries of time have gone on since then.

In 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 7, Peter puts it very bluntly:

"The end of all things is at hand."

Again, this was written to those in the first century. Now either we have to believe that the Bible is mistaken about this, or we have to understand that the Biblical phrase, "the last days," does not mean the immediate end before the return of Christ; it covers a longer period. In this sense, therefore, it is perfectly proper to answer our question this morning, yes, we definitely are in the last days, but we have been there for twenty centuries.

"But," somebody will say, "scripture speaks of a coming period called 'the last days'." Most people refer to 2 Timothy, chapter 3, verse 7, where the Apostle Paul, writing to Timothy toward the close of Paul's ministry, puts it this way:

"But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it."

That sounds very much like the closing words of the first chapter of Romans, which speaks of a time of incredible inhumanity, when senseless violence will occur, when people will seemingly forsake all the normal strictures against injury to others and there will be crimes of incredible malice and evil. As people read the reports in our newspapers of ugly and awful things that outrage the entire community, they say we must be in the last days. We were all outraged by the invasion of five armed men into an old people's home in San Francisco last week, at the rape of an old blind woman and pistol whipping of the helpless victims there in that home. The Mayor of San Francisco came on television with expressions of moral outrage at such a terrible thing. That incident sounds like this list, doesn't it? People say that the Bible predicts that these will come before the end and now they are coming, so this must be the last days.

Now I urge you to read your Bible with care and caution in these areas. If the last days mean, as we have already seen, the full period of time between the coming of our Lord the first time and his second appearing on earth, then what Paul is referring to is not just one single period when these kind of conditions will prevail on

earth, but a repeating cycle of periods that will come again and again and again in history. There will be cycles of revolutionary conditions ("times of stress," the apostle calls them), they will come again and again, and every time these occur it will look like we are approaching the days of the return of Christ.

You only have to be a student of history to know that history records many examples of these "times of stress." Every century seems to have had its outbreak of evil in this way. Periods of quietness, of relative prosperity and expansion have been followed by terrible times of unrest and collapse of all the institutions that were thought to be so stable in those times. The end of the Roman Empire in the fifth century was such a time, when barbarian hordes swarmed out of the northern countries of Europe down over the southern states, captured the city of Rome and sacked it. Everybody saw the collapse of all that appeared to be stable in their day. Those were "times of stress."

Again, in the Crusades of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when bands of knights gathered together from all over Europe and marched into the Holy Land there were terrible times of attack and carnage. People were afraid for their very lives. Again in the thirteenth century, when the Mongol hordes swept out of Asia and came battering up against the capitals of Europe---these were "times of stress."

Again in the fifteenth century, the Turks assaulted the citadels of civilization in Europe; and in the sixteenth century during the days of the Reformation, Europe was aflame from end to end. These were "times of stress." What the apostle is simply saying is that in this whole period will come these repeated cycles of history when men will be facing times of danger and terrible outbreaks of evil, and every time it will look as though these are the last days before the Lord is coming back again.

What are we facing today? Well, undoubtedly we are facing another cycle of these "times of stress," heralding the overthrow of a civilization, but not necessarily the final days before the Lord returns. Now it could be. Every one of these times of stress has been a time when Christ could have returned, from the outlook of those who lived in that day, but not necessarily so. These "times of stress" are related to the overthrow of civilizations, of established orders, the fulfillment of our Lord's words that he will, "rise and shake the earth terribly," and everything that can be shaken will be shaken. (Heb 12) These appear to be apocalyptic times in which we are facing the possibility of the end.

"Well," someone says, "what about signs like the return of the Jews to Israel. What about the amazing, scientifically documented increase in natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, etc.? What about the possible imminent rebuilding of a temple in Jerusalem? What about these strange stories that are widely circulated these days of demonic manifestations, and of angelic manifestations---the appearances of apparently angel messengers to various people from place to place---as well? What about these?" Well, let us take a look at some of these.

The return of the Jews to Israel is indeed a remarkable sign. It is necessary before the final days that scripture predicts can be fulfilled. There must be a people again in the land. As a student at Dallas Seminary I remember how excited everyone got in 1948 when once again there was a nation of Israel in the world, established in the land of Palestine. We all thought the return of Christ could not be more than a few years away because here was Israel back in the land. Well, that was in 1948, over 30 years ago, and still things are going on. Thirty years is not very long, but we can see that it certainly was not five years from the time of the return of Christ. There is not a word in scripture of how long Israel will be back in the land before the Lord returns. The fact that something fulfills a predicted event does not in any way set up a calendar that says we are very very close to the return of the Lord. It does indicate a "time of stress," a cycle of distress, perhaps, reappearing in history, but it does not indicate that it is the last time. No one knows, and there is not a word or hint in scripture of how long Israel will be back in the land. It may be hundreds of years before the Lord returns. Scripture does not say.

Natural disasters are specifically said by Jesus to be "but the beginnings of the birth pangs" of an approaching end. Again, there is no word, not a hint in scripture of how long these things will last. In fact, scripture seems to suggest that these kinds of conditions, these kinds of disasters will occur in repetitive cycles just like the "times of stress." In 79 A.D. when Vesuvius blew up and buried Pompeii in ashes, this was a very similar situation to what just happened in the state of Washington when Mt. St. Helens blew up and buried a great part

of the country in ash. There have been great earthquakes throughout all this period of history, some far more devastating than anything we have known in modern times. The great earthquakes in Lisbon in the last century and the one in Tokyo in the early part of this century were far more devastating than anything we have seen in San Francisco---including the great earthquake of 1906. So to point to natural disasters as "signs of the times" is indicative that you do not understand much about prophetic scripture. These are themselves nothing but the "beginnings of sorrows," as Jesus himself pointed out, and are not indicative of the near approach of the end.

Take the demonic and angelic manifestations that many are recounting today. There is a rash of stories going around about people picking up hitchhikers who say something about "Jesus is coming soon," and as the driver continues the conversation the hitchhiker disappears, gone while the car is moving. I have heard probably 25 different versions of that story in the last few years. My oldest daughter had an experience along this very line a few weeks ago.

But the question is, "What is the significance of this?" We have to recognize that there are times in history recorded in the Scriptures where there have been outbreaks of both demonic and angelic manifestations. At the time of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt angels appeared frequently to people. Again in the days of Elijah and Elisha there were both demonic and angelic manifestations. Again at the coming of Christ and during the apostolic period there are several recorded instances of the appearance of angelic beings. This manifestation seems to fade and then come back again. Now what do we say about these?

Well, the only thing we can safely say is that they are manifestations of these cycles of stress that come into history repeatedly, but that there is no indication, necessarily, that these are declaring an imminent appearing of Jesus Christ returning to earth again. Now no one will argue that we are certainly closer today to the return of Christ than we have ever been before, but I am saying that there is no certainty at all that the return of Jesus may not be centuries away. There is no sign, nothing that I know of today that indicates that he is at the door, that that time is imminent. All of this can settle down and go back again into what we call "normal" life. Civilizations may collapse, what we have known as stable economies may be overthrown, violent changes may occur in society, but those in themselves do not herald the return of Jesus Christ. That is what I am saying.

Now let me add something. I believe from the Scriptures that the departure of the church to be with the Lord has always been an imminent possibility. It is an event that scripture says will occur without warning. How can you get ready for an event that is going to occur without warning? You can "keep" ready, but there is nothing particularly you have to do to "get" ready. It is very much like our own personal death. None of us has a guarantee that he will be here tomorrow; at any time death could intervene for any of us here this morning. We live in that expectation and it is a good expectation, a good reminder that we must not live for this world and for this life as though it were everything. We have no hold upon it, our grip may be loosened at any time, therefore these things must not be allowed to possess us.

Neither is it something that we anticipate with such imminency that we fold our hands and wait for it. We are not to do that any more than we are to decide that since we have arrived at 20, 30, 40, 50 years of age, whatever, we are going to fold our hands and wait for death. We do not do that, and we should not do that about the return of the Lord either because that is an event without warning, invisible to the natural eye when, as Paul describes it:

"The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:16, 17)

But that is an event that is suddenly launched upon humanity without warning, as Jesus himself made clear in the great Olivet Discourse. Now there are some who say the church is not going to escape the great tribulation. I always feel sorry for those people. I can imagine looking back down on earth and seeing them still marching around with their little signs saying, "Hell No! We Won't Go!" Even if they are right, even if our eschatology at this point is wrong, we are told that there is no action expected of God's people until they see the desolating sacrilege sitting in the temple, predicted by Daniel the prophet. Jesus himself said that that is the sign of the

imminent end, of the return of Jesus Christ, when the Antichrist proclaims himself to be God in the temple in Jerusalem. How long that temple has to be there before that happens no one knows until that time takes place. But Jesus said that when that happens, "Move! Get out of town. Don't wait. Don't even go down and take a coat. Move!" That is the moment for action. But until that occurs there is no word given to us to make any kind of preparation physically for the last days or for the return of Christ.

I would conclude, therefore, two things from this. One is that it is actually harmful to the cause of Christ to get involved in some physical preparation for the last days, to go hiding rifles and food up in the hills with the anticipation that you are going to go up there when things get terrible. There is nothing like that in scripture. No word is given to us to do that. To spend time reading the prophetic areas of scripture and charting the events of it, trying to determine what follows this and what follows that, when Christ is going to return and setting dates is all an utter waste of time. To go from meeting to meeting to keep your emotions stirred up with the expectation that the Lord is coming back almost any moment is harmful, because it takes our attention from what scripture tells us we ought to be doing when we are facing one of these cycles of distress that could, admittedly, culminate in the return of Christ.

All right, we are in one of those times. What does the Scripture tell us to do? Well, let me detail it for you. It is found very plainly and clearly set out in chapter 4 of 1 Peter. He says:

"The end of all things is at hand;" therefore

(1) keep sane and sober. Do not go running off after some wild-haired movement that wants to run up in the hills and defend themselves against whatever is coming. "Keep sane and sober," Peter says.

I am impressed by the fact that when Jesus talks about the last days he begins and ends what he has to say with one word, "Watch." "Watch out," is the idea, because these will be days of delusion days of confusion, days when people will be emphasizing the wrong things, when false escapes will be offered and false ways of living will be set forth and delusive ideas will be abroad. Peter says, "Watch. Take heed. Establish yourself in your faith again. Go back to the Scripture and find out where you are. Be careful. Keep sane and sober," he says, so that you will not be swept away by all the excited reactions that you will hear about in these last days, in these times of stress.

Then Peter says,

(2) Keep praying.

The reason, of course, is because days of stress always create great possibilities, great opportunities, and prayer is a way of laying hold of those opportunities. Prayer is a way of calling all the artillery of heaven and bringing it to bear against some weak point in the devil's armor and breaking through at that point so that God reaps a great harvest, despite the terrible conditions that are around. Paul tells us in the letter to the Ephesians that evil days create great possibilities, therefore, "redeem the time," he says, buy it up. One way is to be alert, to be praying about the possibilities that open for us day after day, possibilities with individuals, with circumstances and with groups so that you might enter and break through some of the barriers that have shut us out from these groups in the past. Thus, keep praying, Peter says. Watch and be sober and sane and keep praying. And,

(3) Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another.

There is the manifestation of the "Body Life" of the church---being open to help people who are in need. Be deliberately responsive to appeals that are made for help; practice hospitality widely and generously. That is why every week we publish a "Need Sheet" and a "Prayer Sheet" where some of the needs are made manifest among us in order that we might respond, because this is the way the Lord wants us to behave when we see that the times are close. And finally,

(4) As each has received a gift, employ it for one another.

In other words, get busy, use your gift. God has given each one of us gifts. For heaven's sake, use them; that is what he is saying. When times of stress come again and people are frightened and who knows what is going to happen, when the future looks uncertain, that is a good time for you to take knowledge of what gifts God has given you. Can you teach? Well then, start teaching. You do not have to wait for a Sunday School class. You can have one in your home. You can get a friend and meet in a car at lunch time and study the Bible together. But use your gifts. If you have the gift of encouragement, look around for people who are discouraged and start helping them and encouraging them and strengthening them. If you have the gift of administrating, offer yourself to these struggling Christian groups who have a tremendous vision to help people but are falling all over each other trying to get it done because nobody is administrating it. Offer yourself. If you have a gift of wisdom, or knowledge, use it. If you have a gift of helps, put it to work. This is the way Peter says we are to act.

"Whoever speaks let him do so as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

There is the activity for the "last days." Do not waste your time running around from meeting to meeting, clapping your hands and singing about the coming of the Lord. I do not have anything against that per se, but if that is all you do you are wasting time; you are not preparing for his coming.

These may or may not be the last days, who knows? But whatever they are, they are days of opportunity, days of possibility, days when God can be glorified. And if they culminate at last with the trumpet blast and the return of the Lord, what a satisfying thing it will be to know that you did not get all wound up with a lot of extraneous activity that goes nowhere, but you "occupied," as Jesus said until he came. That is what he tells us to do: "Occupy until I come."

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for the days in which we live. What exciting, what frightening days they are. How the heart quails sometimes with fear, looking at the things that are coming to pass on the earth. But oh! what reassurance is given to us that you are still in charge, that man does not determine his own destiny nor set his own schedule, that you are working out the events of earth according to your own program and nothing can stay your hand. Thank you for letting us live in these days. Help us keep sane and sober and not wrapped up in all kinds of excitement that is unwarranted and unworthy, but keep us laboring in the fullness and power of the Spirit to accomplish what you want done in these days. We pray and thank you in Jesus' name, Amen.

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FOLLOW THE LEADER

by Ray C. Stedman

I was thinking about Easter this past week and I realized that since I had become a Christian as a boy, that this is my fifty-fifth Easter celebration---yet they never grow old! If we take the date of the crucifixion as 30 A.D. (as I think it probably was), then this is the one thousand nine hundredth and fifty-third celebration of Easter for the Church.

Our Jewish friends are also celebrating a great event at this time, the Passover season. Both Easter and Passover are celebrations of historical events, things that actually happened. They are not mere legends or philosophies, but real events that happened in time and space. The Passover, of course, goes back another

fifteen hundred years. It occurred on the night when the Israelites were delivered from Egypt, under the leadership of Moses. At Easter time we celebrate the breakthrough of our Lord Jesus from the bonds of death on an early Sunday morning one thousand nine hundred and fifty-three years ago.

But as I thought about those two celebrations, one great difference between them became obvious to me: though Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, there is no Jew today, nor has there ever been one, who has claimed to be in contact with the living Moses! But Christians claim that they live day-by-day in close contact with the very same Jesus who arose from the dead nineteen hundred and fifty-three years ago. That, it seems to me, constitutes the greatest message of Easter. The most wonderful privilege any human being can have is that he should be given the honor of having a Divine Companion all the way through life, day after day.

Yet it seems to be one of the most neglected privileges today. I do not understand it, except that I have done it so often myself. The greatest provision ever made by God to handle pressure, problems, dangers and disappointments seems to be the last resort for many Christians. They apparently prefer to spend thousands of dollars in counseling and psychiatry bills, or battle with fears and worries for years on end, or even blow out their brains, rather than to follow the simple advice given by the apostle Paul in his last letter to young Timothy. Paul was writing from a prison cell in Rome to a young man who had been left alone in a great pagan city to face the battles of the Christian life. Here are the apostle's words of advice:

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel." (2 Tim. 2:8)

That one verse is a pattern for handling difficulty in life: "Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead. Jesus the Messiah, the Jesus of the gospels, the One we read about in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The One who walked among men and said such marvelous words, who showed such wonderful compassion, who understood the mysteries of life. Jesus of Nazareth, risen from the dead, the One who stood by the Sea of Galilee after the resurrection and said to his disciples, "All power in heaven and on earth is given unto me." Jesus, Lord of life, Lord of history, Lord of nature, Lord of all the rolling centuries yet to come, even past our own day. "Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David": the very human Christ, one of us, part of mankind, with a history, an ancestry and a genealogy that he could trace. That is the gospel that Paul preached, the good news for today. I suggest that that is the message we need to hear again on Easter Sunday (and indeed on many other days), but especially today, because it is a message we seem to forget so easily.

Last fall I spoke at a pastors' conference in Washington State. I enjoy going to pastors' conferences if for no other reason than to hear them sing. No one sings like pastors! They know all the hymns by heart because they have sung them hundreds of times. There was a wonderful song leader at this conference, who led in one of the great hymns: J. Wilbur Chapman's beautiful, "One Day":

One day when heaven was filled with His praises,
One day when sin was black as could be,
Jesus came forth to be born of a virgin,
dwelt among men---oh example is He!

The hymn goes on to recite the various events of Jesus' life, every verse focusing on a single event, and then gathering it all up in the chorus in five great proclamations:

Living, He loved me!
Dying, He saved me!
Buried, He carried my sins far away!
Rising, He justified freely, forever!
One day He's coming---O glorious day!

After we had sung the hymn, the song leader said, "I love that hymn. To me it is the greatest hymn ever written because it incorporates all the truth about Jesus, all the great themes of Christian faith, in one song. I would like to have you all stand and sing it again." Then he led us again in a great singing of the hymn. After it was over, I was introduced to speak, and I had to say, "I am sorry to have to disagree with our song-leading brother. Although I believe that is a great hymn---it is indeed a marvel of condensation of the great themes of

Christian faith and I have sung it since I was a boy---I have to tell you that there is one theme that has been left out; and the exclusion of that one theme explains the weakness of the church today." Then I said, "I wonder if any of you can tell me what it is?"

It took those pastors quite a while, but eventually one of them raised his hand and said, "There is no mention of Pentecost." I said, "You are right. There is no mention of the time when the Spirit came to do what Jesus had said to his disciples, after he was risen from the dead, he would do. Remember that he said to them, 'It is to your advantage that I go away.' They could not believe that. The thought of his going away made their hearts sink. But he meant it. 'It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I go I will send the Spirit.' And what would the Spirit do? 'He will take of the things of mine and make them real unto you.' It is through that companion experience of Pentecost that the resurrection has meaning for us today; for in that event Jesus came again to be our Divine Companion to accompany us through life, to minister to our needs, our pressures and our problems. That is what we are singing about today."

If Christians took seriously Paul's advice, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead," some wonderful things would happen. First, most of the need for counseling among Christians today would be eliminated. Here at this church, as in almost every church, many Christians come with problems and wanting help. Most of them are seeking some gimmick to deliver them from their problems. They do not want problems. Or they want to find some kind of comfort to make them feel a little better. But most of the Christian counseling that is done here, as in every other church, would be eliminated if people took seriously this great truth, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead."

Jesus is the Divine Counselor, the Divine Companion who is available to meet our need. If we took that truth seriously it would enable us to experience immediate victories over lust, over alcoholism, over drug and tobacco addiction, over explosive tempers, over sharp, caustic words, over morbid fears, guilty feelings, and smug, self-righteous complacency. We would be delivered from so much if at the moment of pressure and temptation we would "remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead." We would be delivered from loneliness, greed, jealousy, emptiness and restlessness. We would become wholesome, well-adjusted, well-balanced, loving people, able to cope with life no matter what it brought. That is what Christ came into this world to do.

Are all these exaggerations? Not if we judge from the testimony of Christians in the Scriptures and through history. Remember that Paul wrote to the Philippians, "I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content." Paul had learned the secret of contentment. What kind of contentment? "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound." Whether he had what he needed or had nothing at all, he knew how to be content. He tells us what the secret is: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." I wonder why we so quickly forget that there is One who is given to strengthen us? Paul wrote to the Colossians about his work, "For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me." Did you ever think of that, when you were weary, tired, and subjected to heavy demand? Jesus supplies energy to do what you have to do. When you feel like you cannot do any more, you can "remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead," and find a supply of strength to do what you have to do. Have you found that?

John the apostle wrote, "As he is, so are we in this world." What he is, we can be. The apostle Peter wrote, "His divine power has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness." The writer of Hebrews says, "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us (that is the race of life itself, day after day after day, step after step after step), looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith." Do you need faith to motivate you, to strengthen you to do what must be done? That is what Jesus is here for: "looking unto Jesus, the author (the originator) and the completer of faith."

David Livingstone, in the last century, said, "I go through the jungles of Africa and Jesus is by my side." Savonarola, that great evangelist of the twelfth century in Florence, said, "They may kill me, they may tear me in pieces, but never, never, never shall they tear from my heart the living Jesus." Samuel Rutherford, one of the great Scottish Covenanters, put in jail for his faith, in the seventeenth century said, "Jesus Christ came into my cell yesterday and every stone shone like a jewel." Those are men who have learned to "remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead." They faced problems with an inner impartation of strength, grace, truth and life that they would never have had without his presence.

It is very important for us to see that Jesus is there, not to do what we think needs to be done, but what he thinks needs to be done. Many Christians fail to lay hold of this promise because they want to use Jesus to accomplish their program; they want to use him to work things out according to their plan. Those who watched *The Thorn Birds* on television this past week saw the heartbreaking folly of trying to get God to do something one's own way instead of recognizing the wisdom he has in doing things his way. The first creates havoc in lives, and that is what that book and movie said to us.

Some people think that Jesus is a genie in the magic lamp of our desire which we can rub and there he is, bowing and genuflecting, and saying, "Yes, master, what do you want?" No, Jesus is there to toughen us, to motivate us, to strengthen us, to stabilize us so we do not panic, we do not give up, we do not in anger flip out, throw it all overboard, and try to run and hide. Jesus is there to strengthen us to live. That is the secret that Paul is talking about: "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead."

I have been conducting a one-man research experiment this past week: I have been listening to the way Christians talk. I did not warn them what I was listening for; I did not let them know anything that I expected of them. I sought to learn how many Christians in the normal experiences of life would reflect, in my hearing, the truth that they were counting on Jesus Christ risen from the dead. I have been greatly encouraged by the results. There are many Christians here who are learning that secret. You can tell it by the way they live. They are different.

I talked last week with a young man who needed guidance in his life. As we talked together he said, "I decided that the Lord was big enough to know how to show me what he wanted, and I'm willing to wait for it." I realized that that young man was learning to "remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead."

I talked with a mother who had just had her first baby and it was a difficult and dangerous birth. There was a moment of crisis when she could have lost her own life or that of her baby. As she told me the story, she said that when that moment came she said to the Lord, "Lord, this is your body, and you can do with it whatever you want with it." As she held her baby, this young woman, healthy, whole, with radiant face, I knew that here was a mother who had learned to "remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead."

I talked with my barber last week. He loves bowling, but he said that when he bowls he gets tense at times. He is trying to do better and thereby help his team, but he gets so tense and uptight that he cannot bowl very well. But he told me he has learned what to do. He said, "I say to myself, 'I know who I am; I know who my Father is; I know who my Lord is. I know what he can do, and I just decide to let him do it.'" I realized that there is a man who, even in bowling, has learned to "remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead."

A businessman called me last week and told me that his business had been in desperate financial straits for several years, that it was almost ready to collapse, and his associates and he have been praying that God would show them a way out. It looked as though they had lost, that the whole thing was about to go, when suddenly God opened a door and a fantastic supply of money was provided for their need. He said to me, "I know that the Lord knew our need, and he knew when to supply it." There is a man who is learning to reckon on Jesus Christ, risen from the dead!

Just last night a woman excitedly told me, "Oh, let me tell you what the Lord did for me this month. I had the great privilege of hearing my one hundred-and-one-year old father pray for the first time in his life." Those are people who have learned that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, descended from David; and that is the good news for today!

There is great truth that gathers around the resurrection. It is indeed the answer to the hopelessness of death. It is the breakthrough that has brought us out of grief and terror, and fear and despair in the face of death, into hope and joy and peace in the moment of our dying. Many can testify to that; we witness to it every Easter. It is, as the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, the guarantee of our faith. When moments of doubt seize us and we wonder if we have been tricked, that this whole Christian thing is a psychological gimmick designed to make us feel good while we pass through life, if we go back to the inescapable fact that Jesus rose from the dead, and did it in the presence of many witnesses so that it was established beyond a doubt so that even his enemies could not deny it, we can work our way out again to peace and rest about our faith. Everything rests

on that great fact. The resurrection is a great comfort in times of bereavement when we have had to say goodbye to a loved one; we can walk away from a grave, reminding ourselves that we shall see our loved one again. That is one of the greatest comforts of life.

But surely one of the greatest truths of all to gather around the resurrection is this great word, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead." When you are confronted with a problem, with a struggle, with a difficulty you do not know how to solve, one you can do nothing about, "remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead." That is what he is there for. Remember that God has provided a Divine Companion, a wise Leader who has been down the path ahead of you so he knows the way; a faithful Friend who understands how you feel and what you are going through; a divine, omnipotent Companion who can take you through the trial and the testing and work it out to your ultimate benefit and good.

Easter is a time when many people take the opportunity to receive Christ. Just before the last service I was told of someone who had come to Christ a few minutes earlier. Easter is a great time to come to know the Lord. But I want to say to you this: Easter is also a great time for Christians to begin to lean upon the great provision which God has made in Christ, risen from the dead. Stop running to every human counselor for help! Learn to reckon on the presence of Christ in your difficulty, and watch him, lean on him, to work it out according to his will.

Prayer

"Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

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The Power You Already Have

by Ray C. Stedman

When I was a student at Dallas Seminary back in the '40s right after World War II, Elaine and I lived in a tiny trailer on the campus of the seminary. It was the only housing that we could find in Dallas at that time. A number of families, 17 all together, moved trailers right onto the campus, and we lived there throughout the four years of our seminary training. In a trailer directly behind us, Don and Bea Campbell lived. Don is now the president of Dallas Seminary, so you can see that trailer life is a very good beginning for somebody. On the next row over were Howard and Jean Hendricks, and many of you know of their ministry. Howard is probably widely known all over the world today as a speaker and as a Christian educator. They lived in a trailer identical to ours. We were all poor as church mice. In fact our trailer was so small that the mice were humpbacked trying to fit into it! Seventeen families shared two bathrooms! I remember standing outside one day, waiting in line singing the old hymn, "Why do you wait, dear brother? Why do you tarry so long?"

One day in our extreme poverty there was a letter in my mailbox from a man whom I had never met, but whose name I knew. When I opened it there fell out a ten dollar bill and a note from him that said he had heard about our ministry among the servicemen teaching the Bible during the war. He wanted to help us and was praying for us. To this day I can remember the immense feeling of gratitude that I had because some man, unknown to me, had thought of us, was praying for us, and wanted to help us. We find a similar situation here in the letter to the Ephesians. The apostle Paul had started the church at Ephesus (you can read about it in the book of Acts), and yet he had been away from it for a number of years. Evidently a lot of new Christians had come into new life in Christ, and a lot of people maybe had moved in. The church was filled with people that he didn't

know. In fact he tells us in this opening paragraph that he had heard about their faith, but he had never met them yet. But he was praying for them and was trying to help them in their spiritual growth. So this passage is very appropriate, especially for me, when I come back and find a lot of people that I have never seen or yet met in the church, and yet we've been praying for you as well.

The apostle says in verse 15:

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

This is a wonderful word of encouragement to them. You perhaps are asking, "What does he mean 'for this reason'?" I don't want to go back into the opening verses of this chapter, but there you will find a tremendous paragraph from the apostle Paul. It is actually only one sentence long in the Greek, but it covers several paragraphs in English translation, in which the apostle is describing all that they have in God, all that Christ has done in their lives, and all the great doctrinal foundations of Christianity. And it is all addressed to the mind, that they might understand with their mind what God had done. It is for that reason, he says, that he has been praying for them.

But now in this paragraph he goes on in verse 17 to say:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Now that is really the major objective of a Christian life, and we need to ask ourselves, "Is this happening with us? Are we really getting to know God better?" There is a principle in the Scripture that is very important for us to understand. We are all familiar with the phrase that says we are made in the image of God, which means in some way that humanity reflects God. But the fact is that we are so made in the image of God that we cannot learn who we are until we learn and begin to know who God is. It is the revelation and understanding of the nature of God that will tell us what we are like. I believe that this is one of the major reasons why many people today never seem to discover who they are. They never learn what they can do, what possibilities lie within, and what potential is theirs because they have never discovered who God is. We reflect him, and therefore it is extremely important that we come to know God better. Remember that Jesus said this in his great prayer to the Father in John 17: "This is eternal life, that they may know you and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

This is the reason that we exist--that we may know God better. I hope this is happening to you, young and old alike. You never get over knowing more about God. He is such a fantastic being, and revelation about his character and nature keep coming to us until we begin to discover who we are as well. So Paul prays for them. He doesn't know what else to pray for them. He doesn't know their circumstances. He can't pray for their daily problems and pressures as you can when you know somebody intimately. But he can pray and does pray that they may know God better.

All of this is addressed to the mind, that you may understand with your thinking the being and majesty of God. But now in verse 18 he adds another thought:

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us [to us or in us literally] who believe.

That is a different idea. The eyes of the mind can grasp the doctrine and teaching about God. We see with our mind. You have said that many times. Somebody has said something to you and you have replied, "Oh, yes, I see what you mean." You didn't see it with your eyes; you saw it with your mind, which has eyes. But Paul says that your hearts have eyes too. And he prays that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.

In the scriptures the heart is the seat of the emotions. The apostle's prayer is that we may so grasp the revelation that is made to the mind that it begins to enlighten, move, and motivate our hearts. This is when we become vital Christians--turned on, ready to serve, and highly motivated because we have begun to feel the power and the wonder of the truth that we have been taught. That is why Paul prays for the eyes of your heart,

that you may feel the truth--not just in your intellect, but also down deep in your emotions--and that you may reflect and rejoice on who God is and what he is like.

There are three specific things, he says, that we need to know about God--first, the hope to which he has called us, second, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and third, his incomparably great power. Let us take a closer look at those three things because they are designed to keep us steady under pressure. They will grip our feelings, turn us on, motivate us highly, and make our lives effective and influential. Everyone wants to be significant. We all want our lives to count for something, and these are the three ingredients, says the apostle Paul, that will keep us turned on, excited, and anticipating the adventure of walking with God.

The first one is that we may remember the hope to which we have been called. This is the hope of being changed into his likeness, the hope of glory. Paul speaks of it many places in the Scripture. He says, "This light affliction which is but for a moment is working for us an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory." And he also says, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." In other words, we must not look at life as the world around us does, as being all that you get, as the only chance you are going to have to live. The world says that, if you don't take it now, you are never going to get another chance. I have seen that misunderstanding drive people into forsaking their marriages after 30 or 40 years and into running off with another younger person, hoping that they can still grab something because life is slipping away from them. Christians are not to think that way. We are being told that life is a school, a training period. It is where we are being prepared for something that is incredibly great yet to come. I don't understand all that is involved in that, but I believe it, and I can hardly wait until it happens sometimes.

We are told in scripture, and certainly our experience agrees with it, that these bodies of ours are growing old. Ever since I moved to Oregon I have noted a few streaks of gray in my hair. I can see by the way I feel many times that my body is losing its elasticity, its ability to function at times, and I grow weary and old. I don't know why because inside I don't feel that way at all. As I anticipate getting older I remember that it is all aimed at something tremendous which I am being readied for. It is important not to forget that. Don't succumb to the philosophy around that you have got to have it now or you will never have a chance. You can pass by a lot of things now and be content because you know that what you are getting, what God is sending you in terms of your present experience, is just what you need to get you ready for what he has got waiting for you when life is over. One of my favorite quotations from literature is the words of Robert Browning, which you sometimes see on sundials. He wrote these words: "Grow old along with me. The best is yet to be. The last of life, for which the first was made." So don't lose hope. You are headed for hope, headed for life, headed for glory. All of this life is working its way and having its part in that process. That's the first thing to hang on to. So you don't need to be depressed or feel that everything is useless, that you can't do anything--you are getting older, you have lost your ability to function, and so on. That is not true. Paul prays that these Christians may know the hope to which he has called them.

The second aspect is the "riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints." Now this is such an important truth that I despair sometimes of trying to get it across to people. Everybody thinks in terms of the inheritance that we have in God, and the Scripture teaches that. He is our inheritance. He is like a great bank deposit of resources from which we can draw strength, comfort, encouragement, correction, and whatever else we need as we face problems in our lives. We can draw on God. We have been singing hymns about it, and you have experienced it yourselves. But that is not what Paul is talking about here. He is talking about God's inheritance in us, and the enrichment that will come to our lives when we discover what it means to draw upon what God has given to us--his inheritance in us.

What is that? All through the scriptures we are being told that when we became Christians God gave us gifts which we never had before. Every Christian has one or more, and they are given to us in order that, when we begin to exercise them, we will find that life becomes an exciting adventure of faith. I could spend the rest of the day up here telling you stories about individuals who have found this to be true. I am thinking right now of retired people from this congregation who have started a Bible class in their home and have begun to reach out into their communities. Though their bodily health is failing, they nevertheless are being tremendously influential in reaching some of the leaders of a community--the mayor of a city in one case, the chief of police in another--and influencing the whole community by the exercise of the gifts that God has given. The apostle is

saying that he wants us to discover how exciting and enriching it can be. Do you know that the greatest thrill that any human being can have is the sense that God has just used you to help somebody else. That is the most wonderful feeling that you can have. And God has given each of us gifts. I hope that, if you haven't done so by now, you will seriously think about the gift God has given you and will put it to work in helping some people. Some have the gift of helps, some teaching, some administration, some wisdom, and some knowledge. All of these things are gifts that the Spirit of God has given to us. When we begin to exercise them, we lose the dullness and routine of our lives because we are caught up in a ministry that is exciting. I have never been able to appreciate the kind of retirement that many people have, where all they do is sit around and play bridge or golf or bingo or something like that. They try to just fill up their time. What a waste that is of all the lessons of life and of all the possibilities that God has given! I hope that young and old alike will begin to put this to work and find out the exciting riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

You may say, "Well, that all sounds good, but I don't have the strength to do that. I don't seem to be able to begin to do anything like that." That is why Paul goes on to pray that you may know "his incomparably great power [which is at work in us] who believe." Power is the word of the hour today. Everybody is talking about it. You hear about power evangelism and power living--power lunches. Everybody is looking for power. I am afraid that the search for some kind of power sends many people off on wild goose chases. They look for either some kind of internal strengthening, so that they feel adequate and competent, or perhaps even some miraculous event that is going to enable them to do things that ordinarily would not be possible for anyone--miracles of some sort, an ability to heal people, or an ability to change our circumstances. But that is because they do not understand the model that Paul gives us here of what the power of God is like. Did you know that when you became a Christian you were already equipped with power? It came with the Spirit of grace who came into your heart. If you do not already have the Spirit of Christ, you are not yet a Christian. We can receive the Lord Jesus, and thus he gives us the Spirit of power and grace, but all of that comes when we believe in him. But what we need to understand is the way that power works. This is the example that the apostle gives in verses 19-21 to describe this power:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

The resurrection of Jesus is the model of power. Unfortunately again, we have very confused ideas about this power. We don't listen and look carefully at what the text says about the resurrection. We focus upon the rolling away of the stone and upon the earthquake and the Roman guards, terrified as they understand that some tremendous event has taken place. But what we don't realize is that all those events *followed* the resurrection. They were not associated with it directly. It didn't take the rolling of the stone and the overpowering of the Roman guards to allow Jesus to be resurrected. If you think about it, he was already resurrected when those things took place. His body lay in the tomb wrapped in the grave clothes, and yet at a moment that God determined, the body left those grave clothes; it evaporated out of them. They were left lying there, crumpled up and sunken down, with no body in them. And he passed through the stone while it was still standing before the door of the tomb. In some way he was alive and standing in the garden, where Mary mistook him for a gardener, before any of those events had taken place. What I am trying to say is that the power of God, the resurrection power of God, is not a power that makes a lot of demonstration. It is quiet. We are so used to power that makes noises that we don't think we have power if we don't have noise. Things buzz, hum, pulsate, pound, explode, and bang, and these are seen as power. But this is power that you don't feel. You don't have any sense that it is happening, but it is happening.

This power has a peculiar characteristic. It only happens when you begin to act. When you begin to exercise the gifts that God has given you, then the power begins to flow, not before. And then God will work through you to accomplish things that will leave you gasping sometimes at what he has done. You didn't feel it. You didn't suddenly feel strong, capable, and mighty. No, you felt weak. Paul says that God's power is made perfect in weakness, and we pay no attention sometimes to those things. If you feel weak, if you feel inadequate, if you feel ineffectual, this is no hindrance to being used of God and exercising the power of God, not in the least. That is what this is teaching us. I think many people never discover what God could do in their lives because they keep waiting to feel powerful before they act. No, you won't feel powerful. You begin to

reach out and act according to the needs around. Suddenly you discover that there is unusual power at work.

I have a power toothbrush that works with a battery. It has an unusual characteristic. When you get the toothpaste on the toothbrush and you are ready to brush your teeth, you look around for the button to turn it on. But you don't need a button to turn it on. The directions instruct you to put it up to your teeth and press, and suddenly the power will be there. I remember with what unbelief I tried this the first time, but to my amazement it worked. I put the toothbrush up and began to press, and suddenly the brush began to move up and down--there was power available. This is a trivial, but living example of what the power of God is like. It works when you reach out to somebody. It works when you sit down to exercise a teaching gift, to help somebody who is in trouble, or to comfort somebody. That is when the power of God is available, and it is wonderful power. It is above anything that earth can match.

There are Bible stories that help us understand this. All through the Old Testament God is teaching his people how he works in power. One of these stories is when Joshua crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land. The people of Israel were lined up, and the priests were told to go first and bear on their shoulders the ark of the covenant. They were to walk down to the River Jordan, which was flowing in flood before them, and trust in God that something would happen by the time they got to the river. And so they did. In faith they believed that God would do what he said he would do. When the priests put the ark of the covenant on their shoulders, it says they walked down, and the soles of their feet actually touched the water. The water parted, and they went through on dry ground to the other side. That is the way God's power works. When you put it to work, when you begin to act yourself, expecting him to be with you, then his power begins to work. There is no noise, no flash, and no movement. The power is already there, and God is waiting for you to trust. Remember the verse later on in Ephesians that says:

Now unto him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that you can ask or think according to the power that is at work in us.

This is the explanation. You will never find out what God can do with you until you begin to step out and take on some demand that you need power for. Then you will discover his power. That is why Paul prays for these Ephesians and says that the secret of a vital congregation is that you don't forget the hope to which God has called you and the enriching adventure that awaits you when you begin to use the gifts God has given you. You can expect that he will act in power when you begin to act.

In closing, I will point out some of the wonderful things this power can do. First of all, the Scripture tells us that it is power to face our inner hurts and fears. I find so many people locked up by dwelling on their past. It helps to know your past and to look back on it; I am not disparaging that. But once you know the things that set you on a wrong path, you also have to remember that the Scripture says that we are to forget the things that are past and press on because we are new creatures in Christ Jesus. We are no longer what we once were, and therefore we can set aside that past, having once faced it and seen its impact upon us. We can set it aside and day by day begin to walk with God. We will discover that this power will enable us to overcome all the dysfunctions of a bad past. I have seen it happen many times, and it means that no dysfunctional background can keep us from fulfilling what God wants.

Second, it is power to abandon evil habits. I know Christians who are still in bondage to habits that have held them in an iron grasp--alcoholism, drug use, an evil temper, a lustful practice and attitude. Here is a power that can enable you to say no to these things and to go on saying no. It can break the influence of these things. One of Charles Wesley's great hymns includes the words, "He breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free; his blood can make the foulest clean; his blood availed for me." That's the power of God.

It is a power to restore broken relationships. There may be members of your family or friends that you haven't spoken to for a long time; the relationship is entirely broken. You may be bitter over some experience that you had long ago, and you never want to forgive somebody for what they have done. Here is power to forgive, power to remember that you have been forgiven. Therefore, you can forgive, and you can heal those broken relationships and give a word of acceptance to somebody who has been estranged from you for a long time. And it is power to change bad attitudes and stop obnoxious behavior. I know some Christians that I can't stand to be around because they are so obnoxious and are constantly acting in such a way that they hurt people and

demolish relationships. No Christian needs to go on being like that. We often excuse it, saying, "Well, I'm Irish, I can't help it," or "I'm Italian, that's the way we all are." But we have no right to use those excuses because we have a power that can break every dominion known to man. That is what this verse says: "It is far above all rule or authority and power and dominion and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."

Finally it is power to reach out to others to help them in their need. It is power to respond to people's hurts around you and power to take some of your own time to minister to them. This is what makes a church function as God intended it to in society. That is what these last verses say. Verses 22-23 says:

And God placed all things under his [Jesus] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church [it is all for the church now], which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

My prayer for you is that you may come to know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and the incomparable power which he has already given you.

Catalog No. 4308
Ephesians 1:15-23
Single message
Ray Stedman
September 29, 1991

AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY

by Ray C. Stedman

A covenant is an arrangement between people. All life operates or arises out of a covenant. When two people want to go into business together the first thing they do is draw up a contract or a partnership. That is the basic covenant that defines the terms of their operation. A marriage is that kind of a covenant. It is an agreement between a man and a woman to stick together against all odds, to work out their problems, to share their resources.

Life itself is the most fundamental covenant of all. Life is the agreement or the arrangement that God has already made with us that he will provide to us what it takes to operate, to act. None of us really supplies our own energy; God does. But God does this so continually that we get the illusion that we are supplying it, that it is something inherent in us. We are so used to making a decision and then promptly starting to do something that we never realize that if God didn't give us power to act we could not do what we decided to do. We could not even move a muscle, raise an arm or wink an eye if it weren't for power supplied from something outside of us. All men operate on this principle, but they are blind to this basic truth. It's a funny thing that truth that is really basic is very hard to discover because we take it for granted. It is so much a part of us that we hardly even think about it.

In the Scriptures we have what the Apostle Paul calls an Old Covenant and a New Covenant. Now the passage I use oftentimes in teaching the whole truth of both of these Covenants, or arrangements for life, is found in Second Corinthians. In Chapter 3, Verse 4, Paul says some interesting words:

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.

What kind of confidence? Obviously, that is referring back to something. Paul is referring to the boldness, the confident sense of adequacy he has in his life that makes him able to function as a human being, and even in his work as an apostle. He says this confidence, this adequacy, comes from a certain source. I am not going to take time to expound this at any length, but I want to show you what kind of confidence Paul is talking about. In Chapter 2, Verse 14, Paul says,

Thanks be to God who in Christ always leads us in triumph, {2 Cor 2:14a RSV}

Now that is confidence. You are always going to be led in triumph not in defeat, not in failure, not in weakness even, but in triumph.

... and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere we go. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one a fragrance from death to death and to another a fragrance from life to life. {2 Cor 14b-16a RSV}

Then Paul asks this question.

Who is sufficient for these things? {2 Cor 16b RSV}

Where do you get that kind of ability and adequacy? What kind of a study course will give you that? What kind of chemical compound will produce that? I am always fascinated by magazine ads. They are forever offering the secret of adequacy. If you get a certain deodorant you will be adequate to handle whatever comes your way. Or if you would use the right mouthwash, or the right toothpaste, it will help tremendously. Now everybody knows those ads are fake. Nobody even takes them seriously, although people do buy the product, which is what these ads seek. But if you really took seriously the claims of the newspaper advertising and billboard advertising you would think you had discovered the elixir of life in some of these things. They are offering adequacy because that is what human beings long for how to be able to cope, how to handle situations. And not only are chemical compounds offered, but also courses. One says, "Have you discovered all the hidden powers of your personality? Do you know the secrets of the ancients, now rediscovered? Send ten dollars for this course. Read this and you will get all these secret powers." Again, it is the offer of the secret of adequacy. In a hundred ways today the world is offering this.

Paul continues, Verse 17:

For we are not like so many, peddlers of God's word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? {2 Cor 2:17-3:2 RSV}

It is hard to believe, but these people in Corinth had been misled by some teachers who came down from Jerusalem and taught them that they ought to do like everybody else and boast about their accomplishments. These teachers even suggested that the Apostle Paul was not much of an apostle because he did not do this; and that he really was not one of the true apostles because he was not part of the twelve. They actually had the effrontery to suggest that these people write to Paul and suggest that the next time he came to Corinth he bring a letter of recommendation from the Apostle Peter, or James or John, or others of the real twelve, the real apostles.

Paul says, in effect, "Do you really mean that? Are you serious about that? Have you ever thought that you yourselves are our letter of recommendation?" Chapter 3, Verses 2-3,

You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts, to be known and read by all men; and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. {2 Cor 3:2-3 RSV}

How were they a letter of recommendation? Paul says, "Look what has happened to you. Look at the changes that have happened in your lives since we came and preached to you the word of truth. Has anything happened?" In his first letter to the Corinthians, there is a beautiful passage, which says, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" {1 Cor 6:9a RSV}. It goes on to list such things as idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards, etc. Paul goes on to say, "Such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified" {1 Cor 6:11a RSV}. Some amazing things had

happened to them. So Paul says, in effect, "Take a look at your life. Do you think that these changes could happen if what we were saying was not the truth of God? Your own life is our letter of recommendation ."

Now I have listed in the study I have made on Second Corinthians certain qualities of this kind of life.

First, there is a kind of unquenchable optimism. "Thanks be unto God," Paul says {2 Cor 2:14a RSV}. That marks the kind of life Paul lived. He was always giving thanks for everything that happened, no matter how rough and tough it was.

Then there is a pattern of unvarying success: "Who always leads us in triumph," Paul says {2 Cor 2:14b RSV}. Never in failure. That is, not triumph in his (Paul's) plan, but Christ's plan.

Then there is an unforgettable impact, as brought out in the last part of Verse 14 through Verse 16. Everywhere Paul goes he is like a perfume which fills a room, a fragrance of Christ. To some who are rejecting him, this fragrance is an odor of death unto death, but to those who accept it is an odor of life unto life.

Then there is this unimpeachable integrity, in Verse 17. It is summed up in the words, "We are men of sincerity, commissioned of God, living in the sight of God, speaking in Christ to you."

And then finally, this note of undeniable reality. In Chapter 3, Verses 1-3, Paul says, "Your own lives are proof that what we say and what we do is by the power of the Spirit of God."

That is what Paul means when he says, "Who is sufficient for these things?" {2 Cor 2:16b}. Where do you find the secret of that kind of living? His answer is the New Covenant.

In Chapter 3, Verse 4-6, he says,

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God, not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God. It is he who has qualified us to be ministers of the New covenant, not as in a written code but in the Spirit, for the written code kills but the Spirit gives life. {2 Cor 3:4-6 RSV}

Everyone is born into this world operating on the Old Covenant, as contrasted with the New, which we can learn when we become a Christian. Now being a Christian does not mean that you automatically operate in the New Covenant. That is why you find Christians who are just as mixed up, just as torn up inside, just as unable to handle life as non-Christians are. Though they are Christians they have not learned the value of being a Christian. They have not learned how to operate on the New Covenant, which they have available to them in the Lord Jesus. They are still operating, for the most part, on the Old Covenant. That is what is fouling up their lives.

Now what do I mean when I say, "The Old Covenant"? Paul links this with the Law of Moses. He calls it, "the written code which kills, which was written on tablets of stone" {cf, 2 Cor 3:6}, and so on. Why would Paul associate this with the Law of Moses? The reason is that Law was given to us in order to show us that the basis of our human life, inherited from Adam, is all wrong. It won't work. The Law makes that clear to us and nothing else will do it. The Law makes a demand upon us and when we try to fulfill that demand, we find out we can't, ultimately. Nobody has ever lived up to the Ten Commandments by trying his best to do so. If you doubt that, give yourself twenty-four hours in which you seek with all your strength and might to live up to the Ten Commandments. I will guarantee you will have broken one of them before fifteen minutes is over. If not any others, the last one: "Thou shalt not covet." That means you must not look around this room and see anything that anybody has that you would like to have. That is the Law! It is given to show us that the way we are living now, the resources of our life in Adam, is not workable.

The New Covenant Paul describes consists of this: Nothing coming from us, everything from God:

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; [nothing coming from us, but] our sufficiency is from God [everything from God]. {2 Cor 3:5 RSV}

It is God at work in us that makes us act and produce this kind of living, if we are going to do it at all. If that is the New Covenant, what do you think the Old Covenant is? "Everything coming from us; nothing coming from God."

At any given moment you are operating as a Christian on one or the other of those two. You never can draw from both at once. Jesus said so: "No man can serve two masters. Either he will love the one and hate the other or cling to one and despise the other," {cf, Matt 6:24}. You cannot cling to both; you cannot draw from both. The only time you have to live is right now:

- The present is all there is;
- The future is not yet come;
- The past is gone.

You only can live in the present, and therefore the present moment is either being lived in the Old Covenant or the New, but not both.

"But," you say, "I don't understand that. How could a believer in Jesus Christ even act as though nothing depended on God? Of course we depend on God." It's amazing how easy it is to do this. We all know that God is there, but we really don't expect him to do anything. That is the problem. And that is the great problem with the church today.

As I travel around the world I am continually astonished at how little Christians expect God to do anything, how churches are run and operated exactly like businesses, never expecting God to do a thing. Everything depends on us. It all has to be organized. It all has to be carried out by men alone.

Now God is a God of order, but he is not a God of organization, particularly. Organizations can often become the substitute for the Holy Spirit. Somebody well said that if the Holy Spirit were suddenly removed from most of the churches of this country, nobody would know that anything had happened because they were not depending on him anyway.

Let me illustrate how this can be. Think of that story of Jesus feeding the five thousand. The scene is by the seashore in the evening hours. The crowd has been listening all day and they are hungry. Philip came to Jesus and said, "Send them away. We have no bread to feed them with," {cf, Matt 14:15b}. Jesus said to him, "You give them bread. Give them to eat," {cf, Matt 14:16}. And what was Philip's reaction? "We do not have money and the stores are all closed and we cannot get a loan from the bank and there is no way we can do this," {cf, John 6:7}. Philip is counting on his human resources. Here is the Lord Jesus, whom he had just seen do wonderful things, standing in front of him, but he did not reckon on him at all. His reckoning was on the normal resources of life. Now, if Philip had been an atheist and Jesus had said to him, "Give you them to eat," he would have said the same thing exactly. In other words, there is no difference between the believer and the unbeliever in the way he acts in that situation.

How often and how easily we do this. God tells us to do something and we start immediately saying, "Have I got the training, the background, the skill, the necessary knowledge. Have I had the course? Can I do this? Have I got the personality?" Now I am not implying that you don't have to do some planning because God does direct us to do certain things and not to do other things. But the point is, whom do you reckon on when you do decide to do something? Is it you, or God in you?

That is the difference between the Old and the New Covenant. The Old is, everything comes from me, it all depends on me. If I don't have what it takes, it can't get done. On the other hand, your attitude can be that everything depends on God. He has called you and asked you to be his agent by which this comes. That is the New Covenant. That produces the kind of life Paul has been describing in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17. The Old produces what Paul calls in Galatians "the works of the flesh." That is what the Old Covenant is: the flesh at work. Thus it produces the works of the flesh which he says are evident, manifest, easily visible: "The works

of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like," {Gal 5:19-21a RSV}.

That explains the struggle that Paul records for us in his own experience in Romans 7: "The thing that I would not do, that I do, and the thing that I would do, I do not," {cf, Rom 7:15}. Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever seen a zealous, eager young Christian or older Christian desperately trying to do something for God and ending up after awhile so discouraged and defeated he just wants to quit? In fact, he probably does. But that is a very hopeful stage. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, who have come to the end of their resources," {cf, Matt 5:3}. Why? "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." That is the time when God can give you something. When you have ended your own resources, then he can give you his. That is why the Old Covenant is, "Nothing coming from God, everything coming from me," while the New Covenant is, "Everything coming from God, nothing coming from me."

You only have to look at yourself to see how much of your life is lived in that Old Covenant. You expect success by virtue of something resident in you: your ancestry, your training, your personality, your good looks or something like that. This attitude produces the extrovert, the kind that reckons on his resources: "I've got what it takes, I can do that." Now he may be very modest in his language. We learn all kinds of little subtle tricks to hide this kind of egoism. We say, "I have never really had any special training for that, but I have had some experience in it, and I will do my best." Thus we are subtly saying to people, "I have got what it takes." Or we look at the demands, the problem, the situation we are asked to enter into or perform, and we say, "I don't have what it takes. I can't do that. Don't ask me to do a thing like that. I am one of those people that was behind the door when the gifts were passed out, and I just can't do anything like that." But who are you looking at when you say something like that? Yourself! You are reckoning on your "unresources" but your eye is fixed on the same person, yourself. So both the introvert and the extrovert are wrong.

Most of us introverts always envy the extroverts and wish we could be like them; but, if we did, we would only switch to the extreme which is just as bad. So we don't improve our position by being that. What we need to discover is how to get off any trust in ourselves at all and trust in the activity of God, who has promised that he would be in us and work through us.

Philippians 2:13 has a beautiful promise in which Paul says, "Go to work to work out your own solution." (That is what he means when he says to "work out your own salvation" not in the sense of going to heaven, but of solutions to problems that beset you.) "Work out your own solutions," he says, "knowing that God is at work in you, both to will and to work that which pleases him." Now the only thing that pleases God is what God himself does. Anything a man does apart from God never pleases God. It is always a failure; it is always insufficient in some area. The only thing that can please God is perfection, and the only one who can perfectly work is God himself. Therefore, the only thing, the only life that is ever pleasing to God is the life lived by faith, that is, by expecting God to be at work in you. That is what faith is. That is why Hebrews tells us, "without faith it is impossible to please God" {cf, Heb 11:6}, and why God tells us himself that the only life that is pleasing to him is that which he himself does. That is the New Covenant.

It helped me a great deal to learn that the Apostle Paul did not know this for at least ten years of his life as a Christian. After he was converted on the Damascus Road, he made the same mistake that every one of us makes. He started out with a bit of knowledge of who Christ was and set out to convert the world for Christ by using the brilliance of his mind, the background and training he had, and even his ancestry as a Jew to convince the Jews. He thought he had what it took and he lists a most impressive array of credentials for us in Philippians, Chapter 3. "If any of you think that you are men of the flesh," he says, "I've got something more to glory in. I was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, born a Jew, circumcised on the eighth day, raised up as a Pharisee, trained as a Pharisee. I was blameless before the law. My morality was without rebuke in the eyes of the religious world in which I lived. My activity was zealous. I even persecuted the church," {cf, Phil 3:4-6a}. He had all these things going for him. So even after he became a Christian, he reckoned on the same things for success. But, when he tried it in Damascus, not one convert is recorded. Instead they organized a lynch party! Paul had to sneak out over a wall in a basket at night, just like a criminal.

Then he came up to Jerusalem, he tells us, and there he tried the same thing. He went in and out among the Hellenists (the Greek-speaking Jews) and tried to persuade them that Jesus was the Christ. This was his own

crowd. He was so sure that he had what it took to reach them. But they organized another lynch party in Jerusalem.

Finally, discouraged and defeated, Paul went into the temple to pray. The Lord Jesus appeared to him and said to him, "I want you to leave Jerusalem because they will not receive your testimony about me," {Acts 22:18}. And what did Paul say? He tells us in Acts 22. I am going to paraphrase a little bit, but in essence what he said was,

"Lord, you don't understand this situation. You are going to miss the greatest opportunity of your life. Do you realize the equipment I have to reach these people? I was one of them. I know their language. I know their customs. I know their attitudes. If anybody has what it takes to reach these Jews it is me. You don't know what you are doing sending me away from here. Why, this is the greatest opportunity you have ever had." {cf, Acts 22:19-20}

But Jesus replied in one word: "Depart!" {Acts 22:21a}.

Then he said, "Don't argue with me. I am going to send you far hence to the Gentiles," {cf, Acts 22:21b}.

So Paul was sent to the hardest place on earth, his home town, Tarsus. For ten years we never hear of him again, until Barnabas goes down to Antioch where a great awakening has broken out; but he comes down to help him, he is a different man now. He has learned to shift from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. He tells us in Philippians he learned a tremendous truth: that the things he once counted gain he now counts nothing but a pile of manure, compared with the richness and greatness of trusting in Christ to be at work in him {cf, Phil 3:8}.

Now that is the secret of life. That is the way man was intended to live. That is the way he did live in the beginning. When Adam was created he was a man indwelt by the Spirit of God, and therefore everything he did, he did by the power of God. Whenever Adam planted a tree, or weeded the garden, or picked up a shrub, or named the animals, or whatever it was, he did it by the wisdom and power of God. Therefore it was right. It fit the situation. It was done by God at work in him. Adam had a tremendous exhilarating sense of doing things right, knowing they were right, and doing so by virtue of the fact that he expected God who lived within him to supply what it took to do it. That is the New Covenant. When God gave him the choice of obedience, which involved Adam continuing to expect God to supply him with all the knowledge that he needed, Adam chose to disobey and he lost that whole relationship. The Spirit of God was withdrawn from his human spirit. He was plunged into the condition in which we are all born, that of counting on something in us for success. That is what destroys us.

This is basic to an understanding of human activity and the problems of human life. We have to teach people that the problem with them is that they are counting on the wrong resource. This is a painstaking lesson, one not easily learned. We must patiently set it forth and carefully show how it lies in the Scriptures, and then help people to recognize the flesh (the old life at work within them) and analyze various situations to see whether it was the Old or the New Covenant they are drawing on.

Nothing is more basic to getting people operating rightly than this. The Old Covenant is totally rejected by God. It is what the Bible calls "the flesh," and the "flesh cannot please God," {Rom 8:8 KJV}. The flesh results in death, which is the experience of negative qualities in life, like boredom, worry, anxiety, hostility, anger, greed, etc. That is death and that comes by trusting in something you think you have got in yourself.

This does not mean that people become robots. The choosing is left up to us, just as it was to Adam. The power of choice is what is given to men, not the power to do. The minute you choose to act, something else must supply the power within you. Either it is the old twisted form of life called "the flesh," or it is the new life from the Spirit which will produce "the fruit of the Spirit," {Gal 5:22}. But the key is that you must reject the old, then you can choose the new.

Most of us know something about this life in the Spirit. We try to live this way, but the trouble is that we try to hang on to both. I find this everywhere. Talk to people about Body Life, for instance, in a church beginning to

function this way, and you find they want to keep the whole program the way it is now and add Body Life to it. Nobody every wants to tear down anything or get rid of anything, but until they do so they cannot put in anything new. That is what Jesus meant when he said, "You cannot put new wine into old wine skins. You cannot put new patches onto old garments," {cf, Matt 9:15-16}. You have got to get rid of it and start with everything fresh, in a sense. But we want to cling to the old, a dependence on something in us, and add God to it.

Do you ever see that in your prayers? Do you ever come to God and say, "Lord, I have worked this all out, I want you to bless it"? What is that saying? "It all depends on me. I want you to make it work, that's all." That is trying to mix the old and the new, and it will never work. You cannot do it. God will never go along with that process. He just folds his arms and says, "If that is the way you want to do it, you do it. I'll watch you." And he watches us until we fall flat on our face. But when we are discouraged, after finding out it did not work, and cry out, "Lord, help me," he says, "Here I am. I have been here all along and I am willing to work through you right now, as long as you quit working, depending on yourself."

This means that we are agents, not instruments. God allows us to make the choices and he works through us. We very definitely have decisions to make in these matters, and without these decisions it won't work. But once we decide something, once we feel that we know what God wants us to do, then what do we count on to do it? That is the great question. That is what this New Covenant is all about.

Replies to comments and questions from the audience:

Both boredom and anger are fleshly reactions. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, patience, etc., and also excitement. God is exciting and his kind of life is exciting. But when you are living in the Spirit, it does not mean that you are keyed up to a high pitch all the time; I don't want to give that idea. But life in the Spirit is never boring. It may be frightening, almost. Life can be filled with such intense problems that you hardly know how you are going to get through them, but you are not bored. You may even be scared, for fear and trembling is part of the Christian life. But not boredom, or anger. There is a right kind of anger, but there is also an impatient anger that is wrong. For example, we will see somebody operating in the flesh and we get upset or irritated with them, so then we are operating in the flesh. This is why, in that beautiful story of the woman taken in adultery, Jesus judged the judges. He would not let them sit there and self-righteously point their finger at this woman. He pointed his finger at them and said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone," {cf, John 8:7}.

Q. Is there a point in your life when you really come into the New Covenant, and you can recognize it, and live in it for days or weeks?

A. I would say that it is very unlikely that you would live for days and weeks in the New Covenant, simply because the enemy we are up against is very clever. The flesh is very deceitful. It is very unlikely, in my judgment, that you would live even a full day in the Spirit. Be glad if it is a few hours. But you never have to live long in the flesh. That is the point. You may catch yourself living in the flesh. (I do not mean tempted to live in it, that is a different thing. We must distinguish between the temptation to get angry, or to envy or lust or whatever it is. That is not sin in itself. It is how we deal with it that makes the difference.) But if we yield to it, we ought not to yield very long. We ought to learn to quickly recognize the flesh. That is the point. Irritability, upset, impatience, anxiety, whatever it may be, immediately recognize it, renounce it as being no longer necessary to us, immediately flee to the Lord and lay it before him. Then we are returned to the Spirit immediately, and we go on until the next fall occurs (which may not be very far down the road).

So the Christian life is not a continual life of unbroken victory, although ideally that would be possible. Jesus undoubtedly lived that way, but we don't have that kind of understanding and recognition of the flesh, so we are apt to be trapped more. That is why the grace of forgiveness is provided for us, because those falls do not impede our progress if we return to the Lord. We have not lost it all by falling, since it did not depend on us in the beginning. If we ever begin to think, "Here I have been making it now for two and a half days -- and now look at me. I have fallen again and all that time is wasted." That shows you that you do not understand the New Covenant. It was not coming from you all that time anyhow. Return to your source of strength, thank

God for being shown what was wrong, and then go on.

Notice how Paul often speaks of himself as approaching a demand made upon him with fear and trembling. Jesus did so too. When he went into the Garden of Gethsemane, he said, "My soul is deeply troubled within me," {cf, Matt 26:38}. He asked the disciples to pray with him because of this. Fear and trembling is simply a recognition of weakness, of inability. It is a normal thing in human life. It is the way we ought to approach every situation. But don't stop there. It isn't just fear and trembling; it is fear and trembling that leads us to faith, to the confidence that God is there and he will do it. Therefore we need no longer fear and tremble. But to be frightened and feel a bit nervous or upset by any demand made upon us is a proper thing and not one that we should try to cure.

Q. It is easy to think of the New Covenant in terms of the Lord and the apostles, the New Testament, etc., but how about Moses and the Old Testament?

A. Moses is the symbol of the Old Covenant, but he lived by the New. The Old Testament saints did understand and live by the New Covenant, even though it had not yet been historically laid. The New Covenant is laid in the blood of Jesus: "This blood of the New Covenant which was made with many for the remission of sin," {cf, Matt 26:28}. But as the Old Testament saints were saved by the death of Christ, just as much as we, so they lived by his life, just as much as we. When Moses, therefore, was reckoning upon God to empower him to speak to Pharaoh and trusted God to fulfill his word that he would put his words into Moses's lips, he was living by the New Covenant. Now there were failures in Moses's life, just as there are in ours. He disobeyed God when he struck the rock, when he should have spoken to it. As a result, he was not permitted to enter into the promised land. But he himself was restored by the activity of God at work in him, even though a limitation was set upon his leadership. As Moses himself was restored to God at work in him and went on, so we can go on to be productive and effective persons.

Yet as a type, Moses stands as a symbol of the Old Covenant because he is associated with the Law, and the Law is always linked to the flesh. If there were no flesh, there would never have been any Law. Adam and Eve were never given the Law. They did not need it. They had the law written in their hearts, as they were trusting the work of God within them. They knew what was the right thing to do in any given situation and that is the way we are to live too -- by the Spirit. This is why Paul argues that the Law is ended the minute we believe. But the minute we disbelieve, the Law comes in again in order to show us our unbelief.

The Law as a standard of life will never change. The Law is nothing but an expression of the character of God, and God never changes his character. If we are to be like God, then that demand is always upon us, no matter how long the world, the heavens, and the earth last. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but these words [the words of the law] will never pass away," {cf, Matt 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33}, because they reflect the character of God. In that sense, the Law remains always. But when you believe in Christ, it is the end of the Law for you. You do not need the Law making demands upon you then. I am not talking about becoming Christian when I say, "believe in Christ," I mean trusting him as a Christian. In any moment that you expect him to be at work in you and to supply you with his life in you and you are counting on that, then you do not need any law. But the minute you stop doing that, you need law again. It is right there waiting to correct you.

In that sense, the Law only ends by faith. This is what Paul says in Romans: "Christ is the end of the law to everyone who believes," {cf, Rom 10:4 KJV}. Now don't quote that as, "Christ is the end of the Law." That would contradict what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: "The law shall never pass away," {cf, Matt 5:18}. Christ is the end of the law to everyone who believes. The minute you act by faith you are not acting by law, because faith and works are exactly contrary to one another. When you try to obey the Law because it is there, that is works. But when you respond to the God who is in you, and act on that basis, that is faith. Then you will fulfill the Law another way.

A Special Paper

Title: Authentic Christianity

By: Ray C. Stedman

Series: Single Messages -- Doctrinal Topics

THE AUTHORITY OF THE WORD

by Ray C. Stedman

In these last few weeks I have learned of five cases of Christians, some of whom were rather prominent Christian leaders, who have suffered total moral collapse, having made shipwrecks of their lives and marriages. In each case the first sign of impending disaster, the first outward mark of inward deterioration, was a shift in their view of the authority of the word of God. There is a very definite link between moral decline and the authority of Scripture, and I would like to begin this message with a passage which underscores that line. Reading from Paul's second letter to Timothy, chapter three, the first five verses, the Apostle says,

"But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress."

Now do not regard this as a prophecy to be fulfilled only in the end of the age. "The last days," as scripture uses this term, encompasses the whole period from the first coming of Christ to the second, that is, the present age in which we live. Paul is simply saying here that during the whole time of the last days there shall come recurring cycles of distress. He continues:

"For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Avoid such people."

In the remainder of the chapter he goes on to specify two individuals who fit this pattern and to give us by contrast his own way of life. Then he closes the whole section with a personal exhortation to Timothy, beginning in verse twelve.

"Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived. 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."

Notice how he moves from the theme of deterioration of faith and moral collapse to the one remedy and cure for the believer, an adherence to the written word of God. As Paul outlines it here, the defense of a Christian in a day of moral decline is a thorough acquaintanceship with the written scriptures, while any defection from faith which may occur is made possible only by an abandonment of these writings, in attitude at least, if not in act.

Now you know well that the word of God has been under attack for many centuries. Like an ancient castle it has withstood many assaults. Up to and through the 17th century these attacks were primarily outward. That is, they were an assault from without by men who tried to destroy the Scriptures by rather direct methods. History is full of accounts of book burnings, papal interdicts and even the murder of translators of the word of God. But these outward attacks against the Bible utterly failed. In the 18th century a new approach was made by the enemies of scripture. Instead of sending soldiers to attack the castle (to revert to my figure), the enemies of the Bible sent workmen---carpenters, bricklayers and masons, who came offering to remodel the whole structure. They said, in effect, "This is a good, strong building. It simply needs a bit of renovation here and there." They began to rearrange the structure of the castle of God's word. They drained the moat, tore down

the wall, removed the doors, and when they were through everything was quite different than it was before. There was no longer any castle there and no longer any defense for those who would seek a refuge.

As to any permanent or lasting effect on the church as a whole, this attack from those who stand in pulpits and those who sit in theological chairs in seminaries will, and has, utterly failed. For Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." No force will really overthrow the word of God; we never need to fear that. But as far as individuals are concerned, it is possible for these attacks against the Scripture to upset their faith, and it is this that Paul warns about as he writes to his son in the faith from his prison in Rome. Without attempting an exposition of this passage, I would like to declare to you four propositions which I feel must govern our thinking as we approach the subject of the authority of the Scriptures in this 20th century.

The first of these propositions is this: As Christians (and I am speaking now only to Christians), we have no right to hold a different view of scripture than that held by Jesus himself. That is the first fact we must hold in mind as we come to this subject of the authority of the word. To put it another way, the authority of the Bible rests squarely upon the authority of Jesus Christ himself. To be a Christian at all means that we have fully accepted the authority of Jesus. If we have not we are not Christians, except in name only. It is an utter inconsistency to say that we accept what the Bible says about Christ and reject what he says about scripture. We cannot say of Jesus that he is the image of the invisible God, the bodily expression of the fullness of God, that in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and that he is before all things and by him all things hold together---but he is quite wrong about Adam and Noah and Jonah and the rest of the Old Testament. You see the utter inconsistency of that position? We cannot call him Lord and say he has the right to choose our mates and to pick our line of work and to govern our life in all its attitudes and ways--even to trust our eternal destiny into his hands---but we cannot believe him when he speaks of the creation of man, or the sanctity of marriage, or the sinfulness of certain sexual acts. We are utterly inconsistent if we do.

We need only to read the New Testament to see that the Lord Jesus casts the mantle of his authority over all of the Old Testament and, by anticipation, over all of the New. Remember he said, speaking of the Old Testament, "the scripture cannot be broken." Over and over again he quotes from the Old Testament, usually the very books and passages which the scholars say are in dispute. But our Lord receives them, quotes freely from them, uses them as authority. In his own ministry, you remember, it was with the written word of God (incidentally from the Book of Deuteronomy, which is often under attack) that our Lord turned the tables on the enemy when he came to tempt him in the wilderness and utterly defeated Satan in his attack upon him.

Then there is that remarkable passage in Luke, the 24th chapter, when the Lord Jesus is speaking to his disciples after his resurrection and he takes them to task for their failure to believe the Scriptures. He says (verse 25):

"O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."

Now if we were to read that from the viewpoint and in the language of those who are attempting to tell us today that the Scriptures are no longer authoritative, we would read, I am afraid, something like this:

"And beginning with Moses, he demythologized all the legends to unveil to his disciples epistemological concepts of inauthentic being."

But this kind of language, so frequently employed today, does not illuminate the Gospel---it destroys it. It substitutes an incomprehensible jargon for the clear word of scripture. Imagine, for instance, sitting down beside a naked savage in some South American jungle and trying to explain existential concepts to him. You would simply have no gospel to preach. Yet it is this that is being widely touted today as a necessary requisite to the proper understanding of the Scriptures. But it is utter nonsense. It completely destroys the essential message of the Gospel in its simplicity. You may be an old and experienced Christian with a thorough knowledge of the Bible, or you may be a brand-new Christian who hardly has any knowledge at all of what it

says and have many questions about various aspects of it, but if you are a Christian at all and have received eternal life through believing on Jesus of Nazareth, you must, by that very act, also be subject to his authority in this matter of accepting or rejecting the Scriptures. That is the first proposition.

The second one is somewhat similar and grows out of it. It is this: As Christians we have no right to views of scripture which are different from the apostles' view of Scripture. The apostles, like our Lord, are our teachers. We are not theirs. It is Karl Barth who says, "We cannot stand and look over the apostles' shoulders, correcting their work. It is they who stand looking over our shoulders, correcting our work." The apostles, in writing the New Testament, everywhere declare that their authority is simply the Lord's authority. They, too, rest the authority of their words squarely upon the authority of the Lord Jesus. Paul says repeatedly, "I have declared unto you only that which I have received." In other words, this is not a fabricated message. It is not something borrowed from this philosophy and that authority and this way of thinking. It is not, Paul says, received from men at all. He specifically and clearly declares that he did not in any way receive his message from men, or even from the other apostles, but from the Lord Jesus Christ directly.

The apostles, as they write, are very conscious that the words of the message they preach are the words of God. Listen to Paul as he is writing to the Thessalonians, in his first letter, chapter 2, verse 13:

"And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God..."

There is a clear declaration that he was conscious of speaking more than his own thoughts, more than his own ideas, more than his own theological concepts. The apostles regarded each other's words in this same light. There is that striking passage in 2 Peter 3:15 where Peter says,

"And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures."

Peter makes very clear that he accepted Paul's writings as scripture, and the early church accepted these apostolic writings as the very words of the Lord Jesus right from the beginning. In view of this, when a professor behind a desk in Chicago or New York or London makes a pronouncement that differs from what Paul or Peter or James or John has said, then reject it, for that professor is some thousands of miles and some two thousand years too far away to make an adequate and proper judgment. These men who lived in the first century and associated with the Lord Jesus, who heard his words and who so ministered in power throughout the world of their day as to transform the generation in which they lived, knew far more about what God thought and said than any man studying theology today. So our second proposition is that, in thinking about the authority of the Word, we must remember that as Christians we have no right to a different view of scripture than that held by the apostles, or we cannot consistently call ourselves Christians.

Here is the third proposition: We can never discover the depths of scripture's insights into life without first accepting it as true and authoritative. What I am saying is that we must first believe scripture before we can understand it. As long as we keep asking, "Should this passage be here? Is it genuine, is it real?"

Has it been inserted? Is it a legend? Is it a fairy tale? Is it something that is merely the thinking of the apostles and was never in the mind of Christ?"---if this is our constant approach then we can never get around to asking, "What does this say to me? What does it mean? Where is the wisdom hidden in this that I need so desperately in my life?" Those students and pseudo-scholars who feel they are a final authority on what ought to be here and what ought not to be here never seem to be able to understand what is written. They never seem able to say anything about the depths of scripture or the teaching of it, for they exclude themselves from understanding by their attitude of judgment over it.

Let me clarify myself. There is, of course, a legitimate place for what is called "textual criticism." We do not have the original documents of the Scriptures available and, because we do not, we must reproduce them as

nearly as possible by a painstaking, careful comparison of one document with another. We must compare and decide what is the proper text. We are deeply indebted to scholars for the incredibly painstaking work that has been done in this area. The entire Bible has been examined like no other book ever written, word by word, letter by letter, by the greatest body of scholars that has ever concentrated its knowledge upon one subject. The task has been done and it has been well done, and we can trust our scholarly Greek texts and the careful English versions that are based upon them. There are paraphrases today that are helpful for reading but not necessarily trustworthy in the actual communication of truth, because they are only paraphrases. But a scholarly version, such as the King James or the Revised Standard Version or some of the later ones, can certainly be trusted.

Of course there are problems. There are certain minor inconsistencies in our texts today. There are difficulties in reconciling certain passages with other passages and certain accounts with parallel accounts, but these are simply the normal difficulties that obtain when you have more than one witness to an event, and they are differences of observation rather than differences of fact. Or they are failures in transmission of the text, scratches and stains which time puts upon any object, which neither impairs its beauty nor affects its utility. The texts that we have, therefore, can be trusted.

But my point is this: We can never understand the Scripture until we believe it first. You cannot understand nuclear physics unless you first believe the underlying axioms that have to do with this realm of human knowledge. You cannot understand chemistry unless you are willing to accept certain of the chemical formulas that have been proposed. You cannot believe anything until you accept it as genuine and put it to the test of experience, and this is true of the Word. When you believe that this book is from God and, as Proverbs says, "Cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures," then this book will reveal to you the marvels of a deliberately patterned structure that can only be of God's making, and reveal to you astounding grasps of life and explanations of how the human heart operates.

Many of you may have read Billy Graham's testimony in this regard. He says that as a young man, early in his ministry, there came into his life a time of doubt as to the authority of the Scriptures. There came questions as to whether the text as we have it could be trusted, whether this was the word of God or merely the ideas of men about Jesus. He was troubled by the questions that occur so frequently in these days. He went away by himself up into the mountains, taking his Bible with him, and there began to read it and read it and read it. He came at last to the place where he said to God, "I have seen enough of the transforming ability of this word to know that you are behind it. I know, Lord, there are many questions, many areas that I do not understand about this book, and take it by faith that it is your word and believe it and preach it as your word and trust that you will make clear to me what it means." It was from that time that Billy Graham's world-wide ministry of evangelism began. You well know that his favorite expression is, "The Bible says." He does not debate it with anyone; he does not question it; he simply declares it.

Which brings me to my fourth and last proposition concerning the Word. It is simply, scripture does not need to be defended, but simply declared. Charles Spurgeon's classic maxim puts it very forcefully. He said, "The Bible is like a lion. Who ever heard of defending a lion? Just turn it loose, it will defend itself." And so will Scripture! I must confess that I have totally changed my view on the place of apologetics in the defense of faith. I once thought that apologetics, the science of the defense of scripture, was especially needed to answer the skeptic and the agnostic. I remember how I would turn to archaeology, to logic, or to some of the scientific confirmations of scripture to try and convince a skeptic that the Word was true. But I have learned to do differently. I know now that apologetics may be very helpful for a Christian who is confronted with honest problems, but it is almost totally useless in appealing to a skeptic or to an honest agnostic. I once would approach such people with the question, "Do you believe that the Bible is the word of God?" Of course, they would say, "Yes I do," I was on solid ground. I knew where to go from there. But when they said to me, as they so frequently did, "No, I don't," I did not know what to say next. Where do you go if people reject what you must use as your authority?

But I know now that it was a mistake to ask the question in the first place. Why should I ask whether they believe the Bible is the word of God? How could I expect them to believe it? It is only the Christian who can have the necessary proof that this is the word of God for he has believed it enough to put it to the test.

Therefore, to make this whole matter of the inspiration of the Scriptures a fundamental of the faith that someone must agree to before he can become a Christian is absolutely wrong. It is putting the cart before the horse. No, all that is necessary is to use the Scriptures. If it is the word of God it will confirm itself. It will have in itself inherent authority. For after all, a word has power only because of who utters it. The word itself is useless. If a man who is a congenital liar utters a statement it may be very true but it is of no effect because he is a known liar. Mark Twain tells in one of his books of a man who committed suicide and hung a note on himself saying he had taken his own life. But the coroner's jury declared it must be false, he must have been murdered, because he said he had killed himself and he was known to be an habitual liar, therefore it could not be true. So a word has power, any word, only by virtue of the one who utters it.

The word of Lyndon Johnson has power not because Lyndon Johnson is a man (there are a lot of other men); not because he is a Texan (that authority has diminished considerably since Alaska entered the Union); not because he is a Democrat (their hour is coming); but the word of Lyndon Johnson has power because he is the President of the United States! As long as he remains President there is an inherent power in the word that he speaks by virtue of his office. Now if scripture is from God it will have inherent power. When I talk with someone who does not accept the Christian message, who challenges the Bible, I do not bother with apologetics, I go right to the Book. I quote the words of the Lord Jesus. I say "Well, Jesus said so-and-so." I confront that individual directly with the compelling truth that Jesus uttered and I find, again and again, that this has a power to go deep into the human heart, to pierce beyond all the surface objections which may be raised and to bring men face to face with the choice that they must make. I tell them of the change that this word has made in my own life, how this book has explained life to me, how it has led me from uncertainty and self-distrust into a place of certainty, into a rich awareness of life, into a place of rest and peace of heart and freedom from the fear of what is taking place on earth.

The whole testimony of this church is to the fact that it is the preaching and the exposition of the Bible that establishes its authority. We do not need to defend it, just declare it, proclaim it. Nothing explains the world situation as the Bible does. No philosophy that is current among men today ever comes to grips with international affairs like scripture. Take even the question of the origin of the world and the nature of it, let alone matters of political and international importance. Only in the light of scripture can one understand the total process of history. The very fact that in this ancient book, coming through such feeble and thoroughly human instruments, we have that which twenty or more centuries later is an adequate explanation of the things that are taking place in our own time, is a tremendous, powerful, compelling argument that this book is more than man's.

Now there is more I could say. There is the whole realm of the usual arguments for the inspiration of scripture, but I do not want to go into that now. I am talking primarily to Christian hearts who, like Timothy, are attacked by a subtle and devious philosophy which is attempting to undermine the authority of the word of God, especially in the realm of morality. Much of the moral revolution of our day, the awful collapse of moral standards in great sections of human life, is directly traceable to false concepts concerning scripture. We need again to hear the word of the Apostle to his son in the faith, "Remember the things which you have learned from childhood, these sacred writings which are able to establish you, to keep you, to thoroughly prepare you for every good work."

The choice that is left to us as Christians is very simple; it is always the same in every generation: either we accept the Bible as God's word to us, his own self-revelation, his own explanation of the affairs of life and of human history, or, as the only other alternative, we must rest our faith upon the shifting, complex, ever-changing authority of modern knowledge and human ability. It is either Christ or the critics, one or the other. One way leads to moral decline and final collapse; the other way brings us to illuminating insights into our own hearts, and into the processes of history and to the place of integrity and character.

Remember that the Son of God himself said, "I come not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejects me and receives not my words has one who judges him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." That is because the word of God is truth, it is reality, and the one characteristic that marks reality is unchangeability. Truth is always truth. If it were true ten thousand years ago, it is still true today. That is why a two thousand year old book is as valid today as it ever was, for truth is simply unchangeable. And it is the final measuring stick of any civilization or any individual life.

PRAYER

Our Father, what a marvel this book is. How wonderful that we should have it in our hands, and what a terrible tragedy that we should let it lie unopened, unread, unstudied week after week. Wake us up Lord. Help us to realize that here, by means of the Spirit interpreting it to us, you have given adequate and full knowledge to meet every devious and subtly deceitful philosophy in our world today. Make us men and women of the Book. Bring us back to it. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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WHAT THE BIBLE MEANS TO ME

by Ray C. Stedman

In a world generously supplied with con-artists, pitchmen, wordy politicians, and outright liars, it is a great relief to know there is a place where one can always hear the truth---the truth plainly and simply put, without fear or favor. That place is the book of God, the Bible. God is a Realist. He deals with everything and everyone exactly the way they are, and he knows what that is because he made everything and everyone. It is impossible for him to tell a lie, because he himself is Truth! He deceives no one and no one deceives him, for apart from him there is no reality.

It is only to be expected, therefore, that the Book that comes from him, though it comes through many different humans writing and speaking over many centuries, should nevertheless be characterized by truth. Jesus affirmed it as such. He prayed for his disciples, saying to the Father,

"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." (John 17:17).

The truth is not always easy for us to hear. Sometimes it pierces me and convicts me. Sometimes I wish I could evade it, and then I am reminded that it was sent to heal me. Often it encourages me and enheartens me. Sometimes it restores me when nothing else can do so. It confronts me with paradoxes of revelation which intrigue me and challenge me. It exposes the secular illusions of the day and reveals the destructive ends to which they lead. It deals honestly with uncomfortable concepts and opposes the strangleholds of tradition, correcting them with the authority of God.

I have learned to appreciate the Bible most because it brings me face-to-face with my God! Or at least the relationship is so real and personal that it seems to be a face-to-face encounter. My heavenly Father becomes more real and close than any earthly father. I can all but see my Lord and Savior standing beside me and talking to me as I read his words in the gospels. Sometimes the words of Scripture become so vivid and luminous that I feel like kneeling or even falling on my face before the majesty of God. No other book has such power to transport me beyond earth to heavenly places.

I am often made aware of the power of the Bible in other people's lives, as well. I see it awaken a response in many readers to seize and possess for themselves the promises of God. I have watched it repattern the minds of an entire congregation to view life biblically and realistically. For many, the Bible has unfolded to them the meaning of their humanity and clarified the way it was meant to function. It awakens compassion and delivers from selfishness. It arouses a sense of true worship, grounded in the truth and issuing from the spirit within. No wonder Jeremiah could say,

"When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty." (15:16).

Pasted in the front of my Bible are the words of Henry Van Dyke which I often pray:

Grant us the knowledge that we need,
To solve the questions of the mind.
Light Thou our candles, while we read,
To keep our hearts from going blind.
Enlarge our vision to behold,
The wonders Thou hast wrought of old!"

On "Binding Satan"

by Ray C. Stedman

After pastoring for forty years I can state unequivocally that the most common cause of spiritual weakness in a Christian (or a church) is a failure to recognize the flesh in its disguise of religious zeal. Like Peter flashing a sword in Gethsemane the fleshly Christian thinks he is doing God's will and fighting God's battles for him.

Perhaps one of the commonest expressions of this misguided zeal is the practice of "binding Satan" before Christian ministry is attempted. The Word of God gives no justification for this practice. None of the apostles utilized this approach and no Scripture commands Christians to practice it. It is an extra-biblical performance, arising from the desire of the flesh to look committed and powerful in the service of God. Christians are told to "resist the devil" but never to bind him. Resisting the devil is done by putting on the whole armor of God, as Paul describes it in Ephesians 6. The "binding and loosing" mentioned in Matthew 18:18 refers to the agreement in prayer of believers in line with the promises of God revealed in his Word.

Another form of this same error is to ascribe the manifestations of the flesh to the work of demons, which then are ostensibly "cast out" of an individual through a "deliverance ministry." But Galatians 5:19-21 clearly tell us that lust, hatred, discord, jealousy, rage, envy, sexual orgies, and the like are not the work of demons but of the flesh. It is impossible to "cast out" the flesh during this lifetime---rather it is to be subdued by recognizing its evil character, refusing to yield mind or body to its impulses, and turning immediately to Jesus for the supply of his strength and purity, as Romans 6:13 so clearly outlines.

It is plainly the work of pastors and teachers to help Christians identify the flesh in themselves, by means of the Word of God, and to follow the pattern the Word describes to keep the flesh in subjection to the spirit and the individual free to live as the Lord has already made provision to do.

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1).

TELL IT TO THE CHURCH: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

by Ray C. Stedman

Today we must do what we have had to do only three previous times in the 36-year history of Peninsula Bible Church. That is to obey the word of our Lord Jesus given in Matthew 18 concerning the handling of a serious moral failure in a member of this church. The passage begins with verse 15:

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to

listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

As we go through these words together let us remember that these are the words of Jesus, and as such they cannot be ignored. He is the Lord of the church, the Head of the body, and as such is dealing here with the procedure for handling unjudged sin in our midst.

It is clear in this passage that our Lord is dealing with a situation where sin has not been acknowledged as such. The normal way to handle sin in a Christian's life (since we all sin), is to judge it ourselves, to become aware by the ministry of the Word of God or perhaps by observation of someone else's life that something we are doing is clearly, unmistakably wrong, and to judge it and stop it. This kind of judging must go on in all our lives. Where it does there is no disciplinary action required. But our Lord is dealing here with those cases where, for one reason or another, we do not judge ourselves. Here he describes the process to be followed. This is not a single act, it is a process which involves four steps which are to take place over a period of time.

The first stage is a private meeting: 'If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.' (The words 'against you' are not in some of the better manuscripts, and many texts leave them out.) What this is really saying is, 'if your brother sins,' period---i.e., if your brother (or your sister) is clearly violating by his actions something that the Word of God says is wrong and does not do anything about it we are to go to him and tell him his fault between the two of us.

This, of course, is quite contrary to the spirit of the age. The world around constantly tells us that what an individual does in his private life is nobody else's business. In this election year we are being told that a politician's private life is nobody's business but his own (or her own), and we are not to judge or even take account of what kind of life he leads when we vote. But this is not true in the church. The church is a body, and members of that body belong one to another. Perhaps no two words appear more frequently in the Scripture than those words, 'one another.' We are to do many things to 'one another,' and one of them is to help one another when we do not see or recognize that what we are doing is wrong.

Notice that our Lord specifically says it involves a question of sin---and sin is defined by the Word of God. Jesus is not saying, 'If your brother irritates you, or offends you, or ignores you you are to go to him about that.' There is another great word in the Christian life that covers irritations: it is the word 'forbearance.' We are to bear with one another. We all irritate each other and offend one another and when we do we are to 'forbear' one another; we are to put up with it, to forgive it without saying anything about it to the person involved. But this passage is dealing with sins, and sins are defined for us in the Scripture.

In the letter to the Ephesians the apostle Paul sets forth some of the clearly sinful things that we Christians tend to do to one another.

"Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But fornication and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving." (Eph.4:25-5:4)

That is a representative list of some of the things that the Word of God defines as sin.

At this first meeting we are to go, as Paul instructs in the book of Galatians, 'in the spirit of meekness,' not self-righteously, not harshly, not with condemnation. Aware of our own vulnerability, we are to go to an individual and say, 'The Scriptures say that what you are doing is wrong. What do you think about it? You read the Bible. What does it say?' Thus we are to seek to lay hold of the individual's conscience and restore him to a spirit of repentance.

Notice this word in Matt. 18 is addressed to all Christians, not merely church leaders, elders or pastors. This is to go on all the time between believers wherever we see someone refusing to judge a wrong thing in his or her life. I want to say that this does happen here at PBC. Hardly a week goes by that someone in this congregation is not doing this with someone else. That shows a care and love for someone else and a desire to help. But only when we go in a spirit of awareness of our own vulnerability is it a valid approach.

Jesus continues, 'If your brother hears you,' i.e., if he accepts what you point out to him and ceases his sin, there is to be no further action. No one else is to know about it; We are not to talk to anyone about it. It is not subject for any further action by anyone. If your brother does not hear you, however, then others become involved.

Our Lord moves to the second step: 'But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.' The bringing of others into the situation is clearly designed to impress the erring brother or sister with the seriousness of sin.

This second step is pointing out that this sin cannot be ignored. We cannot shrug our shoulders and say, 'Oh, well, that is his business. Forget about it.' Others are to become involved. This kind of thing may occur several times, in a loving attempt to lay hold of someone's conscience and awaken him to the danger in which he has put himself spiritually and the hurt he is inflicting upon others. The witnesses, of course, serve to keep tempers down and to keep the reports of the meeting accurate in case anything further needs to be done. If this works, if when confronted with two or three the brother or sister who is erring listens, and ceases his sinful behavior, then nothing further need be done. Discipline has achieved its objective and forgiveness comes in.

But, Jesus declares, if there is still no repentance then a third step must be taken: 'If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.' This is the step to which we have come this morning regarding a certain situation in our own midst: we must tell it to the church. The reason for this is that the whole congregation may become involved in an attempt to reach the offender. It is not that we tell people in order that they might turn their backs on the individual or refuse to have anything to do with him. We are not to come as holier-than-thou judges or finger-pointing condemners but as fellow-pleaders for a change of heart, urging the individual in question to permanently cease from the sinful actions involved.

There are several ways to do this. If you ask, 'What can a congregation actually do at this stage?' I would say, first, pray for the offender. Prayer is everywhere urged in Scripture as a powerful weapon to change people's thinking and attitudes. Pray that God will grant repentance to the offender, that God will so move that he will turn and recover himself from the snare of the devil. And pray for those who have been hurt by the sin. Other innocent ones are always involved and they are being damaged and hurt; we need to support them and love them in prayer. So if you cannot do anything else, pray for such a one. In our bulletin this morning there is a notice about a special prayer meeting to be held here this week for prayer for this situation and any others that may be among us. We invite you to come for that purpose.

Then the second thing a congregation can do is to express love and concern to the individual involved. Urge him to repent, to give up sin and to give in to the pleadings of the body and of the Spirit of God. Especially is this true of people who are friends of the individual and have known him for a long period of time. The cooperative effort of many to help the one involved see what he or she has done is a very powerful weapon to turn him from evil.

Thirdly, individuals in a congregation can share with this person experiences they themselves may have had of finding God's grace sufficient in their own lives to resist evil or to turn from it once it has been discovered or indulged in. That will encourage the individual to realize that the only way out of his situation is to return to the Lord, who will forgive. If this works (and some time must be allowed to permit it to work), then nothing more

needs to be done. There is no need to bring the person before the congregation, demanding he tell the whole story, etc. There is no embarrassment or any public humiliation required. The purpose of all discipline is restoration, recovery, repentance.

But if the offender continues in sin and resists all pleas, Jesus sets out a final and fourth step which must be taken: 'If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.' In the culture of that day that was equivalent to saying that he was an unbeliever, not a Christian at all; that he had, by his deeds, declared himself not to be truly a believer, a genuine submitted believer in the Lord. What is suggested here is that the whole congregation look upon the individual differently. This does not require any kind of punishment. There are no penalties assessed. There is no attempt to humiliate the individual. The congregation begins to regard him as an unbeliever.

In his letter to Titus, Paul refers to certain men, of whom he says, 'Their very minds and consciences are corrupted. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds.' If one has resisted the attempts of many to bring him to a knowledge of truth, then this is the condition into which he has allowed himself to fall. He is to be treated, therefore, as we would treat any unbeliever in our midst: with courtesy, yet with sorrow for the sin and the hurt he is bringing on himself, but with hope for his ultimate redemption. He is not to have any role of leadership in the church or any teaching ministry within it. He is not to be recognized as being a believer; his deeds declare that he is not what he professes to be.

At this point we must take verse 18 very seriously. Our Lord underlines it with an introductory word, 'Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' What does that mean? Well, it means that God will act when and where the church can no longer act. When a church has followed carefully and lovingly through this whole program of redemption described here, and has arrived at the fourth step, that is all the church can do. Human effort to recover an individual can go no further. But God can go further, that is the point. What the church has done by faithfully obeying its Lord, God will continue to do in his own sovereign way in bringing about events and circumstances that will bear upon that person's conscience to make him see how wrong he is. If the offender is truly a Christian-as he may well be, despite the fact that his deeds do not support his profession-then he will be chastened by a loving Father.

There are many passages in Scripture, most notably Hebrews 12 and 13, for instance, that speak of this. That chastening can be ruthless. A loving Father can at times be very hard on someone whom he seeks to turn from an evil pathway. This is what the apostle Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians as 'being delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.' God does that, and it can be very painful. One of our members who went through this very process of discipline some years ago and has been restored to us and recovered by God's grace told me that in the years in which he was walking away from the church, away from the body of Christ and under the discipline of this passage, he went through a literal hell on earth. He found himself tremendously distressed---he had psychotic experiences that frightened the living daylights out of him. God can deal very ruthlessly with one of his own.

Now it may be that the offender has never been a Christian. In that case God may allow him to live out his days on earth rather peacefully and ultimately face the judgment that awaits him, as it does all who come to the end of their lives. In any event, it is in God's hands. The church is not required to take any further action.

Now we come to the moment that I intensely dislike. This has not been an academic study, as I am sure you realize. We have an actual case before us that requires this action. So with great sorrow and personal pain I must reveal the name to you and the sin of the offender whom we have been speaking of this morning. Let me say that this has been compounded in agony for all of us by the fact that this man has been an elder of this congregation for over 10 years; he has been a Bible teacher and a counselor among us. I refer to our brother, John Watkins.* About eight months ago, information reached us that he was involved in an extra-marital affair. One of our pastors met with him concerning this situation and the man admitted to this. He admitted it not only to this pastor at that first meeting but subsequently several times to all of us. In talking with him it came to light that this had been going on for a number of years. Further, because this was a financial drain upon him, he used his position as an elder to borrow extensively from several people in this congregation and has thus contracted a heavy debt under essentially false pretenses.

Though at the first meeting he was repentant, submitted himself to the elders' counsel, sought forgiveness from his wife and began the repayment of this debt, we have in recent days learned that he is still involved with the other woman and is unwilling to break off this affair. So we come reluctantly, painfully and sorrowfully to seek the involvement of the church, to ask all who know him to seek to turn him, to reach his conscience and deliver him. The apostle Paul instructs us in 1 Timothy concerning an elder: 'Never admit any charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.' Today we are simply attempting to be obedient to those words. We do so out of a deep sense of our own vulnerability. There is not one of us who could not have fallen into the same condition had we not taken hold of the resources that were provided to all in the Word and by the Spirit.

I am sure many of you have questions about this. Perhaps someone is saying, "How can this happen? How can a man to whom leadership is entrusted, who understands and is even teaching the Scriptures, who does personal counseling, how can he allow himself to be involved in such a thing as this?" The answer, of course, which is everywhere given in Scripture is, the deceitfulness of sin. Sin has a strange power to deceive us and to make us justify what we are doing.

I recently ran across an article written by Dr. Erwin Lutzer, the pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. In it he points out some of the popular lies of today that we often use to justify evil. Here is one of them:

We often allow ourselves to think that God is unfair in giving us passions and then restricting their fulfillment. We say, "I have this strong sex drive. I am not being adequately satisfied and I feel I have to do this." That is a lie. That is saying that our moods and our feelings are to govern us. Never in Scripture do we find that we are to allow our feelings to be in charge of our conscience. It is the other way around. God provides power for us, if we choose to use it.

Another widespread lie today is that by careful planning we can sin secretly without harm. That, of course, denies the word of Scripture that God cannot be mocked. He knows what we are doing. It cannot be hidden from him. He has ordained that 'if we sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption.' Nothing can change that. Nothing can evade it. It is equally true that 'if we sow to the Spirit, we shall of the Spirit reap life.' Nothing can change that. To believe we can sin in secret without penalty is a Satanic lie which permits us to go on in evil and into dangerous involvements that are extremely hurtful. We will find ourselves under the chastening hand of God.

A third lie is that a great enough pleasure is worth any discipline that God may impose as a result. But what a terrible deceit that is! You would agree if you could see, as some of us have seen, the terrible hurt that comes into a life that seeks to deliberately disobey the Word of God. No one can imagine how much it is going to cut and hurt and pain not only the individual but others as well. The degree to which that happens is often incredible. If it be true, as Scripture declares, that we are sowing a seed, then the harvest is always greater than the sowing. Thus we can only fool ourselves when we think it is going to be worth the pleasure that we experience.

Another lie is that we can live in a world of fantasy and still be committed Christians. Many among us, I am afraid, indulge themselves in fantasies, thought-sins, in playing with evil, thinking that because no one else can see it they are not being hurt by it. But our Lord Jesus informs us very clearly that even if we lust in our hearts we have committed adultery; and that too will be brought to light. Now it does not mean that a passing thought is itself a sinful deed. But if we play with it, if we deliberately bring it to our mind, if we seek after it and feed it with pornographic any erotic literature we are exposing ourselves to the judgment of God. We must firmly reject these lies and get on with living the truth as God has called us.

Someone else may say, "Why are we treating this so seriously? This is common in the world today. It is even common in the church today. Why do we take it so seriously?" The answer, of course, is, because the Word of God takes it seriously. The reason it does so is because any degree of sexual misbehavior directly attacks the most fundamental institution among mankind, and that is marriage. God takes that very seriously because marriage is at the root of proper social behavior. Marriage constitutes the warp and woof of the fabric of

society. When marriages begin to fall apart, as they have to a considerable degree in the last decades, the whole society begins to crumble. This is the explanation for the skyrocketing rises in drug addiction, homosexuality, moral breakdown, corruption in politics, etc., on every side. The underlying structure, the foundations of national life are disappearing. Thus God deals very seriously with this, and we must do so as well.

This is not easy to do. I personally dislike intensely what I'm doing now. But it must be done if we are to be obedient to the Word of God. So on behalf of the elders of this congregation I would urge you all to join us in trying to reach our brother, to help him to see how serious this is and to help him recover. We want to see him forgiven and restored, the improper liaison ended, and to be back again with his brothers and sisters in Christ. To that end we ask your involvement and your prayer.

This has been a sobering meeting. I cannot think of anything more fitting by way of closing than to stand quietly together and to commit this matter to the Lord in prayer.

Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, we are made aware by this passage of the purity of the church, of the holiness of our Lord, of the evil that destroys among us, of the cleverness of the devil in tricking and deceiving us by attractive lies. Forgive us all, Lord, and help us to be loving, faithful members one of another. We pray for our brother. We pray you will restore him, that you will deal with him, that this need not go to that last and final stage of being delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh. We pray for his wife and his children, that you will uphold them and strengthen them in this time. May we together share not only in the pain, but also ultimately in the recovery, and rejoice in your grace and in your mercy to us. We commit this, then, into your loving hands that you may do as seems best in your eyes. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*The name has been changed to protect those involved.

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THE CREDENTIALS OF JESUS

By Ray C. Stedman

During the days of his flesh Jesus made astonishing claims about himself which left his hearers gasping at his boldness and ambivalent over whether to stone him as a blasphemer or believe him as the Messiah. Many of them asked, "How do we know he is telling the truth? What evidence does he give?" In John's gospel the answer Jesus gives is recorded at chapter 5, beginning with verse 31.

He knew that the Law of Moses required two or three witnesses to establish truth. No one could be expected to accept his startling claims unless such witnesses could be found. To satisfy that requirement Jesus listed the evidence of his true identity.

He refers to two such witnesses in vs. 31-32:

"If I bear witness to myself, my testimony is not true; there is another who bears witness to me, and I know that the testimony which he bears to me is true."

Jesus himself is the first witness, but when he says that his testimony is not true he does not thereby imply that it is false; he simply means it would not be true in their eyes unless it was validated by another's word. In John 8:14 Jesus clearly states: "Even if I do bear witness to myself, my testimony is true, for I know whence I have

come..." But in his earlier reference he is simply recognizing the fact that in order to be accepted by the general public his witness must be backed by at least two others.

There is a profound psychological principle involved in this need for more than one witness. I have long noticed in my ministry a strange phenomenon. It is possible for people to hear certain truth preached for years and they never seem to believe it. But let a visiting speaker utter the same truth and I have often seen people's faces light up with understanding and afterwards they will say, "I don't think I've ever heard that before." I want to ask them, "Where have you been, my friend. I have been preaching that truth to you for years." Other preachers and speakers record the same phenomenon. I have learned not to be upset by this but to rejoice that at last they have seen the light, for God has ordained that only out of the mouths of two or three witnesses shall the word be established.

Though Jesus states that another witness bears a true testimony to him, he does not name that witness at this point. He will do so in a moment. But he goes on to name the third witness, who is one well known to this crowd of Jewish listeners.

"You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony which I receive is from man; but I say this that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light."

This is a clear reference to John the Baptist who had said four very specific things about Jesus. First, he announced Jesus as the long-expected, long-predicted Messiah, the one of whom the prophets had written. John identified himself as the forerunner of the Lord, quoting Isaiah's great word: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" Of that Lord, John declared, "the thong of his sandal I am not worthy to untie."

Second, John declared Jesus to be the Lamb who would be sacrificed for the sins of mankind. To his own disciples John said, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." Jesus was the innocent Substitute that would stand in every sinner's place, and taking our sins upon his own head would pour out his life's blood, thus permitting the Father to give us freely the riches of Christ.

Thirdly, John proclaimed Jesus to be the Baptizer with the Holy Spirit! He is the one who will send the Spirit to be a river of living water that will satisfy the thirst of men's hearts for life and truth. John baptized with water, as a symbol, but Jesus would baptize with the Spirit's reality.

Fourthly, John named Jesus as "the Son of God." He was the Word made flesh, God himself, Lord of heaven and earth, now become man. These Jews had accepted John as a prophet from God. They could not, therefore, consistently deny his witness concerning the Son. And in vs. 33 Jesus declares plainly, "he has borne witness to the truth." This was powerful evidence which the Jews had already partially received in recognizing John as a prophet.

It may sound strange to us to hear Jesus add, "Not that the testimony which I receive is from man; but I say this that you may be saved." He simply means he did not require testimony from anyone to know whom he was, but it may be of saving help to them since they had heard John. Again a strange phenomenon is involved. Men and women who pay no attention to the word of God directly will yet often listen attentively to someone who relates his own experience with God.

Recently I gathered with 650 other people to hear former Senator Harold Hughes, once Governor of Iowa, tell how God had drastically changed his life when he was a hopeless alcoholic. He had become so despairing that he was ready to take his own life but God met him and delivered him through much struggle and pain, and led him at last to a place of prominence and power. I watched people hanging on his every word, listening to a man describe what God could do. So Jesus says, "For your sake John has been sent, and I call attention to his witness in order that you might be saved." It is a marvelous insight into the compassionate heart of Jesus. He will use any approach that will cause people to listen to God.

He then says a very beautiful thing about John: "He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to

rejoice for a while in his light." John was a lamp, not a light! A lamp bears the light, holds the light, but it is not the light itself. When an electric bulb is not burning, it does not shine either. The lamp is there, but there is no light. Sometimes people are like that. They are lamps and have a capacity to be lights, but they are not shining. Why? Because they do not burn! John was the kind of lamp which shone brightly. He told people clearly where they could see, hear and know the Light.

Would you like to be a shining lamp? Let me tell you how to do it. Burn! Let the truth of God fuel your heart till it begins to burn. When you understand from the Word what God proposes to do with a life that belongs to him, your heart will begin to burn, and when it burns you will start to shine. You have probably sung the little chorus:

"This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine."

Here is how to do it. Burn!

Now Jesus comes to the witness whom he feels is the most important one; the one of whom he said earlier, "There is another who bears witness of me, and his witness is true."

"But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear me witness that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen; and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe him whom he has sent."

With these words Jesus declares that the Invisible God himself, the Father of glory, is the truly formidable witness who corroborates the claims Jesus makes to be the Son of God, the Source of all life physical or spiritual, and the coming Judge of all the world.

That witness of the Father is given in three different ways. It was given when our Lord first came to earth and it is given yet today in the same three ways. It is the way the Father backs up unmistakably the words of the Son.

The first way is through the works which the Son does. Jesus refers specifically here to his healing of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda. These people listening to Jesus had seen this man who had been ill for 38 years. They saw him no longer in the weakness of paralysis, but functioning now in strength and full normalcy. He was standing right before them so they could not deny the miracle. "These very works which I am doing," Jesus declares, "are the witness of the Father that He has sent me."

"But," you may say, "that was two thousand years ago. If God would only witness like that again today I could believe in him." Well, God does sometimes witness like that today. I have a letter received a few months ago from a prisoner in a California prison. This man found some of our Discovery Papers (printed messages) in a trash bin and, reading them, came to faith in Christ. He subsequently led many of his fellow-prisoners to the Lord. In this particular letter he says several of the prisoners, including himself, took a Bible correspondence course. When they finished the course the chaplain of the prison arranged a graduation exercise to encourage them. The prison authorities allowed them to have a special room and provided Kool-Aid and cookies, even graduation gowns and caps, and invited friends and relatives of the prisoners to attend.

At the festivities was a little eight-year-old girl, severely crippled, wearing heavy leg braces, and on crutches. She said to my friend, "My mother has left me so I can't get any cookies. Could you get some for me?" He immediately did so and sat down and began to talk to her about the love of Jesus and the way Jesus went about healing people and ministering to them. While he was speaking she interrupted and said, "Mister, if Jesus healed all those sick people, and you say he still lives today, why can't he see that I am crippled and heal me?" For a moment he was at a loss to answer, but then realized that though he could not heal, it was possible for Jesus to heal through him. Let me now read directly from his letter to describe what followed:

"So, with over sixty people in that crowded room, I asked the child if she wanted me to pray for her that Jesus would touch her legs. She not only said, "Oh yes," but she began to remove the braces from her legs. It jolted me in one way, but I placed my hand on her head and began to pray. I felt the holy power of God there with us. And that child started praising God. She bolted out from under my hand, left the chair running, without her braces. But as she left the chair she picked up her crutches, ran a ways, still giving glory to God, then held the crutches over her head in a cross, running around all over the visiting room. Praise God! What a witness to God's power!

"Her mother thought something was wrong with her child, hearing her loud cries of praise and joy, and she came bursting into the visiting room from the outside visiting area. When she saw her little girl running about without crutches or even braces, she fainted dead away. Now, Brother Ray, I just wish you could have seen the peoples' faces. No one in all that crowd and commotion missed what had taken place. All they knew is this child had much difficulty to get around or move, let alone walk. She was seen by everyone as a poor, deeply crippled child, so it was an amazing miracle to suddenly see her just running all over that visiting room. And because of all that commotion they ordered the visiting area cleared and I slipped out and came back to my cell. Only then did the full impact of what had just happened hit me. God performed a miracle before my very eyes. He unleashed a little of his power for me to witness."

I have been in touch by letter with this man since, and learned he has seen this little girl come back to the prison with her mother and walking normally. This prisoner has made no effort to capitalize on this incident or exploit it to his own glory. He is rejoicing that God's power can still be manifest today, whenever he so chooses.

Other miracles of this sort occur today from time to time. They are a witness from the Father of the truth about Jesus. But, it must be quickly added, there are many phony miracles too. So called faith-healers abound today who work upon people's psychological motivations to produce what look to many like real miracles. But God is still at work to deliver where he chooses. In the case of the man at the pool of Bethesda there was confirmation given that Jesus is truly who he claims to be.

But there is also another way the Father bears witness. It is indicated in the words, "And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen." What is this invisible, voiceless witness which nevertheless confirms the words of the Son? It is what is frequently called today, "the conviction of the Spirit." It occurs within the conscience of men and women; an inner witness to truth, even sometimes when the mind is consciously denying that truth. Some years ago I talked with a highly intelligent electronics engineer---a man who prided himself on his high IQ. He listened to me and volubly argued against the need of salvation for himself. But, suddenly, as he was trying to maintain an intellectual argument, he dropped to his knees and began to plead with the Lord to enter his heart. C. S. Lewis writes that on the night he was converted he was "the most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England." His mind was still trying to find a way to escape while his heart and will were being captured by the witness of the Father through the Spirit within him.

Again, listening to Senator Hughes, I was impressed anew by this phenomenon. He told of reaching a point in his life where his wife and children had left him and he had lost his work. He ended up drunk, sitting in a bathtub, with the barrel of a gun in his mouth and his finger on the trigger. But he sensed within an agonizing cry of despair. He called out to God and immediately felt a spreading sense of peace that helped him through the crisis of the moment. God led him along until he was at last free from the grip of alcohol.

Such is the power of God to bear inner witness. You may be reading the Scriptures, or listening to a message by tape or in person, and suddenly you find you are not just playing games or toying with some religious ideas. You are faced with total reality. The Spirit nails you and you cannot escape. That, too, is the witness of the Father.

Then Jesus turns to the third way the Father bears testimony to him. He said to those listening:

"You do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe him whom he has sent. You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have

life."

What a strange paradox! These men were painstaking students of the scriptures, spending their whole lives counting the words and memorizing great sections of it, committing themselves wholly to it because they thought the knowledge of Scripture would give them life. There are many like that today: students and scholars who search the Bible but never find Jesus. It is because, as Jesus declares, "They (the scriptures) bear witness to me." It is he who gives life, the scriptures point the way to him, but he alone can save.

The scriptures he referred to are what we call the Old Testament. Read that book with the object of looking for Jesus and you will find him on almost every page! He appears in type and shadow, in sacrifice and priesthood, and in clear, burning prophecy. The theologian, F. Godet comments:

"We see from this passage how Jesus beheld Himself in the mirror of the O.T. There, He recognized His own figure so clearly that He thought it impossible to study the book sincerely and not come to him immediately."

It is possible to study the Bible, even to give your whole life to it, and never see him. These people thought what many today think, that knowledge is power, and education is life, and if you get a knowledge of what God does you will have life. Someone has well described the syndrome this way:

"Trained men's minds are spread so thin
They let all sorts of darkness in.
Whatever light they find, they doubt it,
They love not light--just talk about it."

How can these people recognize truth and yet turn from the One of whom it speaks? We who are Gentiles point to the Jews and say, "How can you read the New Testament and not see that it fulfills all the prophecies about Jesus?" Sometimes we ask, "Why do the Jews reject the Messiah so clearly made evident in their own scriptures?" What we fail to see, of course, is that millions of Gentiles are doing the same thing. We believe that Jesus is the Messiah, yet many do not come to him. "You refuse to come to me," our Lord declares. The problem is the will. "You choose not to come to me, that you may have life," he is saying. If they had come they would have been given life--but they chose not to come.

He goes on to tell us why.

"I do not receive glory from men. But I know that you have not the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"

Here Jesus puts his finger on the true reason for stubborn unbelief. Why would someone read the truth, know it to be truth, know that it speaks of Jesus and know him to be whom he claims to be--and still refuse to come to him? The answer is, Jesus says, because he wants the open praise of men and not the praise of God. He wants glory now, before men, and not glory in heaven some day. Proudful ambition is the deadly enemy of truth. Such a one seeks fame, recognition, prestige. He wants to be treated with respect and even reverence--now! He loves the praise of men so much he is unwilling to set it aside to receive the glory of God. That is the real problem.

There is a terrible danger in that, Jesus declares. "I have come in my Father's name (with the corroboration of the Father), and yet you do not receive me. All right, another is coming in his own name (without any evidence other than his own claims), and you will receive him!" Most scholars feel that our Lord is here referring to the Antichrist who is to come. Jesus is saying that he came backed by the evidence of the word, of the Spirit, and of the Father--visible evidence. He came with the proper introduction: John the Baptist opened the door, as it was predicted he would do. Yet these men would not receive him. Very well, Jesus is saying, there is coming another Christ, one who will make grandiloquent claims that he can do for you what you have always wanted done, and saying things you have always wanted to hear. And you will accept him--only to be betrayed by him!

That is the great danger of rejecting truth when you know it to be truth. You open yourself up to deceit and infinite loss. His words are very plain. How can one believe who looks only for his own advancement, is only out to please himself. When you are committed to such a philosophy, how can you follow Jesus? These mutually exclusive concepts are seen all through scripture. You cannot love the world and love the Father. You cannot follow the Lord and the devil. You cannot drink the cup of God and the cup of demons. You cannot have it both ways.

Now Jesus comes to his final words:

"Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; it is Moses who accuses you, on whom you set your hope."

The very one they thought they were obeying is the one who will finally tell them they have ignored his words about Jesus. Moses, whom they are using as their excuse to persecute Jesus, will instead become their accuser. Many are in the same place today. I have heard people say, "When I stand before God I will have a lot of things to say to him. I don't think he has treated me very well. I've had a bad deal in life, and I'm going to tell him so." But on that day they will stand absolutely mute before God, their own memories testifying that he is right and they are wrong. So Jesus adds the clincher.

"If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

That is a radical principle! We think that if someone does not believe something what he needs is more information. But Jesus declares that will not work. If you do not believe truth you know, you will not believe greater truth when you hear it. If you do not respond to what you know to be true now, you will not respond if further truth is given. That is what Jesus is saying. With that searching word he brings his public discourse to a close.

Where does this leave us? We have the witness of John the Baptist, the witness of the Father through miracles, the Spirit, and the word, as well as the witness of twenty centuries of testimony of the power of Jesus to free men and women from their chains, turn them around, heal them, and make them whole. Hundreds of thousands of voices bear witness to that fact. Where do we stand if we continue to pursue the empty voices of the world, and seek for positions of power and influence apart from the will and glory of God?

These are searching words from Jesus. I cannot make them easy words because Jesus did not make them easy. They are words that force us to face ourselves in the light of reality. Where are you going in life? What are you doing with your life? This is a critical hour in history. No more critical hour has ever come. Let us face the choice which Jesus demands and submit ourselves to His loving Lordship.

ON DISPENSATIONALISM

by Ray C. Stedman

In this series of studies we are taking up a few subjects which need further explanation and amplification. They center around great themes which run through the Scriptures. Therefore these studies are not the exposition of any one Scripture passage, but are an attempt to gather up various passages and teachings in one connected theme. In our last study we looked together at the knotty problem of legalism, and at how it pervades the whole Christian church. Now we want to take a problem of a somewhat different nature---the teaching of Scripture about the dispensations, the on-working program of God as it unfolds through the course of history.

Perhaps I can best introduce this to you with a personal word. I grew up as a young Christian at a time when the great dispensational Bible teachers were household names in America---men like William R. Newell,

whose books on Romans and Hebrews were a great help to me as a young Christian; Dr. A. C. Gaebelien, who was an immigrant from Germany and became a marvelous prophetic teacher and conference speaker in the Twenties and Thirties of this century; and Dr. James M. Grey, who was the successor of Dr. Reuben Torrey, the founder of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. Dr. Grey also became president of Moody Bible Institute and was a great Bible teacher. And then, of course, that prince of expositors and dispensational preachers, Dr. H. A. Ironside, who was for many years the pastor of the Moody Bible Church in Chicago, and who was in some sense my patron saint, since I traveled with him during the last year of his life.

At that time, when I was just a young Christian, the Scofield Reference Bible was the hallmark of evangelical Christianity. You simply couldn't be a Christian if you didn't have a Scofield Bible tucked under your arm---at least that is the way it seemed. The Scofield Reference Bible was edited by Dr. C. I. Scofield, a lawyer who became converted to Christianity under the ministry of D. L. Moody. He studied many of the Plymouth Brethren writings and put together a tremendous set of very helpful reference notes that were issued as the Scofield Reference Bible. He became the great teacher of dispensationalism to a whole generation of people.

It was Dr. Scofield who provided the classic definition of a dispensation. In the first chapter of Genesis he has a note which says, "A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect to his obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God." He saw through the course of history seven periods of time in which God was doing different things with men. He called them: (1) the "dispensation of innocence," which covered the time before the fall when Adam and Eve were in the Garden, in fellowship with God; (2) the "dispensation of conscience," which followed the fall and extended to the time of Noah, when men lived according to their consciences; (3) the "dispensation of human government," which came in after the flood and went from Noah's time until that of Abraham; (4) the "dispensation of promise," which began when Abraham was given various great promises of God by which men were to live, as Dr. Scofield saw it, until the time when Moses brought the law. The (5) "dispensation of law" ran on through many centuries until the coming of Jesus Christ, who introduced (6) the "dispensation of grace" in which we all live, and which is yet to be followed by (7) the "dispensation of the kingdom," which many call "the millennium," the thousand years of Christ's rule on earth which is yet to come. Those are the seven dispensations that many of you have been taught, and as I grew up understanding them.

I remember so well some of the slogans of dispensational teaching. One was, "Rightly dividing the word of truth," borrowed from 2 Timothy 2:15 where Paul exhorts young Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." To the dispensational mind, that meant dividing up history according to these dispensational distinctions "rightly dividing" it so that you have a clear understanding of the divisions of time.

I have since come to understand that this verse doesn't refer to that. It is really talking about hermeneutical or interpretational principles. You are to handle the Word of God according to clear-cut laws of communication, and not go off on a tangent, on various doctrinal hobby horses, but to "plow a straight course" through the Word of God. That is literally what the phrase means.

Another of the phrases of that day was "The Great Parenthesis," which had to do with prophecy. It took note of the fact that seemingly God has interrupted his program with the nation of Israel, that at the Cross this nation was scattered abroad across the face of the earth, and God introduced the church. The church age will run its course until the Great Tribulation, and then God will again deal with the people of Israel and wind up this age with a resurgence of the prominence of the nation of Israel. The period in between, then, is called "The Great Parenthesis," the time when God is working with the church, as opposed to Israel. Now, there is a good deal of truth in some of these teachings, and these men of God were greatly used to help clarify our understanding of the Scriptures from these points of view.

Another of the slogans I heard frequently was, "All Scripture is for us but it is not about us." This was an attempt to show people that certain parts of the Scriptures seemingly did not apply to the church or Christians today but were addressed only to the Jews. And there is some grain of truth running through this as well which we need to understand. It certainly was pointing out a very important matter.

All of this, of course, found its final expression in the ministry and leadership of Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer,

who was the successor of Dr. Scofield at the great Scofield Memorial Church, in Dallas, Texas, and who founded, as most of you know, the Dallas Theological Seminary, of which I became a student in 1946. It has been 22 years since I graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary, and people frequently ask me, "Are you still a Dispensationalist?" That is what I am trying to answer this morning. The answer, I think, is "Yes, but with modifications." I want to explain those modifications to you, if I can.

I no longer agree with Dr. Scofield's definition, because he starts out "A dispensation is a period of time..." Though a dispensation has some relationship to time, time is not the essential element. I want to explain that in a few moments. I much prefer the use of the biblical terms "age," and "times and seasons." These are biblical phrases which mark the way God works in the course of history. We have the "age of grace"---we are living in it today. Jesus, you remember, spoke of the "times and the seasons" to his disciples. He said they are in the Father's power---the Father administers these various times and seasons in human history.

But you can't study the Bible without realizing that undoubtedly there are time distinctions which must be recognized. God hasn't always done everything with man in the same way. There has been a progressive unfolding of truth across the course of history, and we must recognize the various steps God took in that process. All Bible students recognize this. Therefore, in some sense, all Bible students who take the Bible seriously are dispensationalists. You are, for instance. You don't bring a goat or a sheep to church to offer as a sacrifice, which indicates that you are a dispensationalist, because you understand that those requirements have now passed away and God isn't demanding this of men any longer. I doubt if you have a tree in your back yard which you feel forbidden to eat the fruit of. Yet Adam and Eve had such a tree. This marks a difference, a change of "dispensations" since that time. And we gather for church services on Sunday morning, instead of on Friday evening as the Old Testament saints did. This marks a recognition of God's differing dealings with men---a change of "dispensations".

This word, "dispensation," is a biblical word. It is found in the King James Version in several places. It comes from a Greek word, *oikonomia*, from which we get, in English; **economy**. In the Revised Standard Version it is usually translated "stewardship" or, in some places, "plan." It appears in Ephesians 1:10 where the apostle Paul speaks of "a plan for the fulness of time." In Ephesians 3:9, Paul speaks of a "dispensation" or "stewardship" which was committed to him, which he calls, in the RSV, "the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things." This is the word we are dealing with. Literally, it really means "the law of the house"---*oikos* is house and *nomus* is law; so *oikonomus* is the law of the house. It has to do with order and regulation within a household. You have your house-law and I have mine. Mine is different from yours, I presume, and to that degree I live in a different dispensation in my house than you do in yours.

For a long time we had neighbors next door to us who evidently had a very loose law of the house. Their yard was neglected, with trash lying all over it. The lawn was allowed to die out. The paint cracked and peeled off the house and the whole place looked shabby. We were were sorry they had such loose ideas about housekeeping. But now some new neighbors have moved in, and their house-laws are much different. The yard has been planted to a beautiful green lawn, and the trees and shrubs are being trimmed. The house is being kept clean and in order. Regular hours are being observed, and the whole neighborhood is thankful for the change of dispensations which has come in.

In my opinion, a great deal of damage has been done to our understanding of the Scriptures by linking dispensations with time. There is a certain element present which links with time, but essentially a dispensation has nothing to do with a period of time, as such. Let me illustrate. In John 1:17 you have a verse that dispensationalists often use. John says, "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." This has been construed to mean that a "dispensation of law" was introduced by Moses which covered the entire Old Testament period. And the people of the Old Testament lived primarily under the law and tried to fulfill the law. But, in the New Testament, Jesus changed all that, set aside the law, and introduced grace and truth. And now it is by grace and truth that we live.

But that is very confusing, because it ignores the fact that there was grace and truth running through the Old Testament. Right in the middle of the law, and the struggles of the people of Israel to obey the law, was the provision by God---given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, as we have seen in our recent studies in the book of Leviticus ---of grace and truth. The entire system of sacrifices was God's gracious provision to enable people

to escape from the thunderings and cursings of the law. And it is a picture of the work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, grace and truth were as much available, and as much a part of the life of God's people, in the Old Testament as they were in the New. They didn't begin only when Jesus appeared in the flesh, as John 1:17 would sometimes be made to seem to teach. You see, it is the attempt to link them to time which is the confusing ingredient.

This verse is actually referring not to any periods of time but to the instruments through which law, and grace and truth, came. Moses was merely a man. He was a servant in the household of God, as the book of Hebrews calls him, a man able to expound and explain the character of God as set forth in the law. Moses was given that privilege. But law will never redeem, will never save. Knowing what God is like, or what you should be like, will never help you, because you can't do it. So grace and truth came in, through Jesus Christ, the son of God, the Redeemer---God at work among men. Only he could give grace and truth, but he gave them as much in the Old Testament as in the New. That is the point. So it isn't two periods of time which are marked out in this verse. It is really a reference to the origination of these two great themes in the Scriptures.

Because of this confusion, many Dispensationalists have rejected, for instance, the Sermon on the Mount, the great passage in Matthew 5 through 7 in which our Lord Jesus taught such marvelous truths about the character and nature of the Christian life. Many Dispensationalists say, "No, this doesn't belong to us. This belongs only to Israel. It is to be fulfilled in the kingdom." Because that passage incorporates the Lord's Prayer, many Dispensationalists refuse to pray the Lord's Prayer. Yet this is the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray, and it has great value and meaning for Christians today. Some go even further and apply much of the Gospels to the kingdom age. Some reject water baptism as being inapplicable today. Or even the Lord's Supper, they say, doesn't belong to us but is only to be celebrated in the millennium yet to come. And some Dispensationalists set aside all the apostles except Paul. They say that Paul is the apostle to the church, and that he is the only one we should read, that the rest were Jewish Apostles---James, and Peter, and John---and their words do not have any significance to us, but only to Hebrew Christians.

These distinctions have all been made, in my judgment, because of an attempt to link the idea of a dispensation with time. But it isn't a time period. A dispensation represents a level of understanding of God's truth. And it also has to do with the divinely chosen method by which that truth has been made known.

For instance, God did choose the sacrifices and the offerings and all these other pictures in the Old Testament as a way of teaching truth. And in Galatians Paul says, "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." But this doesn't mean that people had to wait for twelve hundred years---the whole time from Moses to Christ before they could come to Christ.

No, the law was teaching them something about Christ all during this time---through the sacrifices and the offerings. And they could come to Christ through those means. That is what Paul means. At first they started out merely on the kindergarten level---looking at these pictures that God gave. Then they began to understand what the pictures meant, and so the level of their understanding rose higher and higher until it brought them to Christ, whom they saw as pictured by these offerings and sacrifices. and they trusted his work on their behalf, just as we do today. Thus they entered a new dispensation even back in the days of the Old Testament. I will say more about that in a moment, but I think it is an important distinction we need to observe.

You see, it is possible for a single individual during the course of his life to pass through many dispensations. Take for instance a savage living in the jungle, who is an animist or a worshipper of idols or images. He is living, Dr. Scofield would say, in the "dispensation of conscience," in which he is responsible only to his conscience for guidance. But then, let us say, some Jews come along, and they get acquainted with him and begin to teach him the Old Testament revelation of God through Judaism, the law of Moses and the sacrifices, and he becomes a Jew. Well, now he has moved into what Dr. Scofield would call the "dispensation of the law." He understands something of that further revelation. His understanding of God has been greatly increased, but it is still far short of what the New Testament sets forth---all this according to a Dispensationalist's point of view. Finally some Christians come along, and this savage is led to Christ, born again, is taught the New Testament. Now he has moved into the "dispensation of grace". But he is the same man---just at various stages of understanding in his life---moving from one dispensation to another.

So a dispensation is not so much a period of time as it is a level of understanding, which increases gradually as men begin to grasp the truth that God has given. And it is this that Paul means is the process of a schoolmaster---starting you out on the kindergarten level with pictures about God, and moving you on until you see the real thing: an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ, the living God.

The last point of disagreement I have with the classic picture of dispensationalism is its tendency to view individuals in the past as locked into a pattern of truth that they cannot rise above. That is, dispensationalists often teach that the Old Testament saints did not understand and did not experience God in the same way that we do today, that they lived at a lower level of understanding and experience than we, and they couldn't come up to ours because ours is based on a fuller and fresher revelation of truth.

But I would have to disagree strongly with that. As I read of the Old Testament men and women of God, I find that I really can't improve very much on what they experienced of God. Take men like David and Abraham and Isaiah and others. When David writes in the Psalms about how he felt in relationship to God, I find myself merely echoing what he says. Nothing that I have experienced has ever gone beyond what David has known. He cries, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear. The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid." I can't beat that. That is what the Lord is to me, but he is no more than that. He is the strength of my life, and I see no difference between that expression and that of the apostle Paul when he says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

When you read Isaiah, you see beautiful descriptions of his understanding of the being, the wisdom, the knowledge, and the character of God, of his grace and his abiding presence. He writes to the people of Israel and says, "Even youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall fall exhausted. But they who wait and walk and not faint." I can't beat that. These men may have begun at a lower level than we do. They may have learned it by a different process, but they grew by faith into an understanding of God.

Abraham is said to be the father of the faithful. That is, everyone who has ever exercised faith walks in the steps of Abraham. He doesn't go beyond him. He simply follows him. He attains the same relationship with God that Abraham attained. And Abraham was called the friend of God. He is set forth as the example of those who follow, so that we become children of Abraham, walking as Abraham walked---children of Abraham, by faith in Jesus Christ. Abraham was taught of God and learned of God and came into an understanding of God. And the promise that was given to Abraham is promised to us. Read what the book of Galatians has to say about this. Paul bases much of his argument on the fact that the promise of the indwelling Spirit, which was given to Abraham and experienced by Abraham, is exactly what is given now to us who are Gentiles---not Jews at all---but called to follow according to the promise and grace of God.

So, you see, faith has a way of eclipsing time. Faith is a way of surmounting time and eliminating it, if you like. When you live by faith in the Word of God, you are able, as the book of Hebrews puts it, to "taste the powers of the age to come." The age to come hasn't come yet in history, but it can come in your experience. You can live in the millennium now, in your inner life. You can know the presence of God, live in the city of God, walk in the midst of the garden, with the river of life flowing through it and the tree of life on each side---in your experience, now, by faith---although it hasn't yet come in history. Faith is that marvelous way by which the people of God in any age are able to enter into the truth of God.

You see this so marvelously in David, for instance. It is true that David was brought up under the law and the sacrifices and offerings, and he brought his lambs and goats and calves and bulls and sheep like everyone else. But as he brought them, he was listening to what God was saying by them, learning what God meant by these symbols. And there came a time in David's experience when he no longer felt it necessary to offer offerings not that he quit entirely, any more than, for instance, we who understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper no longer observe it. Of course we do. Merely understanding what it is getting at doesn't stop us from observing it. But in the 51st Psalm, after David has committed the terrible sins of murder and adultery and has covered them up but God finally has exposed them, David cries out for forgiveness, and he thanks God for the washing and the cleansing of the Word in his life. Then he says, "Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, else I would bring it." David understood what these things meant, and he had passed beyond the need actually to bring these things, for, he says, "The sacrifice acceptable to God is an obedient spirit and a contrite heart." This is the sacrifice God wants.

And the Lord Jesus reminded the Pharisees on one occasion of an incident in David's life when he and his armed men came into the tabernacle and took the showbread---the twelve loaves of bread expressly designed to be the priest's food and limited only to the priests---and yet David and his men, who were not priests, ate the showbread. And Jesus said to the Pharisees, "What do you make of that? You dispensational legalists what do you think of that?" Of course, Jesus understood that David had come to understand what the showbread meant, and that he had passed then beyond the picture to the real thing. So, by faith these men and women of old entered into all the truth of God that we do today.

Now, there is a difference between the church and the nation Israel, and here dispensationalists make some proper distinctions. It is important to understand these distinctions, because this is what gives us a grasp of what God is doing in history. If you don't make these distinctions and understand what the biblical definition of a dispensation is, you will never understand what is going on in the world today, right now. You will get discouraged. You will be sure that it is all going to fall apart, that your life and the lives of others of your own day are wasted, that we are only waiting for a final event, and until we get there nothing counts very much. If that is your view of life, you have missed completely what the Scriptures are trying to impart by these means.

For what the Bible tells us is that God today is at work behind the scenes of human events, building a new kind of humanity. The world is familiar with the old kind. There is only one man who has ever lived in all of history, really; it is Adam. The life of Adam has been spread across the pages of history, and it is always the same old story---rather depressing to read. This is why history can often be very boring and dull if you don't understand this great fact, because it is merely a chronicle of the life of Adam, with its ups and downs, its inner wars, its fightings and tumults, its hating and bitterness, resentment and injustice.

But that is not the only man who is alive today. The Scriptures tell us that there is a new man, a new creation. the second Adam---Jesus Christ. God is building a new humanity in him. And this is going on behind the scenes of all that is taking place, and it involves all the heartache and struggle and tears and pressure of your life and mine. All that is part of the process. But in Romans 8, the apostle Paul speaks of a day that is coming when God is going to lift the curtain, and the world will suddenly be startled and astonished to see what he has been building quietly behind the scenes all these centuries, when, as Paul calls it, "the day of manifestation of the sons of God" occurs, and the curse is lifted and the curtain is raised and a new humanity appears. But it has been produced in all these times.

And like the first Adam, the second Adam is made of three parts---body, soul, and spirit. Part of it is physical, corporeal; part of it is inward, soulish and spiritual. This is where the church and the nation of Israel come in. The part of the new humanity which is physical and outward and external is represented by Israel, the nation redeemed and sanctified under its true Messiah, to be, at last, the visible expression of God's life before the world. But there is an inward part as well, having to do with ideas and knowledge and wisdom and truth and beauty, and this is represented by the church. This is what we are learning now---how to understand the wisdom of God, and the amazing ways by which he operates, the paradoxes by which he brings things about which seem to be contradictory but aren't at all. This is our curriculum. This is what we are engaged in---being taught by the Spirit of God.

And then, at the heart of it all, tying it all together, throbbing through every member and every cell of that new and amazing humanity, is the Spirit which is God himself. God who is a Spirit---that threefold mystery of Being, who intends to manifest the fulness of his character and the greatness of his glory through man---God dwelling among his people---this is the new humanity which is being produced. And this is what God is after. This is what makes all the struggle and all the pain and all the heartache worthwhile, because this is where it all is going to end. As Paul says in chapter 3, verses 8 and 9 of Ephesians,

"To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God Who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places."

What a calling! What a program! What a plan! This is what God is working out. And if you understand it, you will see that your place in it is a very important part. Your life relates to the great thing that God is doing in this day and age.

PRAYER

Our Heavenly Father, thank you for the mystery of the ages, the mystery of your being, the mystery of the church, the mystery of Israel, the mystery of lawlessness which is at work in this day and age. Forgive us for our shallow views of history. Forgive us for our superficial approaches to the problems we wrestle with today. Help us to ground all that we do in the greatness of your unfolding plan, and to understand what part we play in this program. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

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On Expository Preaching

by Ray C. Stedman

THE WORD OF POWER

The greatest contribution the Church can make today to a troubled and frightened generation is to return to a consistent and relevant preaching of the Word of God! All Christians would agree that what is most needed in the present age is a loosing of the power of God among us, but what is often forgotten is that the proclamation of His word has always been God's chosen channel of power. "He sent his word and healed them," the psalmist declares. And it is not so much preaching from the Bible that is needed, as it is preaching the Bible itself--in a word, expository preaching!

WHAT IS EXPOSITION?

Exposition is preaching that derives its content from the Scripture directly, seeking to discover its divinely intended meaning, to observe its effect upon those who first received it, and to apply it to those who seek its guidance in the present. It consists of deep insight into and understanding of the thoughts of God, powerfully presented in direct personal application to contemporary needs and problems. It is definitely not a dreary, rambling, shallow verse-by-verse commentary, as many imagine. Nor is it a dry-as-dust presentation of academic biblical truth, but a vigorous, captivating analysis of reality, flowing from the mind of Christ by means of the Spirit and the preacher into the daily lives and circumstances of twentieth century people.

I first came to understand and value expository preaching from the writings of G. Campbell Morgan, the Prince of English expositors in the early decades of the 20th century. I ran across his books while trying to teach an evening Bible study class of sailors at Pearl Harbor during World War II. I learned from him not only how to discover the patterns of thought-development in a biblical passage, but how to organize those patterns into contemporary presentations that would touch directly upon the issues of life today. In 40 years of preaching and teaching I have never been able to match Morgan's beauty of language and richness of literary allusions, but I have had him continually before me as a model to follow.

Other expository preachers have added touches of their own uniqueness to my learning process. Dr. Harry Ironside of the Moody Church of Chicago left his mark upon me through a summer spent with him as his chauffeur, secretary, and constant companion. From him I learned simplicity of style and warmth of illustration. Campbell Morgan's successor at Westminster Chapel, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, also greatly raised my appreciation of the Bible's relevancy and authority. I was privileged also to know with some degree of intimacy such expositors as J. Vernon McGee, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Richard Halverson, Stephen Olford,

John R. W. Stott, Frances Schaeffer, and J. I. Packer. These all have, in one degree or another, taught me lessons of preaching power.

PREPARING TO PREACH

Upon coming to Palo Alto in 1950 I began immediately to preach through books of the Bible, working my way through Sunday after Sunday until I had finished the whole book. I have tried to keep an even balance between the New Testament and the Old, usually alternating from one to the other. This has great advantages over textual preaching in that it forces one to handle the difficult themes of Scripture as well as the more popular ones. Further it keeps truth in balance since it follows the pattern of Scripture itself in mingling several themes in one passage; and thus makes possible the apostolic goal of "declaring the whole counsel of God." If a series grows so long it tends to weary the congregation, I do not hesitate to break it off in favor of another, but will come back later and finish the original series. Since for years now all our messages have been put into print, when a series is finally finished it is a complete coverage of the biblical book and is available as a unit for private or group study.

My method of sermon preparation has evolved from this concept. Having chosen which book of the Bible I will preach through, taking into consideration the needs of the congregation, the level of doctrinal instruction they may yet lack, and the spirit of the times we may be passing through, I then begin to read the book through several times in various versions. My objective is to create a general outline of the book as a guideline to my preaching. I note the broad divisions of the book, and the major changes of subjects. What I want is a bird's-eye view of the whole. For instance, my division of the gospel of John is very simple: Prologue, 1:1-18 - The Manifestation of the Messiah, 1:19-4:54 - Growing Unbelief, 5:1-12:50 - The Unveiling of the Church, 13:1-17:26 - The Murder of the Messiah, 18:1-19:42 - The New Creation, 20:1-21:25.

I then choose a section from the first division upon which to base my first message. The section should be short enough to be manageable in the time available (30-40 minutes) but yet constitute a single main theme. I next check out all lexical or linguistical problems that may be present, and read the historical background for customs or color that needs explaining or emphasizing. Then I begin work on a detailed exegetical outline of the passage. Outlining permits me to put textual truth into my own words, and yet reveals clearly the logical development of the author's thought. This outline is the backbone of my message. It may take several hours of work to produce, but it is essential in order to maintain clarity and faithfulness to the text.

WHERE COMMENTARIES COME IN

After I have completed this outline, then (and only then) do I read commentaries or other messages on the passage. This reading constitutes a check upon my own exegesis and permits me to make changes or add insights (with due acknowledgment) to my own work. At this point I have probably put 8 to 10 hours of work into my text, but have only reached the half-way point of preparation. The exegesis is now complete. I know what I am going to say, but I do not yet know how I am going to say it.

I turn then to the work of presentation. Here I begin to form what I call my preaching notes. They are based upon the exegetical outline I have made, but I must now select what to include and what to leave out. Here also I add in the illustrations which will make the text stick in people's minds and hold their attention until the end is reached. I think through how best to introduce the passage, usually with a personal story or reference to some current event. I must choose which themes to enlarge upon and which only to touch upon and then pass on. My notes will reflect all this and lead me logically and climactically to my predetermined conclusion. I will take these notes to the platform with me, but I try to know them so thoroughly that I need only the briefest glimpse from time to time to keep me on track. I believe it is very important to maintain eye contact with my audience while I am preaching.

THE PREACHING EXPERIENCE

I try to have my preparation complete by Friday afternoon, or at the latest, Saturday morning. I need to let my notes alone for at least half a day before preaching, while I prepare my body and heart with rest and prayer and other work. Following this approach, through the years I have gained a growing sense of the grandeur of

preaching. I have seen many examples of its power to transform both individual lives and whole communities. I have increasingly felt a divine compulsion to preach, so that I know something of Paul's words, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel!" But even more---I feel a deeply humbling conviction that I could never be given a greater honor than the privilege of declaring "the unsearchable riches of Christ." I often hear in my inner ear the words of the great apostle: "This is how one should regard us; as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God!" A servant of Christ! A steward of the mysteries! I can think of no greater work than that.

When Grace Appeared

by Ray C. Stedman

In the midst of the hurry-burly and hustle and bustle of Christmas, while we were getting the tree and trimming it, and in the midst of all that accompanies this festive season, the thought suddenly occurred to me, "How did the first-century Christians celebrate Christmas?" Or did they celebrate the birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ? I took my New Testament and made a rather startling discovery. I found there is no Christmas celebration recorded at all in the New Testament! There is, of course, the coming of the shepherds and the wise men. But in the letters of Paul and James and Peter and John there is not one reference to a Christmas celebration. I wondered why this should be.

Did they not care about the birthday of Jesus? Were they opposed to it, perhaps, like the early Pilgrim fathers here on our own shores, who felt that it was a frivolous and worldly manifestation and forbade it by law? Or was it simply because credit cards had not yet been invented and they could not afford it? As I read the New Testament I found what I think is the reason for this rather amazing fact. I discovered that the early Christians, the apostles and their associates, did not see the life of Jesus as we do, in segments—the birth, the hidden years, the open ministry, the cross and the resurrection. We have the record in the gospels and it is easier to study it when it is broken up that way. But they saw the life of Jesus and his ministry as one complete whole, all the great events blended together into one, which they called "the appearing of Jesus Christ."

In Paul's second letter to his son in the faith, Timothy, he writes,

Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but take your share of suffering for the gospel in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Thus he groups it all together as one great event which he calls "the appearing." In our text in Titus, chapter two, verse eleven we have the same nomenclature,

For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Notice, there are two "appearings" in that passage. One begins the passage and one occurs in the middle of it. One is a part of history and it was so in Paul's day; "for the grace of God," he said, "has appeared." That appearing covers the entire life and ministry of Jesus Christ, approximately thirty-three years, as best we can determine, from the birth of Jesus through the cross and the resurrection; from Bethlehem to the Mount of Olives; from the open heavens, where the shepherds heard the voices of the angels singing, to the open heavens when the disciples looked up and saw him disappearing into the clouds of heaven. Thirty-three years, yet one appearing of Jesus Christ.

The second appearing is a part of prophecy and still is today, two thousand years after these words were written. We are, we read, "awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. who he gave himself for us. " Paul calls this "our blessed hope. "This is the only way out for a war-torn, weary, troubled world. It is more meaningful to us today than it was when it was written, for many students of Scripture feel this blessed hope, this "appearing of the glory. " is drawing very, very near.

The first appearing is called the appearing of the grace of our Lord Jesus, while the second one is the appearing of His glory_ two quite different things. In between comes what has been called, quite properly, "the age of grace," the age in which we live, and the age in which Paul wrote. I call attention to one other interesting fact, that the word "appearing" is, in the original, "epiphany." It has been transliterated into English and means "a shining forth." The wonderful phrasing of the New English Bible reads, "The grace of God has dawned upon the world. "What a beautiful expression that is of Christmas!

Thus the nature of Christ's first appearing, beginning at Bethlehem, and all the subsequent ministry, is quite plainly described for us. From Bethlehem through the darkness of Calvary to the glorious light of Easter morning you have that which introduces the age of grace. It is all grace God reaching out to man. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan says, very beautifully, "The song of the angels to sighing humanity is the beginning of the infinite mystery of the Incarnate God. From this all light is streaming, all songs are coming, all hope is flaming." Grace means that the first subject on God's agenda to discuss with man is not judgment, but love. It is amazing how many today fear that if they draw near to God, the first thing God wants to talk about is condemnation, that he wishes to punish them for their sins. But the Scripture says, " God sent His Son into the world not to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved." God's first concern with man is not judgment.

I was in Oklahoma City a few weeks ago, and attended a lunch put on by Campus Crusade for Christ. Among other parts of the program they had asked a number of local men to give testimonials to the blessing of the ministry of Campus Crusade in their own lives. One man startled the group by saying, "I want you men to know that I had a long-standing resentment against Campus Crusade. I read some of their literature one day and discovered they had what they called 'The Four Spiritual Laws'. (1) God loves you and has a plan for your life; (2) man is sinful and therefore is unable to discover God's love and plan; (3) Jesus Christ is God's provision for the sin of man that he might enter into the full program of God; and 4) you must receive Him by faith, by an invitation and thus you may enter into all that God has planned." He said, "I read these four spiritual laws through and I felt very angry for I recognized that all they had done was to take the three points of our good Southern Baptist 'plan for salvation' and simply preface it with another and call it 'The Four Spiritual Laws'. I could not stand this crowd at first! The idea of taking the Southern Baptist plan of salvation and using it without giving any credit to them at all! But I remembered how many times I had tried witnessing with the plan of salvation which begins, 'you are a sinner and if you acknowledge your sin God will save you.' I would go to people and tell them they were sinners but I could never get any of them to admit it! But one day I decided to try these four spiritual laws and instead of starting out with the subject of sin I started out with the idea, 'God loves you and has a plan for your life,' and you know, in the last three weeks I have won four men to Christ, because I started out with God's love."

That is grace, the first subject on God's program. For almost two thousand years God has permitted man to have his way. He is allowing man, in his ignorance and willfulness, to abuse and misuse God's gift of life to him in order that he may have the opportunity to hear the whole wonderful tale of redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ, that there is a way out of man's misery and heartache and sinfulness.

Not only is the nature of this appearing plainly described for us as grace, but the purpose of it is clearly announced. Paul says, " the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men "Now do not read that as saying that all men will be saved automatically, regardless of how they believe or live, for there are far too many scriptures, including those from the mouth of Jesus himself, that say quite otherwise. Salvation is never put on an automatic basis. It is not that all men will be saved but all men *can* be saved. The grace of God has appeared that all men can be saved. It is available to all. - Though it is true that God's first subject with man is His love and grace, nevertheless, if a man will not talk on that subject, refuses utterly to do so, then eventually God must move to the subject of condemnation and of judgment. But if man will talk with God about grace the

result is salvation.

Here is a word that needs to be examined a bit, for we use it very loosely. Salvation is not merely a reserved seat in heaven, or an insurance policy against going to hell. To, frequently this is what we make it. Salvation is described for us quite accurately in verse twelve, where Paul goes on to say, ". . . training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world Salvation is, first of all, an altered allegiance, "renouncing irreligion (or godlessness) and worldly passions, "and then, lawful life, "soberly, uprightly and godly in this present world "

Let us look at that more closely. Salvation manifests itself first by an altered allegiance. Have you discovered that the chain with which the devil binds men too do his will, even though they are not aware of it, is the desire for the approval of their fellows'? This is the great power by which the devil holds his slaves together. This desire to please men_our crowd, our gang, our social set_is an implacable master. The natural man, the man without Jesus Christ, inevitably lives his life on this level. His strongest motive is a desire to please whoever around him is important to him. This desire is back of all social acts at all levels of life. It is impossible to escape it. We cannot break it ourselves. The most we can do is to narrow the circle. The outlaw breaks loose from society but is still intent on finding the approval of the small gang with which he runs. The philosopher rises above what he regards as the common herd, but is still dependent upon the approval of that small coterie of "real thinkers" that agree with him.

But when a man looks at Jesus Christ and desires Him and loves Him, he is suddenly overwhelmed with a powerful feeling that only God matters. When he realizes this great fact he has discovered the ultimate truth behind all the machinery of the universe. As he gives himself to that fact it works its way through his heart and life and manifests itself in every part of his being. He becomes possessed of a mighty desire to please God. When he does, he discovers that very soon he is utterly set free from slavery to others' opinions. So Paul, writing to the Romans, can say, "Be not conformed to this world" (do not let the world around you squeeze you into its mold), ". . . but be transformed by the renewing of your mind," in Jesus Christ. It is this that makes true Christians invincible.

Some of you may recall a story from the third or fourth century, when the Church was undergoing persecution. There arose a terrible heresy within the ranks of the Church- called Arianism, the idea that Jesus Christ was not God but merely a created being. Opposed to that were certain doughty champions of orthodoxy and among them was a man by the name of Athanasius from Alexandria, Egypt, a mighty man of God. He was brought before the Emperor Theodosius (a convert to Arianism) to answer for what was regarded as heresy in that part of the Christian world, his belief that Jesus Christ was God. Standing before the Emperor, Athanasius stoutly refused to surrender any of the faith of which he was convinced. The Emperor leaned over and said to him, "Pertinacious old man! Do you not know that the whole world is against you'?" And Athanasius said to him, "Then, Sire, I am against the whole world." This is what happens when a man believes in Jesus Christ. There is a breaking away from the slavery of the opinions of others, and only God matters. There is a renouncing of godlessness with its worldly attitudes and philosophies.

Second, there is manifest a lawful life, lawful living. Paul describes it in three terms, sober upright, and godly. " Do not be misled by the word "sober." By no means does that mean long-faced. There are, unfortunately, long-faced Christians who look as if they could eat butter out of a churn, but this word does not describe someone without humor. I confess to you, I am always afraid of religious people who have no humor. They are invariably fanatical. But the greatest saints I have ever met have invariably possessed a wonderful sense of humor. No, this does not indicate dourness. It means being responsible, taking life seriously_responsibility in the areas of knowledge. Phillips renders it thus. "We are to live," he says, "responsible, honorable, God-fearing lives." If you want an enlargement of this, I refer you to the context, beginning with verse six.

Likewise urge the younger men to control themselves. [That is responsible living.] Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us.

That is the kind of living that results when a heart has been changed by contact with Jesus Christ. An altered

allegiance and altered living. A Christian man was once asked if he believed in the miracle of changing water to wine. He said, 'Of course I do. I have never seen Jesus change water into wine, but in our home he changed beer into furniture.'

Salvation is not only described as to what it is, that is, what it looks like, but also where it is to be manifest. "In this world," Paul said literally, "in this present age," Where are you to show this change? In church? Well, that is a nice place to start, but the place where it will really count is at home, at work, at school. In other words, right in the center of life. That is where the change is to be manifest. I read this week a rather quaint sermon of Charles Spurgeon's, the great London preacher, on Christ's words to the demoniac, "Go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord has done for thee, and had compassion upon thee." Spurgeon said, among other things, "Oh, if I could do it, I would seek out the hermit in his lonely cave and say to him, 'If you are what you profess to be, a servant of God, then upset this pitcher and eat your bread and leave this dreary cave and wash your face and go home to your friends and tell them what the Lord has done for you.'" He said, "I would go to the monks and to the nuns and say, 'No more of this absurd discipline. Go home to your friends and to your parents, and turn your houses into convents and live your lives, not in some isolated separation which is disobedience to the will and purpose of God, but right in the center of life. Go home to your friends.'" Christianity never was made to interfere with households and family ties. It makes a better husband and a better wife and a better son and a better daughter out of anyone who takes the Lord Jesus seriously.

And if you ask why all this happens, you have more than a hint in verse fourteen. We read of the Lord Jesus,

Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for Himself a people of His own who are zealous for good deeds.

The key is, "a people of his own," i.e.. a people for his own possession. We can never escape the transcendent mystery of the Christian message, that the God who became incarnate in Bethlehem is willing and able to become incarnate in you. The secret of a godly life is God himself, in that life. Jesus, himself, living in you. making the difference. imparting the power, preserving purity. He is the only answer. Not an empty creed that is followed but a living Lord at work.

In these closing moments I wish to depart from the mere theory of what I have been saying to end on a very practical note. Sermons can sound so wonderful and such a beautiful picture can be painted. but the question must come to many who hear, Does it ever happen? Is Jesus saving men and women, boys and girls like this today? Is it real, or is it but a myth? Are these kind of lives being produced? Are we still in the age of grace and is the appearing of glory yet ahead? Or is it all a beautiful dream'?

Last Sunday night I met with a group of fifteen or sixteen, people, right here in this building. and I listened to them one after another, tell in their own way the story of the difference Jesus Christ had made when he came into their lives. It was heartwarming. I could not possibly repeat each story but among them was a young man who said that as he grew up his heart was filled with hate to all people everywhere. This was the characteristic of his life, he hated people. His reaction to every situation was one of hate. But he met a man who told him about Christ, and in telling there came an awakened hope and he opened his heart to this living Christ. He went on to say how the hate had been changed to compassion and to concern.

Sitting next to him was a woman who told us that as she grew up her heart was so filled with hatred of her father that on one occasion she was barely restrained from killing him. But Christ entered her life and changed that. Her father, too, was changed so that when he died a few years later he was mourned by the family that hated him before.

I finished reading this week that amazing story, "The Cross and the Switchblade"_ the story of what is going on in the streets of New York City among the tough gang leaders and teen-age gangsters there. These are dope addicts, homosexuals, and murderers, giving themselves over to the vilest and the foulest of deeds, yet in the grace of God the gospel has penetrated even into those dark areas and is transforming and delivering them from drug addiction and the other hopeless, wearing, frightful things of their life; transforming them into new creatures in Christ, intelligent men and women, living lawful lives.

Does this work for the old as well as the young? A few years ago I met an old man who had been a member of the French Foreign Legion in Africa, a tough, hard-bitten old soldier whose every other word was blasphemy. Meeting him, I found that he was interested in reading and I started taking him books, first a rather light type and gradually more and more serious books, all of them concerning Christian faith. One day I knocked at the door to pick up a book he had finished and when he brought it to the door and laid it in my hand he said, with a tear in his eye, "I want to thank you for this book because through this book I was introduced to Jesus, my Saviour." He lived for only a couple of years after that but what a change in that man! He was completely transformed, every interest in his life different, and the joy that was in his heart was evident to all.

These last few weeks I sat down with one of the world's great ear surgeons and heard him tell how Christ had entered his heart and what a transformation it had made. I met a woman high in social circles in New York City who told me of the empty social round of her life, with its meaninglessness and drab monotony, but how it was utterly transformed as she came to know Jesus Christ, a living Saviour. I sat with a Senator from Mexico not long ago who confessed he had been searching all his life for something that would satisfy and give him joy and a sense of purpose in life. He said that in simple faith he had met Jesus Christ recently, and there was on his face a light that never shone on land or sea before.

Just this week I read an account of a young minister to whom a young girl of about seventeen years of age came and said she wanted to talk with him. He took her into the study and she sat down and said, "I am so unhappy, so miserable." He said, "Tell me about it." She said, "You know how the magazines all say today that the purity that the church tries to uphold is not realistic? And parents seem to do the same things that the young people are doing these days, and you wonder what is right and what is wrong. I sometimes wonder if there is any goodness left at all. You know how your classmates will tell you that all this purity and chastity is old-fashioned and out of date. The boys come and tell you that they love you and they make demands upon you and tell you that if you will not do what they want they will never date you again. This has been happening to me, and I did things I did not think I would do, but I am in pretty deep now and I do not know what to do about it. I get no fun out of it, it is a misery to me. But I do not know what to do. I'm afraid that I will just go on and I will end up nothing but an old hag." The minister said, "Do not despair. Jesus Christ has come to stand against these very things and to deal with exactly this kind of problem. The scars that are in your life will still remain, but your life need never be the same again."

And as he talked with her he told her what it means to meet a living Lord. She knelt in prayer with him and he said he did something he had never done before. Impulsively he reached out and put his hands on her head and said, "May the healing grace of Jesus Christ cleanse you from all your sin." And he said that girl looked up at him and there was a change in her eyes, a light in her face, that made his heart leap with joy. He said, "I know she will go straight. I know there is imparted to her now a power that can keep her straight."

This is what salvation is. It is not "pie in the sky by and by." It is a transformed heart and a transformed life right now, an altered allegiance, a delivered life the breaking of the bonds of slavery that bind us to this terrible system of pleasing men and brings us into the full glory and liberty of a life that is well pleasing to God. This is what Christmas means. This is "the appearing," the reason behind it. Christ did not come simply to give us a beautiful manger scene to look at. He did not come to give us a lovely pageant, a religious charade, to work out once a year. He came to be a Saviour. He came to give salvation to begin right where you are, in your place of need and to accept you as you are and to change you. And that change is always manifest in this two-fold way: an altered allegiance, and thus the beginning of a lawful life.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, in this closing moment thou hast promised to be in our midst. 'Where two or three are gathered together (or two or three hundred) thou art there in the midst of them.' We pray that any who are hungering for deliverance, any who are sick and tired of being what they are and wanting to be something different, wanting to be set free, wanting to be taken out of the morass and the wilderness of emptiness in which they live out their days, may now breathe a prayer to thee, asking thee to be their Lord, to enter their life. We pray this Christmas season may be to them a totally different time as this amazing miracle of new birth

takes place. Thou didst come, Lord Jesus, to enter human life and be incarnate in men once again. We thank you for it. May it take place, as some pray here in this very moment of quietness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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SHOULD A WOMAN TEACH IN CHURCH?

by Ray C. Stedman

The social movements of every age seem to be used by God to force Christians to re-examine (and clarify) their understanding of what the Scriptures teach. Painful as they may be, every such re-examination results ultimately in stronger and clearer statements on the subjects in question than the Church has ever had before. This is certainly the case in the matter of the woman's role in the Church. The secular Women's Liberation movement is forcing church leaders everywhere to distinguish carefully between attitudes toward women derived from customs and traditions of the past (often strongly macho-dominated) and what the Bible actually teaches and what the early Church actually did.

In the scope of this brief article it is not possible to answer all the questions which are being raised today. But we would like to examine the specific question being asked by many Christians today: Should a woman teach the Scriptures, and especially, should she teach men or when men are present?

We can say at once that the New Testament clearly indicates that both men and women receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit without distinction in regard to sex. Included among these is the gift of teaching, and other related gifts, such as prophesying (basically, preaching), exhortation, and the word of wisdom and of knowledge. Women prophets are referred to both in the Old and New Testaments and older women are instructed by the apostle Paul to teach the younger women. A somewhat oblique reference in 1 Corinthians 11:4-5 suggests that both men and women were free to pray or prophesy in the open meeting of the Church, though the woman must do it in such a way as to indicate that she recognizes the headship role of her husband. If she does so, there seems to be no objection to the fact that men would be present in the congregation, or any limitation placed on her for that reason. From the viewpoint of spiritual gifts it seems clear that "in Christ there is neither male nor female" and God expects every woman to have a ministry as much as he expects every male to have one.

Though the ministry of women in the New Testament churches is not prominent in the record, nevertheless there are certain references which indicate they were frequently and widely used in various capacities. Almost all commentators agree that Priscilla and her husband Aquila were side-by-side companions of the apostle Paul in his work both in Corinth and in Ephesus, and that of the two, Priscilla was the more gifted and capable teacher, since her name is most often listed first. They were, together, the instructors of the mighty Apollos in his early preaching efforts. Here is a clear-cut case of a knowledgeable woman being used in the teaching of a man with no hint of an objection from Paul. Further, in Paul's letter to the church in Philippi he urges an unnamed fellow-worker (probably Epaphroditus) to "help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel." In the letter to the Romans he mentions other women who labored with him "in the Lord."

Perhaps no question would ever have arisen about the propriety of women's ministry were it not for two passages from Paul's hand which seem to lay severe restriction upon them. In 1 Corinthians 14 he says, "As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." Again, in 1 Timothy 2 he says, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." Taken by themselves, apart from their contexts, these two passages

do seem to prohibit any kind of teaching ministry for women, especially in any public way within the church.

But let us look at some guidelines of interpretation which will help us in understanding just what the apostle means.

1. Nothing in the above quoted passages can be taken in such a way as to contradict what the apostle himself permitted or referred to with approval in the practice of the church. He surely did not teach one thing and practice another. If, in 1 Corinthians 11 he speaks with approval of a woman praying or prophesying in public, as he does, then surely, in 1 Corinthians 14 he does not contradict himself by forbidding women even to open their mouths in any circumstance in the public meeting of the church. We must, therefore, read the prohibition of chapter 14 as applying to something other than the ministry of women permitted in chapter 11.

2. We must note that the immediate context of both passages quoted above has to do with the problem of disorder and even some degree of defiance in the actions of the women involved. In both passages, though widely separated as to recipients and locality, the word submission appears. In Corinth the problem was one of so conducting the meeting that edification of all present would be central. Therefore tongues were to be controlled and limited, and so was the exercise of prophesying.

Furthermore, they were to remember that "God is not a God of disorder but of peace," and then follows the warning against women speaking in the church. It is clear from this that the apostle was not concerned about women who properly exercised their gifts in prophesying or in praying, but was greatly concerned about women who disrupted the meetings with questions and comments, and perhaps even challenged the teaching of apostolic doctrine with contrary views. This is what he prohibited, as verse 27 makes crystal clear: "If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command." He then closes the whole section with the admonition, "But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."

The word to Timothy (who was probably living at Ephesus) is similar in character. The general context in which these words about women appear is concerned with regulating the behavior of Christians at meetings, as 3:14 makes clear: "Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." In line with this purpose, Paul tells the men how to pray (without anger or disputing) and the women how to adorn themselves (not with fine clothing but with good works) and from this he moves to the words of prohibition against a woman teaching or having authority over a man. These words cannot be taken as an absolute (no woman should ever teach a man) for if that were true Paul should have rebuked Priscilla for having a part in instructing Apollos. The words "have authority over" provide us the key to understanding this passage. Women should not be permitted the role of authoritative definers of doctrine within the church. They must not be permitted to do this, even though they may mean well, for the role of authoritative interpreters is given by the Holy Spirit to the apostles and elders, who, in the New Testament, were invariably men. This is supported by Paul's references to Adam and Eve which follows.

From this we are warranted in drawing certain conclusions to guide our conduct today.

1. Women certainly can teach. They are given the gift of teaching as freely as it is given to men, and they must exercise those gifts.

2. Women can teach within the context of church meetings. They are certainly free to teach children and other women without question, but are free to teach men as well if what they are teaching is not a challenge to the understanding of doctrine held by the elders of the church. Many godly and instructed women know far more about the Scriptures than many men and it would be both absurd and unscriptural to forbid such men to learn from such women.

3. Even the elders should recognize the often unique and godly insights of gifted women teachers and should seek their input in arriving at an understanding of the Scriptures. It is, however, the duty of elders to make the final decision of what is to be taught. No woman may participate in this.

It is my hope that this brief survey will help many in understanding the difficulties involved in answering the question with which we began. I, personally, thank God for the gifted woman teachers, among us at PBC and rejoice that we have little or no problem with the question of proper authority in this matter.

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HOW GOD USES GOVERNMENT

by Ray C. Stedman

It was the summer of 1787. The heat in Philadelphia was oppressive and the delegates to the Constitutional Convention fanned themselves languidly and longed for adjournment. Debate had dragged on for days over the issue of how the States would be represented in Congress. Luther Martin of Maryland had held the floor for the best part of two days in a long-winded speech on States Rights that left everyone weary and querulous. The Convention faced an impasse. At this point aged Dr. Benjamin Franklin rose and addressed himself to General Washington in the Chair.

In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights to illuminate our understandings?

He went on to remind the Convention that at the beginning of the war with England the Continental Congress had, in that very room, prayed for divine protection, and their prayers were answered. He continued:

I have lived, Sir, a long time and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth that God governs in the affairs of men. If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground unseen by him, is it possible that an empire could arise without his aid?

He stated that it was his firm belief that without divine aid the Convention would succeed in their political building no better than the builders of Babel, but would find themselves so divided and split by local interests that they would become a reproach to future ages. He then concluded:

I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of heaven and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service.

The motion failed, largely due to the embarrassment of the Assembly at not having funds to pay for engaging a chaplain. But Franklin had soundly made his point. Nations do not rise or continue at the whim and desire of men. A higher Power must be reckoned with, for the ultimate destiny of nations lies in his hands.

THE LAW OF RETRIBUTION

Surely there is one great fact everywhere revealed in history, in nature, in Scripture. It is called "the law of retribution." Even an atheist, who does not believe in God at all, must admit that when he examines the laws of nature he is faced with the fact that one either obeys them, and lives, or disobeys them, and dies. There is no other alternative. All man's wisdom and adaptability must function within these inexorable limits. He is not at liberty to go beyond them. No one fools around with 10,000 volts of electricity, hoping to make up the laws of electricity as he goes along. The laws are already in force and he had better discover them before he goes much further.

So it is also with nations. Napoleon's cynical answer to someone who asked him whether God was on the side of France was: "God is on the side of the heaviest artillery." Then came the battle of Waterloo, the loss of his empire, and, finally, exile to St. Helena. There, chastened and humbled, he said, "Man proposes; God

disposes." What Franklin saw so clearly and Napoleon learned so painfully is that nations, like individuals, can lose their right to exist. "The powers that be are ordained of God, " (KJV) writes St . Paul in Romans 13:1, and J.B. Phillips translates I Corinthians 2:6 as referring to "the powers-that-be, who soon will be only the powers that have been."

The rise and fall of empires is, of course, the very stuff of history. We chronicle it in voluminous detail without actually understanding it. We record the flux of political and economic change which results in toppled thrones, violent or peaceful conquest, radical swings from world leadership to obscurity, and feel we have analyzed the underlying reasons for change. But political movements and economic pressures are as much effects as they are causes. The causes in turn which produce them are ill-defined and little understood, arising as they do from forces that operate in our essential humanity, and are, therefore, so close to us as to make detection difficult. For example, an unknown writer has said:

If a man does not believe in God, his own ego becomes the ruler of his life. Since there are no standards of right and wrong existing apart from himself, right becomes that which pleases him, and wrong that which does not minister to his own ego. Since he himself is the supreme consideration, he is restrained by nothing but his own wishes and easily reaches the conclusion that the best possible world is one in which his will is supreme. He therefore enforces it upon others to the limit of his ability. The denial of God thus becomes the seed from which totalitarianism develops.

Freedom is possible only if men believe in God and seek to do his will. William Penn was right when he said that if men will not be governed by God, they must be governed by tyrants.

In the fact of history, it is hard to argue with that. One must not, of course, make the mistake of equating the widespread practice of religion with being truly "governed by God." Religious totalitarianism is perhaps the worst kind of all; certainly it is the most deeply hated. But the religious tyrant is no more being governed by God than the iron-fisted atheist is. Pirate ships often flew the flags of lawful nations to deceive and disarm their intended victims, and even modern dictators are not averse to flying the flag of the church. But Senator Daniel Webster caught the essence of true government by God, in a speech made in 1847.

If truth be not diffused, error will be; if God and his Word are not known and received, the devil and his works will gain the ascendancy; if the evangelical volume does not reach every hamlet, the pages of a corrupt and licentious literature will; if the power of the Gospel is not felt through the length and breadth of the land, anarchy and misrule, degradation and misery, corruption and darkness will reign without mitigation or end.

"THE LIFE OF THE LAND IS PRESERVED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS"

When Hawaii became the 50th State of the Union, she brought with her to statehood the motto she had adopted as a territory, reflecting her missionary beginnings: "The life of the land is preserved in righteousness." It sounds like a pious platitude, but it is actually a profound truth which should be taught in every classroom in the land. A widespread myth exists in our day that the foundation of our freedoms lies in the great documents that launched our national history: the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. But important as these may be as instruments of freedom, they are not the foundation of it. Freedom rests on the moral righteousness of each individual member of the nation. When individual righteousness fails on a large scale, laws lose their force, judges fail in their powers, enforcement becomes impracticable, and the Constitution itself is soon changed to reflect the currently acceptable level of morality.

This was clearly demonstrated in the late sixties of this century, when violence swept the country, youth exploded in revolt, a tidal wave of drug abuse and occultism hit, and Chief Justice Earl Warren, of the Supreme Court, sensing the impotence of laws, called for "a company of moral counselors" who would hopefully build a moral climate in which laws again would have meaning, and enforcement would again be possible. Those were days in which the nation came perilously close to total disaster, but how quickly they have been forgotten, and the salutary lessons they unfolded have been lost.

If Benjamin Franklin's mature conviction is indeed true that "God governs in the affairs of men," allotting to each their due portion of world leadership and status, and permitting each to continue without overthrow only as long as they fulfill his purposes it is certainly in order to inquire: what are the values which God seeks to

achieve in bringing nations into existence; and what are the wrongs which he will no longer tolerate that mark their appointed end? It would surely be the highest possible exercise of statecraft to discover the answers to these crucial questions and disseminate them widely and clearly, not only in legislative halls, but in the shops, offices, homes and classrooms of a land.

For centuries Western statesmen have turned to the Bible for the answers to the questions formulated above. Abraham Lincoln termed the Bible "God's best gift to men," and the impact of its pages upon his thinking is apparent in many of his speeches and writings as president. The Bible's view of nations seems to group them in two major classifications: Those who are moving toward darkness, or those who are moving toward increasing light. A nation moving toward light is growing in two essential areas: truth and love. Its knowledge of reality is increasing, manifesting itself in growth in literacy, education, science, medicine, and above all (since God is the greatest Reality), theology. But light also means that along with increasing truth there is increasing love, manifesting itself as legal and social justice, public and private courtesy, care for the aged and infirm, help to the poor, the safeguarding of personal liberty, and, of course, cleanliness and conservation of resources.

A nation moving toward darkness experiences the reverse. Truth declines so that, though surrounded by books and knowledge, the general populace learns less and less, illiteracy increases, personal liberties diminish, violence and crime mount, pollution and corruption abound, and the courts find it hard to administer justice. One remarkable fact about a nation in decline which the Bible reveals is that its increasing spirit of cruelty and violence may be used by God as a cudgel to awaken a more enlightened nation to its declining state, and, hopefully, to arrest that decline and turn it again toward truth and light. Thus the Babylonians were raised up to punish Israel and Judah, much to the dismay of some of the prophets who could not understand how God could use a wicked and rebellious nation to chastise a more God-fearing state. Communism in our day is a case in point.

JEREMIAH'S STIRRING COMMISSION

One book of the Bible is especially given to us to trace how a nation grows increasingly dark until it reaches the point of overthrow and national death. It is the Book of Jeremiah the prophet. He was sent to the nation of Judah to minister during its final forty years. He began his ministry in the days of the godly king Josiah and ended it four kings later, in the days of Zedekiah, who was led captive to Babylon. At the beginning of his ministry he was given a stirring commission:

**"Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.
See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow
to build and to plant." (Jer. 1:9-10, RSV)**

Throughout his long ministry Jeremiah was faithful to declare to kings and people alike four great facts about God. He described, first, the sovereignty of God, his right of control over all the nations of earth. Then he spoke of the faithfulness of God to fulfill his Word to the letter, no matter how long it would take. In this connection Jeremiah described the ruthlessness of God, who would not spare or pity his people if they refused to heed his warnings. Finally, in language of infinite beauty and warmth, Jeremiah described the tenderness of God, who grieved over his sinning people and promised that a remnant would survive the overwhelming judgments to reestablish the land in truth and love. There is an illuminating passage in the 27th chapter where Jeremiah is sent by God to Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, to say to him:

"It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me. Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him. All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes; then many nations and great kings shall make him their slave." (Jer. 27:5-7, RSV, emphasis mine)

Here is the biblical basis for Benjamin Franklin's statement: "God governs in the affairs of men." Here God

calls an idol-worshipping monarch "my servant" and states that it is his God-given destiny to rule for a time over all the nations of earth, but in the end he too shall be judged and be subjected to the rule of other people.

To this same King Zedekiah Jeremiah had been sent some years earlier to detail to him what God expects of governments.

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord." (Jer. 23:1-2, RSV)

Who are these shepherds? They are the leaders of the nation Rulers and government leaders are viewed as shepherds by God, responsible to him for the care of his flock. This is what governors, presidents, and legislators are for. God says further to them:

"Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of this oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place." (Jer. 22:3, RSV)

Note what the rulers of this land were expected to do. First, they were to set an example of justice and righteousness themselves: "Do justice and righteousness." This is why it is a serious matter when leaders and elected officials do things which are wrong. Many said during the Watergate crisis: "Why make such a fuss about this? Everyone does this kind of thing businessmen, leaders of industry, common citizens why make so much over what politicians in Washington do?" The answer is: Because all government leaders, elected or appointed, from the president on down, are, as St. Paul calls them in Romans 13:6, "ministers of God." Each is the agent of God and is to represent God's standard of righteousness and judgment. When such leaders are guilty of wrongdoing, the effect of their wrongdoing is greatly intensified. Though we may sympathize with them in succumbing to unusual pressures, nevertheless we must recognize that their failure introduced widespread dissension and evil into a land.

Second, governmental leaders were to "deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed." The task of government is to keep the courts honest and just, so that the guilty can be found out and the innocent freed. The uncontrollable rise of crime and violence is an unerring indicator of the darkening of a nation's life and its decline toward obscurity.

The third responsibility of the shepherds was "to do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place." Here the power of government itself is to be held in check and guarded against misuse, especially against minority groups. This is a recognition of the ease by which bureaucracy can increase and turn a deaf ear to those who have no ability to defend themselves: the aliens (those with differing cultural patterns), the widows and the fatherless (who have no one to plead their cause).

The prophet went on to show that special care must be exercised by those in power to avoid using the public purse for their own enrichment.

"Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing, and does not give him his wages; who says, 'I will build myself a great house with spacious upper rooms,' and cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar, and painting it with vermilion." (Jer. 22:13-14, RSV)

Incredibly, in a day when the city was surrounded by a foreign army, its treasury was bankrupt, and its temple was being looted, the king utilized his power to cause his subjects to build an ornate palace for himself! All this was noted by the God of the nations, and marked this nation as degenerate to the point deserving overturn.

Perhaps the most remarkable statement to be found in the chronicle of Jeremiah, which points to the decay of the nation, occurs in the 34th chapter, after King Zedekiah had issued an order to free the slaves held by the

Israelites, and then had abruptly rescinded it when he felt the judgment threatening the nation had been withdrawn. Jeremiah was sent to the king with this message from God:

"You recently repented and did what was right in my eyes by proclaiming liberty, each to his neighbor, and you made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name; but then you turned around and profaned my name when each of you took back his male and female slaves, whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them into subjection to be your slaves." (Jer. 34:15-16, RSV, emphasis mine).

The remarkable phrase in this passage is "you . . . profaned my name." This was a serious charge to any Jew. They all had been brought up to revere and respect the name of God, and they went to extreme lengths to avoid defiling the name by using it irreverently or without care. Yet God's charge to this king is: "You have profaned my name." How? By failing to respect the human rights of slaves! God regards it as blasphemy against himself to treat another person in an inhuman or depersonalized way. God holds the nation to account for such actions.

The prophet went on to announce to the king:

"Therefore, thus says the Lord: You have not obeyed me by proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and to his neighbor; behold, I proclaim to you liberty to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine, says the Lord. I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth." (Jer. 34:17, RSV)

As we think of our own national history, we can see what a heavy charge must be leveled against us in this respect. How have we treated the American Indians, the original inhabitants of this land? Or what have we done to the Africans whom we forcibly brought to these shores? Or the Chinese and Japanese, the Mexicans, the Puerto Ricans, and other nationalities that have sought refuge and opportunity among us? How often have we despised them and treated them as less than human? The God of the nations says, "You have profaned my name." He has every right further to say, "I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth." Is this, perhaps, the true explanation for the decline in America's prestige and influence in world affairs of recent years?

WE ARE ALL RESPONSIBLE

Nations live by pursuing truth and love; they die by self deceit, by bigotry and injustice, and especially by ungodliness, pride, and self-sufficiency. It would be a serious mistake to blame governmental agents as having ultimate responsibility for a nation's destiny. It has been said that every nation gets the government it deserves. Final responsibility, therefore, rests with the individuals that make up a nation. "No man is an island," and every one of us is responsible for the influence we exert upon our neighbors, our community, our city, county, state, and national governments.

The ultimate issue is our own personal godliness. Do we "Fear God, and honor the king?" Do we, in the great words of Micah, "Do justice . . . love kindness, and. . . walk humbly with [our] God?" (Micah. 6:8, RSV). The hand of doom rests upon any people who deliberately refuse to hear and heed the Word of God. Ultimately, judgment will come. No political manipulation can avert it. No partial compromise will delay it, no defiance will evade it. There will come at last, as to ancient Judah, some eleventh year, ninth month, and fourth day, when a breach shall be made in the walls of the city, and the inhabitants shall be led forth into captivity and death.

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GOD'S FAITHFULNESS: ISRAEL AND THE NEW COVENANT

by Ray C. Stedman

We rest upon the faithfulness of God. Our unchangeable God---never falters, never goes back on His word, never fails in His promise. Throughout the ages as they roll on and on and on, we can count upon the fact that we have a God who will stay true to what he has said, who in no way will God ever alter anything that he has promised or change his mind about anything. That is what gives stability and strength to our faith, we can count on it. We have the same God that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had. We have the same God that David prayed to and wrote his Psalms in praise of---all this constitutes for us the bedrock of security that we may count upon it in every single day.

I know that every one of us who knows the Lord has rested upon that rock, many, many times. We count upon Him daily. We sing about it, "Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are truly blessed, finding as he promised perfect peace and rest."

But I want to explore with you this morning a somewhat different aspect of the faithfulness of God. I find a very strange phenomenon among Christians across the country and around the world today and that is, "we can believe for ourselves in the faithfulness of God but (strangely enough) we doubt it when it comes to the nation of Israel." Many people raise the question "what part does that strange people called in the scriptures itself 'God's chosen people', what part do they play or will play in the future?" And many have written the nation off as not having any longer a part in the program of God.

I want to explore with you what we've not done for a long time perhaps at this church or at PBC North either, something of what God has said about his promises to that strange people. I know that many of you perhaps might remember the little rhyme that somebody wrote once about Israel, "How odd of God to choose the Jews." We wonder what was Israel is all about as we read the newspapers morning to morning and see still centered in the headlines of the world is this nation, this strange nation. Yet we also know that in many ways these Jews are unbelievers in their own scriptures. It's a very remarkable thing that they exist after all the centuries of dispersion and of wanderings. Many are asking the question, "where do the Jews fit into the program of God."

I want to begin by going back to the very center of our own Christian faith, the one ritual that all Christians agree about---no matter where it is or what the background or the denomination or anything else---the supper of the Lord. Periodically we gather together to celebrate the Lord's supper, to do together what he told us to do on that unforgettable night when he was betrayed. Jesus took bread and wine and celebrated this supper together with his disciples. Let me refer to Matthew's brief, familiar account of that supper found in the 26th chapter,

"Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And then he took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sin. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I will drink it new with you in my father's kingdom."

Now notice the words that Jesus uses to introduce this as he passes the cup among these disciples he says, "this is my blood of the new covenant." Now that's a clear reference back to the words of Jeremiah found in the 31st chapter of his prophecy. Some of you may like to turn to that because it's a very marvelous prophecy. Jeremiah says, beginning in verse 31 of chapter 31 these words,

"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Jacob, and not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt," [That is, the covenant of the law, the ten commandments,] "my covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them," says the Lord."But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the Lord of hosts, "I will put my laws in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they

shall be my people. And no more shall every man teach, his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them, to the greatest of them," says the Lord, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember know more."

Now that what was taking place on the night our Lord was betrayed. He was making a covenant with the house of Israel for every one of those disciples that were there that night, (Judas had all ready left the apostolic band to go to do his dirty work of betrayal). The eleven disciples that were remaining were, each one of them, Jews from various cults and various parts of the land of Israel; they were representatives of the house of Israel and the house of Jacob or of Judah. And our Lord borrows here the very words which Moses had used when he announced the covenant of the ten commandments when he came down from Mount Sinai. You remember Moses sprinkled the people with blood from animals and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." (Ex. 24:8) It is not a mere accident that when Jesus uses these words this he says "this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins." To return to Jeremiah Chapter 31, the prophet goes on to say these words---these words are not often quoted---in verse 35, he says,

Thus says the Lord, "Who gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinance of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea and its waves roar; The Lord of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me," says the Lord, "then the seed of Israel shall cease from being a nation before me forever." Thus says the Lord, "If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath..."

Isn't it remarkable that with all the achievements of science, and with all the explorations of space, that we have noticed and observed these last few decades, the sending out of these space travelers out to explore the planetary system and even beyond, yet we still have not learned how to measure the whole of the universe in which we live. And the prophet says, "If heaven above can be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath." We don't know that either, we haven't yet found what's at the core of the earth, we have theories but no one yet has been able to explore in this area. Then God says,

"If heaven can be measured, and the and foundations of the earth searched, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done," says the Lord.

Now that's a most remarkable promise. God has bound himself by the faithfulness of his Being and of his Word that Israel shall have a place in his program. God will never cast them off as long as the sun and the moon maintain themselves in their courses and as long as the interior of the earth remain unexplored to its depths, as long as the scope of the heavens remains to be measured. Well if that is the case, if this is the covenant all ready made with Israel, as the Lord's supper clearly indicates, we must ask ourselves the question, why is it that Israel lies in spiritual shambles today---while Gentile Christians, with whom this covenant was never made, are now enjoying the fulfillment of the new covenant?

Many people wonder about th regard to the Jews, and a number of explanations have been suggested. Most of you I'm sure know that over in the 8th chapter of Hebrews, the writer quotes verbatim, word for word, this promise of God in Jeremiah 31. He makes clear that new covenant that is referred to, applies to the church. The New Covenant was a covenant made with Israel but it is being fulfilled today by believers from all the nations. The writer of Hebrews quoting those words concerning the new covenant repeats the fact that that covenant was made with the house of Israel and Judah, that is the whole literal nation of the Jews---but he applies three essential elements of this covenant to us today.

I think it's very helpful for us to understand that these terms and conditions of the New Covenant are faithfully carried out when ever anybody turns to Christ. Listen to the provisions of the new covenant again, as the prophet Jermiah had announced (Hebrews 8:10):

"I will put my law into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts."

Here is the first element of the new covenant. In other words there will be a new awareness rising within us so

that we know inwardly how to tell right from wrong. I want you to think back to when you first came to Christ. You will discover that there came into your knowledge, your existence, your experience, a different feeling about right and wrong. Before you became a Christian right and wrong were spelled out to you in terms of what you had been taught as you were growing up. Whether these standards were related to the Ten commandments or not, there was something external to yourself that constituted a set of standards imposed upon you from without. But when you became a Christian you suddenly became more sensitive in this area. There were things that you never dreamed were wrong before that you now became uncomfortable about. Perhaps you indulged in the habit of profanity---I know a number of people who before becoming Christians could swear a blue streak and turn the air blue around them and never think anything wrong with it. But when they became Christians, though nobody said anything to them about their language, they suddenly began to feel that it was wrong. And other habits begin to drop off or change also---we all end up with an inner sense of what is right and what is wrong. That's the new covenant being fulfilled in our lives. The second element of the New Covenant is that God has said,

"I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," says the Lord.

Once again if you think back to your first days as a believer in Jesus you became aware that you had become a member of a new family and that God had a different relationship in your life. He was no longer a stern judge condemning you every time you turned around but he was now a loving Father. A new word came to your lips---you began to call him "Father." You sensed a new intimacy with God. I'll never forget when I first became a Christian, I was only ten years old, but I received the Lord in a Methodist camp meeting. The summer that followed that was an unforgettable summer to me because I had a constant consciousness of God in my life. I used to sing some of the hymns to myself over, and they would cause me break into tears because I was so conscious of the nearness of God. That's what the new covenant does for us, the provision that God has made for everyone. You begin also to discover when you meet other Christians that they felt the same way as you. They too know God, you didn't have to tell them about it. They also knew him as their Father. They understood that same relationship you had been brought into. That's the greatness of the new covenant.

And then there is third element in the New Covenant, one that is most important, given by these words:

"For I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more."

Do you remember the lifting of the load of guilt in your life when you first came to Christ? I'll never forget this in my own life. To me it was a wonderful thing to realize that all the mistakes and the ugliness of my past life, all the things I had done wrong, all the shameful episodes I would like to have forgotten were forgiven. I now had perfect access to my Father in heaven, there was now nothing between us---He had taken care of it all by the blood of Jesus. Nothing in all of life meant more to me then, and does today than that reality. You know, I think most Christians fail to see that forgiveness is something we need every day. You see, even as Christians we go on sinning and making mistakes. And every day we need the cleansing of the blood of Jesus. Every day we need to admit and confess to him that there are things that were wrong yesterday, or this morning; and claim again that wonderful promise, "I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more." Now that's the new covenant. Now wonderfully it is applied to us today, to us who are not Jews, who don't belong to the house of Israel.

There are some of course among us who are perhaps Jews---I am sure you know that all of us come into the church, whether Jew and Gentile, on the same basis. Now this is why some people have greatly misunderstood the promises to the Jews. They say that the church has replaced Israel. They say that we, the church, have taken over all the promises that were given to Israel. They claim that all these promises are now spiritually fulfilled in us, in the church, and therefore Israel no longer has a place in God's program and plan. Now this teaching is pressed to the point sometimes where the church is often called the new Israel or spiritual Israel. The idea is set forth that it was God's intent to reach us Gentiles, that this was the final goal that he was aiming at. When the Gentiles became believers in God, all the promises of God were all fulfilled and so Israel would no longer have a place in God's plan. But, you see, if you think that's true than you've forgotten what Jeremiah has said regarding Israel and His ordinances concerning the sun and the moon, and the inability of

man to measure the heavens or to plum the depths of the earth. When you got up this morning the sun rose, (sometime perhaps a little before you got up, or even perhaps like I did this morning, a little before the sun rose). But when I got up, I could count on the sun rising. As Jeremiah has reminded us, as long as those ordinances maintain in the earth, God has pledged himself that he will never cast off his people Israel but they have a place in his kingdom.

When you come to the book of Romans in the New Testament you discover that the apostle Paul has a better explanation. We learn that Israel has been set aside, but that they have only been temporarily set aside. In Romans chapters 9, 10, and 11 the Apostle Paul deals at length with this problem: "where does Israel fit in the faithfulness of God?" I want to turn to that passage for a few moments here with you. In these chapters, these three remarkable chapters the apostle carefully distinguishes between the church and Israel. The church---which includes believing Jews and gentiles alike---is called the body of Christ, which the nation Israel never is. Paul distinguishes between the church, and the nation of Israel which consists only of Jews and mostly unbelieving Jews who do not even give credence to their own scriptures. In chapter 9 the apostle describes for us some of these differences. Twenty-five years after the church was born, after it came into existence the day of Pentecost, as you have recorded in the opening chapters of Acts---twenty-five years after that event the apostle admits that the unbelieving nation of Israel still has certain advantages which they cannot lose. He lists for us these advantages and distinctives in these opening words of chapter 9:

"I tell the truth in Christ, I'm not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness by the Holy Spirit, [See how he undergirds with the authority of God what he's about to say,] that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, [see clearly, Jews] to whom pertain or belong the adoption as sons of God, the glory, [the skekinah glory that filled the temple and the tabernacle] the covenants, [those made with Abraham and with David, with Isaac and Jacob and with others throughout the Old Testament, the covenants including the new covenant] the giving of the Law, [the ten commandments brought down from the mountain top not by Charleton Heston but by Moses himself] the service of God, [that is the tabernacle, the temple and its rituals of sacrifices and the offerings, and the promises of God, [all belong to Israel---and he goes on,] of whom are the fathers, [the patriarchs---Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob] and from whom according to the flesh Christ, the Messiah, came---who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."

Now that's a great statement. And in it the apostle is telling us what belongs to Israel by the faithfulness of God and can never be set aside. Now in chapter 11, if you want to just skip over with me to that, in verses 15 and 16 he says something very interesting. Israel he acknowledges at this point had been set set aside from its favored position before God and God had turned to the Gentile world and had begun to take in pagans, unbelievers, idol worshippers, gentiles who had no knowledge of all the great things that God had taught Israel in the Old Testament. But Israel had been set aside. And in verse 15 the apostle says,

"For if the first fruit is holy the lump is also holy."

This is a reference to something the Jews would understand. The Jews have a ritual in which they take dough, a big pile of dough made up from the first fruits of the harvest, the grain that is the first that is harvested; the priest would take a handful of that dough and offer it before God in the tabernacle or the temple service. Paul's argument here is, if that offering, if that handful, was offered to God at the beginning then the whole lump of dough would likewise be acceptable to God. Now the firstfruits of Israel were the patriarchs---Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were the men whom God called to himself. He accepted them and gave them the gift of eternal life, because of their faith, and that constituted the offering of firstfruit. And Paul is simply saying now if that was true, if he could accept these patriarchs and make them holy, then he could do the same thing with the whole nation of Israel. But then the Apostle changes his figure---and this is very important---in the latter part of the verse:

"And if the root is holy so are the branches."

This time of the year is the bear root season and some of you may be planting roses and fruit trees, others of you will just be putting the bare root into the ground. Just before I came here from my home in Oregon I

planted some roses and I just took a bare root, with no growth on it at all, just a little bit of the stem sticking up, and I stuck it in the ground. You see a root becomes a symbol of the source of life. The root that the apostle is referring to are those divine advantages that Jews have, which he had described so clearly in chapter 9---the shekinah glory, the promises, the sacrifices in the temple, all that God had given to Israel---that is the root he is referring to. He says that "if the root is holy then so are the branches." And he makes very clear the reality that God therefore can restore life to Israel because they still possess the root that God himself had given to them.

Now in verses 17 through 21, the apostle goes on and says,

"If some of the branches were broken off, [that is, the unbelieving nation of Israel] and you, [he's talking to Gentiles---notice verse 13, "for I speak to you gentiles,"] being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches; [that is Israel] but if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you."

Here we learn how it is that we Gentiles got in on this new covenant that actually belongs to Israel. You see, the root still belongs to Israel---but we gentiles enjoy it by faith. God opened the door of faith to the Gentiles through the apostle Paul and by the preaching of the other apostles. This is why the Lord Jesus said to the woman at the well of Samaria, "Salvation belongs to the Jews." ("salvation is of the Jews," John 4:22b)

If we begin to feel superior and think that we have a favored position before God, if we suppose that Israel no longer has a place in God's program for the world let us remember Paul's words here,

"you do not support the root, but the root supports you."

In this same chapter of Romans, in verse 11, Paul asks the key question,

"I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?"

His answer is,

"Certainly not!" [By no means.]

God you see has an appointed time when he will fulfill the promises of the new covenant to make Israel the head of the nations of the earth and Jerusalem the center of the government of the earth. This is what he asks us to pray for when we pray the Lord's prayer,

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10)

This is why the disciples came to the Lord Jesus risen from the dead and they said to him, (as we are told in the opening verses of Acts),

"Will you at this time restore the kingdom unto Israel?" (Acts 1:6b)

Now Jesus did not rebuke them for asking that question. All he did was correct their question about the timing. They said, "Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" This is after he'd been with them for 3 1/2 years and taught them much. But they still obviously expected that there would be a time coming when Israel would be restored as the head of the nations of the earth. The kingdom was to be the promises restored to Israel. But Jesus warned them, "Times are not for you to know." Times are uncertain---but events are not.

In Romans 11, verses 12 and following, the Apostle Paul tells us what will happen when Israel does experience the fulfillment of the new covenant. Look at these words,

"Now if their fall means riches for the world..."

Did you ever realize that the greatest blessing any nation has ever had, in this whole age since the coming of

our Lord, was the entrance of the gospel into that nation? The secular world does not want to recognize this. But you can prove this to yourself---every nation where the gospel has been preached since the coming of the Lord, has been a nation where people have found freedom. Freedom always accompanies the teaching and the preaching of the word of God. And wherever a nation has had the gospel once, found freedom. and then turned its back on God, that nation goes back into despair and into national oblivion. It loses its ability to function to a large degree as a nation. Totalitarian government and authoritarianism comes in and the people become virtual slaves. Now the greatest witness of this fact today is what has happened in the Soviet Union. Here is a people that 70 years ago turned its back on what it had known about the gospel, and threw out the moral absolutes of God, and tried instead to erect certain artificial absolutes supported only by intense government oppression. As a result the Russian people lost their freedom. Turn away from God and you, too, will lose your freedom as an individual, always. Freedom is the greatest riches that the world can know. Through the course of history today you can trace this out---every nation that has received the gospel and given heed to the word of God has been a nation blessed by God, blessed with freedom---its people are relatively free. That's what Paul means, if the fall of Israel meant that God turned to the gentiles and brought riches to them, then, now listen to this,

"...and their failures riches to the gentiles, how much more their fulness! For I speak to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am an apostle of the Gentiles,

He goes on to tell us that when the nation Israel believes, the nations of the world will be brought from death unto life! Look at verse 15,

"For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be [the riches of the world] but life from the dead?"

Most of you know your Bibles well enough to know that God's appraisal of the peoples of the world today is that they are lost, they are all dead in trespasses and sins. That deadness, that death that produces violence, and anger, and hatred, and terrorism, and warfare, and crime, and all the other destructive, things. These are a result of the loss of the freedom of the believer that come from belief in the gospel. That death which blights all the nations will end only when Israel accepts their Messiah. Then, at that time, the promise of the new covenant is fulfilled in their national life. We know that will be the time when our Lord returns. As the prophets Zechariah and others tell us, Jesus will then personally assume the throne of his father David. And the 12 apostles will reign with Jesus---as he specifically states back in Matthew 19:27. Let me read these words to you---these are the words of Jesus himself,

Peter answered and said to him, "See, we have left all and followed you; therefore what shall we have?" [Now listen.] So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, [that is, the restoration that is coming] when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold and inherit eternal life.

This is our Lord's own description of that coming kingdom which Revelation 20 tells us (six times over) will last for one thousand years, it is what we call the millennium.

To wind this up, the apostle Paul confirms all these things in the eleventh chapter of Romans in these words in verses 25 through 27, he says,

For I do not desire brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fulness of the gentiles be come in; and then all Israel shall be saved; as it is written,

**"The Deliverer will come from Zion,
He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.
For this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins."**

What covenant? Why, the New Covenant. The New Covenant was made with the house of Israel and Judah on the night our Lord was betrayed, "This is the blood of the new covenant which is made with many for the remission of sins." So you see that which began at the first coming will be fulfilled in its entirety at the second. All of us, all Christians, have to live in a sense with between the all ready and the not yet. All ready the Kingdom of God has begun within us but its not yet fully manifest or fulfilled upon the earth---we have to live waiting for that promise.

Just before he died Dr. Francis Schaeffer, one of the major prophets of our day, was asked what he believed about the promises of God to Israel, and this is his reply. He says,

"I believe that if God can revoke his promises to the nation Israel then I have no assurance of my own personal salvation. I believe that at the end of the present age the Lord will return and establish his kingdom for one thousand years and the purpose of the millennium will be to demonstrate conclusively that man's problem is himself, and not Satan. Evil is present during the millennium, even though Satan is bound because evil in man is a result of the fall unless there be a regenerated experience. When Satan is released he will find thousands who will immediately respond to his call to mount a final rebellion against God."

We have the very promise of God. Do you know that the Apostle Peter tells us someday the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the earth shall be melted with fervent heat. Those ordinances of the sun and the moon and the stars and the heaven and the earth will end in that day and then shall come into being what Peter goes on to tell about, and Isaiah and other of the prophets predict the creation of a new heaven and a new earth where evil will no longer be present in any form whatsoever. But before that time comes God promises he will fulfill every word spoken to that strange nation there in the Middle East. So Israel does have a part in the promises of God---and our very existence as a church borrows from, and rests upon, those promises made to Israel long ago! That's the faithfulness of God.

Let us close in prayer,

Prayer

Thank you Father for the wonderful teaching of your Word that reminds us that once you give a promise you never go back on it. The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable, you never take them back again. Our redemption rests on that. So Lord we thank you for the redemption of the nation of Israel from its unbelief today. We thank you for that in Jesus name, Amen.

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LEGALISM

by Ray C. Stedman

Our study today is legality, or legalism. There is much misunderstanding on this subject by many. We tend to think that everybody else has it but that we don't. We often treat it like the common cold. We don't understand what it is or how to cure it, but almost everyone suffers from it and we find it to be very highly contagious. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to liken it to hay fever, since I see that some of you are joining me in a chorus of snuffing and sniffing and wheezy breathing. Legality can be very much like that. It comes upon you and you hardly know what has happened. But there it is. The symptoms are suddenly present and you don't know what to do with it---certainly not how to cure it---and so you suffer through it but don't know what is wrong.

But legality is one of the favorite weapons of the enemy. He loves to get Christians to be legalistic, for then he has destroyed their enjoyment of the Spirit and he can use them to spread havoc among a generation or a

company of believers and ruin a vital, active, and growing Christian group. That is exactly what happened in Galatia, and is what drew forth the letter to the Galatians from the Apostle Paul. Here was a group of young Christians who had a fantastic beginning. Their response to the preaching of the apostle was heartwarming. They had given themselves totally to Christ. Paul was greatly enthusiastic about this group of growing young Christians. But after a while word came to him that legality had set in, legalism was taking its toll. What had been a bright and marvelous testimony of the grace and glory of God was being turned into a dull, apathetic group of religionists---cold, barren, and empty, almost devoid of spiritual life.

That is what legality will do. Legalism destroys! It did then and it does the same thing today. I know of no affliction in Christendom which is more widespread and more devastating in its destructiveness than this. Across the world today many churches are sunken into a pall of boredom and futility largely because of the legalistic spirit which has throttled their spiritual vitality.

Legalism can also be described as false Christianity because that is essentially what it is. It uses Christian language and biblical terms. It sounds evangelical. It loves to use phrases like "evangelism," "fundamentalism," "biblical literalism," and such. It sounds Christian and looks Christian but it is emphatically not true Christianity. It is a spurious fake, an imitation Christianity, an empty, hollow counterfeit of the real thing. It is a burdensome drag upon the spiritual life that creates a sense of bondage and guilt. It is a sickening, nauseating fraud in the eyes of others. God describes it in the Scriptures as a stench in his nostrils. That is what legality really is. We ought not to be proud of it in any degree although, strangely enough, I find Christians boasting of their legalism. They don't call it that, but they nevertheless boast in what is in effect a legalistic spirit. But God does not boast of it. He finds it disgusting. Yet it is so widespread. Why is that? Why should it be so universal? Surely the answer is that the enemy strives diligently to keep us in ignorance as to what legalism really is. We recognize certain forms of it and try to divest ourselves of those, but then we are not aware of other forms of it that are gripping our lives and holding us in bondage. So while we are denouncing legality on one side as practiced by others, we ourselves are practicing it in another form. Thus it spreads its noxious influence throughout a local Christian body, across the nation, and throughout the entire worldwide church.

How can you recognize legalism? That is the question we want to zero in on. We must first understand that since legality is basically false Christianity, then you can never recognize the false unless you understand the true. That is where I want to start. What is real Christianity? What is Christianity as the Scriptures set it forth---true Spirit-filled living? Let me attempt a definition. True Christianity is to manifest genuinely Christlike behavior by dependence on the working of the Spirit of God within, motivated by a love for the glory and honor of God. That is the genuine article.

You will notice that it has three essential elements, and without all three it becomes legality. If it fails in even one point it is nothing but legality. First, there is an expected pattern of behavior. There is a law, if you like, a code, to which we are expected to conform. Many Christians make the mistake of thinking that to be free from legalism you must become free from any law whatsoever. Nothing is further from the truth. The Scriptures never endorse that notion. I know that we sing, "Free from the Law, O happy condition/Jesus hath bled, and there is remission," but what we are talking about is not freedom from the law but freedom from the curse of the law. That is something quite different.

There always must be law. This is a law-governed universe because the law reflects the character of God. God himself is reality. God is behind all things, and his character is the law which governs everything. Therefore Christians must always be related to law---the law of the character of Christ, of the law of the Ten Commandments---it is the same thing. The Ten Commandments simply describe the nature of God's character. So true Christianity isn't freedom from the existence of law. There is always a standard, always a code of conduct to be observed. That is essential. But be careful what the standard is! You can go wrong selecting the law. You can be legalistic in the standard you have set.

The second necessary element is a sufficient and adequate power. That is absolutely essential to true Christianity. The whole glory of the gospel comes in right at this point. The good news is that God has given us a sufficient and adequate power, indwelling us, available to us at all times, so that we never have an excuse for not being what we ought to be. In the Spirit of Jesus Christ, indwelling us, we have what it takes---a

sufficient and adequate power.

The third essential is a motive which moves us to action---a powerful, compelling hunger for the glory of God, an urge that God be honored and glorified. If I can put all the foregoing in another way, the true Christian life is fulfilling a law by means of a unique power because of an overwhelming desire. It requires an outward standard or code of behavior, an inward power which makes it possible to meet it, and a motive which drives us on to do so. But it takes all three. You cannot manifest genuine Christianity without all three. If it fails at any one point it immediately becomes legality. The other two can be perfect and yet it still will be legality. You can go wrong at any one of three places.

Let me go over these and show you what I mean. First, one form of legality is to have the wrong standard. Legality then becomes making unwarranted or unnecessary demands on yourself or on someone else, especially in areas which are not prohibited in the Scriptures. That becomes legality.

There is a standard which is prescribed. As I have mentioned, the law of God never changes and it is always right, always applicable and relevant to a Christian. For instance, it is always wrong to murder or to lie or to steal or to commit adultery or to covet your neighbor's things. These are always wrong. They are never right. There is no way ever of justifying them. But there are other areas in which we are given a great deal of personal liberty, and it is legalism to make standards (particularly for someone else) in these areas.

Here we must be careful, because for ourselves it is proper to set standards or rules which apply to us. When we have difficulty with some situation or we discover a weakness within ourselves it is wise to make a rule for our own protection. "I will not go to bars because I have a weakness toward alcohol. I tend to lose control and get drunk, therefore I won't go there." That may be a perfectly proper rule for your life. "I find myself easily inflamed by pornographic literature," you may say, "therefore I won't read that kind of stuff. I find myself sexually aroused to the point where I want to do the wrong thing, so I won't read literature or go to movies which do that to me." It is right to set these kinds of rules and limitations upon yourself. And you will find they will change as you grow as a Christian.

But legality comes in when a group of Christians makes rules for each other or for anybody else. That is what is wrong. That becomes legalism. We may sit down and explain a situation to somebody and ask him, "Would you agree to observe this standard of behavior if you work or study with us?" If he says "yes," then he has agreed and has adopted the rule for himself. But the Scriptures are careful not to command behavior in certain areas. When the Corinthians wrote to Paul they asked, "What about these Christians who are eating meat offered to idols?" A group of them were upset about this and they wrote to the apostle, saying, "We don't think that is right, To us that is demon worship." But Paul wrote back and said, "Now be careful!" He said, in effect, "It would be the easiest thing in the world for me, as an apostle, simply to say, 'Yes, you are right, don't eat meat offered to idols,' but I am not going to say that. What I am going to say is that here is an area where each man must be fully persuaded in his own mind. You can't make rules for each other, and you have to honor a weaker brother's conscience. If he is troubled by a certain action then don't flaunt your liberty in his presence, but be careful of one another and love each other."

So it becomes legality for Christians to levy standards of achievement or behavior or spirituality upon others. Today this involves matters concerning clothing styles, length of hair, certain demands of ritual observance like whether you may cut your lawn on Sunday or not, whether or not it is right to eat meat on Friday, food and behavior restrictions---all these things become legality when they are legislated upon somebody else. These are areas in which we are left free to be guided by our conscience, instructed by the word of God in general principles. We are free to counsel one another and help one another but not to legislate. It is wrong, absolutely wrong, to do so. It becomes legality when we make unwarranted demands upon others in an area not prohibited by Scripture. This focuses upon the what of an issue, what it is you are supposed to do, and you can be legalistic at this point.

A second form of legalism (and it is the same basic thing even though it takes another form) has to do with the power upon which you rely in order to act. Legalism is also the making of quite proper demands but making them on those who have no awareness of the proper power it takes to fulfill them. That becomes a very subtle form of legality because it is always based on a proper demand. It is in the realm which Scripture

authorizes---thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not lie, and so on---a moral code which is approved of the Scriptures. But even in that area it is wrong to make a demand upon someone who doesn't understand the power by which it is to be met. It becomes legality.

Do you see how subtle this can be? The actual behavior can be exactly the same in the case of a legalist or of one behaving as an authentic Christian. They both may be real Christians and their behavior may be exactly the same, but one is legalistic and the other is not. It is what is going on inside that is the issue in question. It is a matter of inner reliance. What are you reckoning on to meet this demand? Are you counting on your ability, your own adequacy, your talent, your personality? Is that what you are reckoning on in order to accomplish what is expected of you? Well, if you are reckoning on anything other than the activity of God at work in you, you are a legalist! We all do this from time to time. Who has not found himself falling back into some form of reckoning upon himself---either his ability (to try to show someone what he can do) or his inability (to use as an excuse). If you do this you immediately become a legalist. This is focusing now on the how you are going to do something. The most widespread form of legality in the Christian church is the flesh, trying to do something before God which will be acceptable to him.

The flesh is the old life, the natural life inherited from Adam, with its apparent resources of personality, of ancestry, of commitment, of dedication, and so forth. You can do all kinds of religious things in the flesh. The flesh can preach a sermon. The flesh can sing in the choir. The flesh can act as an usher. The flesh can lead people to Christ. Did you know that? The flesh can go out and be very zealous in its witnessing and amass a terribly impressive list of people won to Christ, scalps to hang on a belt. The flesh can do these things but it is absolutely nauseating in the eyes of God. It is merely religious activity. There is nothing wrong with what is being done, but what is terribly wrong is the power being relied upon to do it. That is legality.

That is why, in any Christian activity, you have to be careful that your inner reliance is on God and not on you. Otherwise it comes out all wrong and makes all the difference between heaven and hell, life and death. You can do exactly the same thing that someone else is doing and, if you do it with a sense of reliance on anything other than the Spirit of God, what they do will bless people but what you do will curse them. It is the very same action, absolutely the same. What you do one moment, trusting in God's Spirit, will bless people and strengthen them and bless your own life and enrich and fulfill it, but the very next moment you can do exactly the same thing in the power of the flesh, and it will be damaging and destructive and hurtful to others and to you. That is why you need to recognize the subtlety of all this and to be aware that God looks not at the outward appearance, as man does, but at the inner heart. What is going on inside is all-important to God. It is paramount that we understand that. Because other Christians around you approve of what you are doing is no sign at all that what you are doing is acceptable to God. What you are doing must be done out of a reliance on the power he provides or else it is nauseating, religious hypocrisy in his sight, and it will ultimately prove to be that in the eyes of others as well.

Now let's move to the third area. You can go wrong in the motive which moves you to do things. Legality is also the fulfilling of external requirements for reasons of self-exaltation or personal merit. Here we are focusing on the why of what you do. You must be right in what you do, how you do it, and why you do it. Why do you do things? Are you trying to build a reputation for yourself? Do you want a name as a spiritual Christian and so you let it be known how many Bible verses you memorize each week, how many hours you spend in prayer, and how much you give to the missions? That is exactly on a par with the religion of the Pharisees. This is what Jesus is highlighting in the Sermon on the Mount---men who love to be seen before men instead of being content to be visible only to the God and Father who sees in secret. If what is motivating you is a desire to gain preeminence, some prominence as a Christian, if you long to have your name blazoned before others, published around the world known here and there, and if you love to table-hop at Christian conventions (believe me, I know plenty about this in my own heart), this is legality. It is a stench in the nostrils of God. It will end up producing only death in your life and increasing the shame and reprobation of Christianity before the world.

Of course, combinations of these failures are possible. You can be wrong at two points as well as one, or at all three---and then you are really a legalist! You can be an obvious legalist as well as a subtle one. But it is all legality. It is what the Scriptures fight unstintingly and what the enemy is clever to cover over and make look like something good.

Now we are ready to attempt a definition of legality which I hope will fit all the circumstances we have looked at. Legality is a mechanical and external behavior growing out of reliance on self, because of a desire to gain a reputation, display a skill, or satisfy an urge to personal power. That is legality. It is religious performance, scrupulous and meticulous in its outward form but inwardly, as Jesus described it, "filled with dead men's bones." It is relying on self, personality, background, training, and talent or skill instead of the Spirit of God. And it is operating for and on behalf of one's own personal glory. That is full-orbed legality.

The thing that is appalling to us is to remember that there is no way to cheat in this matter. God knows our hearts. He sees us as we are and he turns off the power immediately when a legalistic spirit is present, even momentarily, in our life. What we do out of that spirit never produces anything of value in the kingdom of God. We can't fool him. We may fool others but we can't fool him. God acts immediately upon the basis of what he has said he would do, and so legality results always in death.

That is why it needs constant evaluation on our part. You can't live the Christian life and never take a look at yourself. If you go on week after week, year after year, never examining yourself, never asking, "What kind of a Christian am I? Where am I before the Lord?" you cannot escape a legalistic spirit. We must always be asking, "What kind of attitudes do I manifest? What kind of disposition do I display to others?" You must ask these questions repeatedly. That is why the Scriptures say, "examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith." The life of faith requires this.

Furthermore, it requires an openness to the help of others in this respect. Not only are we to examine ourselves, but we are to let others examine us, because it is amazing how little we can see ourselves. At times we can. We all have moments of truth. You know how they feel. Moments of truth come when you are suddenly aware of what you are. But God doesn't leave us to depend on these alone. He also gives us the rest of the body of Christ to help us. So pay attention to what others say about you---especially if they say it in love and not in harshness. Listen to their appraisal. They may be seeing something that you are not seeing, and it is important to consider and to face honestly what others make clear to us.

We don't like that, do we? We all want to deal with God directly. We don't mind his seeing us. We don't mind his telling us what is wrong because he does it in secret. But it really gets to us when he chooses to use someone else to do it. As Oswald Chambers says, "God never allows you to choose the scene of your own martyrdom. If you object to the fingers by which he crushes his grapes, you will never become wine poured out to bless the hearts of others." So don't object to them. Allow others to minister to you and to help you with their insights into your life. That is why we need the body.

Well then, what is the cure of legality? Suppose you find it in your heart---and we all will. If you can go on week after week and never find any evidences of legality in your life you are utterly blind. There is something wrong with you, because legality is there. It is present. It is always waiting to be manifested at any moment of weakness, and there are plenty of moments of weakness, aren't there? But what do you do with it when you find it? The Scriptures suggest a very simple and unfailing remedy. Repent and believe---that is all. Repent of it. Change your mind about it. Don't justify it. Don't excuse it. Don't call it something else. Don't try to cover it up and pretend that it is something acceptable. You may fool the people around you but you won't fool God. He knows. So repent of it. Admit it. Say so, openly and freely. And then believe that God has already taken care of it, that death need not follow. Commit it to him and out of death will come resurrection; from death will come life. The moment you acknowledge the death, the resurrection immediately follows---always. God brings to life that which would otherwise be barren and dead. That is the secret of handling legality.

Bill Newton will forgive me if I share a little story that he told me just before the service, because it illustrates this so beautifully. Bill was reminding me of the time when the Salt Company (a Christian folk-rock music group) was here a year or so ago in our Body Life service. He was troubled by the music. It wasn't the style to which he was accustomed. He didn't like the beat and he couldn't understand the words very clearly, so the music wasn't ministering to him very much. When he looked over to his wife, LaVose (who plays the piano for us so wonderfully), he saw her bowed in prayer. He found a moment to ask her, "What's troubling you?" She said, "You know, the Lord just said to me that he isn't as uptight over this as I am." Now that is repentance, exactly! That is what it means. It is facing the fact that God's attitude is different than ours.

Something may bother me but it doesn't bother him and therefore it is my attitude that is wrong, not his. A belief in and acceptance of God's attitude---that is repentance.

How much grief we would be spared in our lives if we gave people the same liberty we expect for ourselves. We don't want somebody else to tell us how to dress in order to come to church. There is no rule in the Bible that says you must wear shoes to church or anything of the sort. I know this is not a problem with us any longer but there are plenty of places where it is. And I am sure that we have lingering moments of other kinds of legalism. But I am not trying to judge anyone, I simply want to say, let's look at the legalistic attitudes we find within us and judge them in the light of the Word, because legality is death. Legality is hypocrisy. Legality is phony Christianity. It is a false way to trying to appear right, and therefore it is a stench in the nostrils of the God of truth who loves to have people be honest and true as he made them to be.

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THE LORD AND HIS CHURCH

by Ray C. Stedman

The following study grows out of a question that was handed me on one occasion during a question and answer hour. Many have asked it before and since, and it deserves an honest and straightforward answer. The question is, "On what basis do you feel that the present church government at Peninsula Bible Church is scriptural?" I am very happy to attempt an answer, for I feel that it is a great and important issue. Church government is a matter of real concern and one that we need to be very sure is based on the principles of the Word of God.

Among the great denominations of our American church life there are three major forms of church government today. One of them (undoubtedly the oldest), is the *episcopal* form of government. This form is found in churches such as the Roman Catholic, the Anglican, the Methodist, and certain smaller groups as well. Final authority in the episcopal form of government rests in a bishop. There are other governing agencies besides the bishop, of course, but by and large the major, final decisions are made by the bishop. This form of government grew out of an attempt to recreate apostolic authority. The apostles were recognized as the final human authority in the early church, and in more or less degree the churches that follow this type of government are trying to recreate that apostolic authority.

Another form that is quite widespread in this country, as well as in Scotland, is the *presbyterian* form of government. This stems largely from Reformation days, when the reformers broke away from the rigid control represented in the Catholic church and established what they felt was a more modified and more scriptural form of government. This is represented in this country by Presbyterian churches of various types. Final authority here is vested largely in a group of ministers called a "presbytery." It is made up of the pastors of a given number of churches within a specified district or area. They make final decisions about matters of policy and matters of government, control buildings and property, and settle disciplinary problems. This form of government seems to have arisen out of the concept of the ascendancy of the clergy over the laity, that is, that the clergy are especially ordained by God to exercise ruling power within the church.

The third and most widespread type of church government in our country is called the *congregational* form. This is utilized by the Congregational churches, Baptist churches, the Church of Christ, and many other similar groups. It is probably one of the newest forms of church government, dating back no further than the early part of the 17th, or even the later part of the 16th century. It arose out of the widespread adherence of democratic ideals that came with the rising of democracies in our western world. It was assumed that in the church the people ought to have the voice of authority, and in congregationally governed churches the voice of the people (usually determined by a majority vote) is the final voice, and the church is regarded as a democracy.

Now in examining these systems, I recognize that men are very apt to be creatures of their times. It is easy to be influenced by our background of politics and the customs of the times in which we live. Therefore if I take the position, as I most sincerely do, that none of these systems represents a clearly scriptural position, it is not in any sense an attempt to be critical. I am sure that Peninsula Bible Church is doubtless missing the full scriptural pattern as well. There are things to which we are emotionally blind and which are not in accord with the Scriptures, for we too have been influenced by traditional thinking. I would like to make it clear that there is no sense of criticism intended along this line.

But having said all the above, I firmly believe that the present form of government at Peninsula Bible Church is the closest to the Biblical pattern that I have seen. If there is one primary reason for this it is because the men who began this work were unconscious of the Spirit's goal. They did not begin with the idea of forming a church, so there was no occasion to intrude their own concepts of church government in the planning involved. Peninsula Bible Church began in 1949 with five businessmen who were led of the Lord to begin a little Bible class, which met Sunday evenings in the Community Center in Palo Alto. These five men could not foresee and did not foresee that in setting up the organization as they then envisaged it that it would become a church. So they could not and did not go into the question of church government. In many ways, therefore, Peninsula Bible Church, like Topsy, just grew. But in looking back on those early days we can see the over-superintendency of the Holy Spirit in setting up the form of government. These five men became aware only later, as the Lord made evident what was taking place here, that a New Testament pattern had been woven into the warp and woof of the original constitution and articles of incorporation that were drawn up to govern this group.

Now the thing at question, of course, is what is it that marks Peninsula Bible Church as a Biblical church? Unquestionably, it is the enthronement here of the central idea from the Bible of what a church ought to be. The basic idea of church government in the Scriptures is the Headship of Christ!

Let me state that negatively. The church is definitely not a democracy, nor is it to be governed by clergy. Neither of these two ideas finds any support in the New Testament. The concept of the clergy as a special governing class is decried throughout the New Testament. It finds its most severe condemnation in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. There the deeds and the doctrines of the clergy as a separate group that ought to be elevated above the laity and run things within the church is decried. Christ says, "I hate those things." To make a distinction between the clergy and the laity in governmental matters is to invite endless difficulties.

But neither is the church a democracy! When you read in the New Testament that Christ is Head of the Church, you immediately are saying that it cannot be a democracy. If the Head has final authority then the people cannot be the authority. Now it is interesting that the final authority of Christ is given great emphasis in the very first mention of the church in the New Testament. In the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, the Lord says to Peter, "I will build my church [my church] and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Why will not the gates of hell prevail? Because it is his church! He will govern it and defend it. This is the first and most essential thing about the church---it is a body under the headship of Christ.

The Epistle to the Ephesians is the great letter of the New Testament that has to do with the church, and in that letter Paul develops two figures to illustrate the nature of the church. One is that the church is a body and it has a head. Just as our body is governed physically by our head, and our hands and our feet and all the other elements of our body never move except by the command of the head, so the church is a living organism, a body that is not to move except by direct command of the Head, and Christ is the Head. Then, in another passage, Paul compares the church to a building. It is a temple, he says, that is holy, spotless, and growing gradually to be a holy temple that is to be occupied by the Lord himself. In both figures the idea of growth is emphasized---the body is growing, the building is growing. But in each case, as well, all authority is vested in the Lord. Christ is the Head of the body; he is the Lord of the temple. Therefore, the basic function of church government is to make room for the ministry and superintendency of Christ as the Head of the church, through the Holy Spirit.

Now it is also revealed in our New Testament that the Lord chooses to make known his will through men whom he designates and equips to carry on the spiritual oversight of his work. These are called by various

names in the Scriptures. They are designated as elders in one place, and in another place they are named bishops or overseers (the same word in the Greek), and in still another place they are called pastors and teachers. These all refer to the same office, but they designate different aspects. The word "elder" is a reference to the man himself. It indicates a man of maturity, a man not necessarily old in years, but mature in judgement. The word "bishop," or "overseer," is a word that has reference to the work. Such a one is to have the oversight: he is to be in superintendency over a group. Then the double word, "pastor and teacher," has a regard to the duties involved. A pastor is a shepherd. The job of these men in any church is to shepherd the flock, to see that they are fed from the Word of God, to see that they are disciplined if necessary, to see that their needs are met, whatever they may be. This is the important task of those who are bishops, elders, pastors, teachers, or whatever title may be used in the Word of God.

It is also clearly evident that there was never just one of these in any given church. There is no instance in the Bible of there being but one individual in authority in the church, other than the story in Third John where Diotrephes is referred to, and John speaks in the most severe terms of this man who "loveth to have the preeminence," and who lifted himself up and singlehandedly started running the church. In all other churches there were always several elders in charge. Also, in every case, you will notice that these elders (plural) were to serve for life, or until conduct or circumstances rendered it no longer possible for them to serve. This can easily be established as you read through the New Testament. There is never any place where a term of office is mentioned for these men. They were evidently to serve for life, and the only thing that was ever brought to question was their fitness to serve on the basis of their conduct or the fact that they had moved away or were otherwise incapacitated.

Immediately, the great question is: How were these men selected? What method was used to determine who should serve in this capacity? This is the very heart of the issue. As you read through your New Testament, it is quite obvious that they were, first of all, appointed by the apostles. In Acts, the fourteenth chapter, verse twenty-two, we learn that the apostles, Paul and Barnabas, came back down through the cities that they had formerly visited, "conforming the souls" of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

Here is a clear-cut instance of the apostles selecting these individuals, ordaining elders in every church, praying with them, and then commending them to the Lord. These men were not chosen willfully, according of the apostles' own desires. They did not go into a church and take the first good looking man who had become a Christian, and had a pretty sizable bank account, and make him an elder. They were not guided simply by personal preference. It is clearly indicated in the Word of God that they prayed and fasted over this, seeking the mind of the Lord. Who does the Lord want? What does the Head of the Church want as instruments in the governing of his church?

Again, this is made manifest in Acts 20, verse 17, "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church." Then in verse 28 he says of them, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." Here are men that the apostles had appointed to their office, but they had first determined that these were men chosen of the Holy Ghost, gifted by God.

Then, later on, it is apparent that the apostles appointed apostolic delegates to do this task. Two of these were Timothy and Titus. These were two young men who traveled with Paul, and both were commissioned to this work. In Titus, first chapter, verse five, Paul says, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." Though Titus was not an apostle, yet he could represent Paul and was commissioned to this task. In First Timothy, the third chapter, verses one through seven, Timothy was likewise commanded to ordain elders and the qualifications were given specifically that they might recognize the ones whom the Holy Spirit had chosen.

But, you say, we do not have apostles or apostolic delegates today! Yes, we do. There are apostles authorized by the Lord to select elders today! I remember on one occasion I was meeting with two or three Mormons in a home in which we were discussing the tenets of the Mormon faith. One of their constant boasts is that they have the only church that has twelve apostles as well as a council of seventy. They claim, of course, that this is

the mark of the true church. They said to me, "You do not belong to the true church. Your church doesn't even have apostles, but our church has twelve apostles." I said, "You are mistaken, my friends, our church does have apostles." They said, "What do you mean? What sect do you belong to?" And I said, "The group I belong to makes no difference, but the apostles that we have are the true apostles." He said, "Well, who are they?" I said, "The apostles we have are the original ones, Paul, John, Peter, James and others who are listed in the New Testament."

"How do you mean," they said, "how can that be?" I said, "Any time I want to find out what the Apostle Paul has to say about a subject, I simply turn to Romans through Hebrews and read his words. If I want to know what the Apostle Peter has to say, I turn to Peter's letters and there is Peter still speaking today." The church was built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and they still speak to us today. Christ's plan for government has never changed. If you desire to know the qualifications for elders, go to Paul, the Apostle, and he will tell you what qualifications you must look for. Ask Peter what are their duties, and he will outline them for you. Then those in positions of leadership see men gifted in this way by the Holy Spirit and they are to recognize that the Spirit of God has chosen such to be in a position of authority within the church. It is really the Apostle Paul who has identified him. He has given us the qualifications by which that man is to be chosen. He still speaks to guide the saints in recognizing who among them the Lord has marked out for this work.

Here is a most significant point. Never once in the whole of the New Testament do you read of churches choosing their own leaders. Never once. Sheep never choose their shepherd. That is always the job of the Chief Shepherd. The sheep never get together and have an election to decide who is going to be their shepherd. Neither is the church, the flock of God, to do it. But, once chosen, the flock is constantly exhorted to recognize that the Chief Shepherd has set these men among them and that they are to honor them, to respect them, and to follow them. In the letter to the Hebrews believers are exhorted, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." Again, "obey them that have rule over you, and submit yourselves for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you." Then in First Thessalonians, Paul writes, "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake, and be at peace among yourselves." This is the Apostle's word to the church concerning those who are in positions of authority over them.

Neither are these men left to their own devices on how to run the church. They are carefully instructed by the apostles as to their duties. The Apostle Peter addresses "the elders which are among you" and urges them: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as being lords over God's heritage, that is, do not think that you are to be the boss of the church and are simply to give orders and everyone must follow what you say. No, remember, this is God's flock. [And you are not to lord it over them]...but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." These are wise words and they are very badly needed in church government. Other instructions appear in First Timothy and Titus, given to inform the elders of the church where their limitations lie and what form of activities they are to engage in.

Perhaps someone is saying, "Why has this been so largely abandoned today?" Let me answer this with a quotation from W. E. Vine, a noted English scholar. He says:

The course of departure from apostolic teaching and precept is easily traceable. Human pride and rivalry, a struggle for ascendancy and power early produced a class of ecclesiastical officials who obtained their position in a manner very different from what is set forth in Scripture. The case of Diotrophes provides an illustration. The method was adopted, too, of electing church officials by vote, hence the popular or the strong man obtained a coveted position. Dependence on the Spirit of God and the recognition of the evidence of his operation have given place to officialism and formality, and the evil spread gradually but surely, and eventually became general.

I am greatly in the belief that the strong and wonderful fellowship of the Spirit we enjoy here at Peninsula Bible Church is largely because we have been unconsciously led of the Lord into this ancient form of

government which so nearly represents what the New Testament sets forth. It is wonderful to see how the Lord can control men whom he has set in the position of authority. In Isaiah eleven there is a wonderful passage which predicts a time when the wolf shall lie down with the lamb, and the calf and the lion and the fatling shall lie down together and a little child shall lead them. In reading that I have often thought, "This sounds like a Board of Directors' meeting at Peninsula Bible Church." If you know these men intimately, as I have had occasion to know them, you would recognize that some of them are pretty strong-minded men. One fellow is like a lion, taking the leadership like a lion, a strong, wonderful man that way. Another one is like a leopard, quiet but deadly! Then another one is more like a wolf. He can snap a bit at times. Still another fellow in his weak moments is more like a bear, sometimes surly and growly. And here am I, poor innocent lamb, in the midst of all these wild animals! But I can testify with a full heart that when we meet together as Directors of Peninsula Bible Church, a miracle takes place. The wolf lies down with the lamb; and the lion and the fatling lie down together; the cow and the bear feed together, and so on. We have found a deep bond of peace and fellowship because of the superintendency of the Spirit of God in all these matters.

Perhaps somebody says, "Are we just to leave the church to be run by these men, with the congregation never allowed to decide anything at all?" The answer is, "No." This group is not to decide all questions within the church. On spiritual matters and matters of essential policy within the church their job is to determine the mind of the Lord. They are not to determine their own will or the will of the people, but the will of the Lord. We believe this is best determined by seeking unanimous action on decisions so that, through the years, there has been an unwritten law that the Board of Directors will not operate by majority vote, but there must be a unanimous vote. Sometimes we must wait quite a while before the Lord gets some of the lions and the bears around to the place where they agree, but it had always been accomplished. When there is unanimity, we believe the mind of the Lord is made manifest. But on matters that have to do with the disbursement of funds for major projects, the voice of the people is rightly heard. This is a matter that concerns the church. When people give money they have a right to say where it is going. A giver has the right to direct his gift. We have tried to recognize this and to set up opportunities for the voice of the congregation to be heard about matters that have to do with the undertaking of missionary projects, building programs, and that type of thing.

I sincerely believe that at Peninsula Bible Church we follow this New Testament pattern as closely as it is possible to do today, and yet I am aware that even as I write this, there are doubtless areas of failure to which we are blind because of our closeness to the situation, our varied backgrounds, and the times in which we live. Yet I thank God that we have been led of him into a basic form of organization that is close to the New Testament pattern.

Now before I bring this to a close, let me come back to the all important thing, and that is the Lordship of Christ. How comforting it is to know that we are not left to run things ourselves. We do not have to make final decisions on church matters. When problems come before the church, we do not need to stew and fret, and attempt to solve them ourselves. We are, of course, to investigate and discuss and plan. The Lord wants us to know what is happening. We are to look into matters to see what the underlying principles affecting them may be. The Lord does not work apart from us, but through us. But in the final analysis, we are not to listen to the voice of the people; we are to listen only to the voice of the Lord. We can be sure that when he is in the midst of his church, direction will be given. This church is not ours, it is his church. It was bought with his blood. He cleansed it and purified it by his Word. He appointed its ordinances. He is the one who has chosen those to guide in spiritual matters and has equipped them with the necessary qualifications to do the work. It is the Lord who has distributed the talents of gifts and ministry among the whole congregation so that each one has a special talent, a special gift to be exercised in the ministry of the church. It is to the Lord that we bring our gifts, not to the church. If they are withheld, you withhold them from the Lord, not from the church. If you bring them, you bring them to the Lord, not to the church. That is what he meant when he said, "Inasmuch as you did it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me."

This is the place where God's honor dwells, where evil doctrines and evil associates are not to have any practice or place. I do not mean this building, I mean this people. This is the place of worship in spirit and in truth. This is the place of witness in love and in power. Of this church, as of all other churches, it is written, "If any man defile the church of God, him will God destroy." And of this church it is written, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." So traditions and customs and the trappings of men must be put away. We must now take our Bibles and search out these things, and walk in the light of His

Word, dwelling together in unity and in peace, speaking the truth in love, and above all else, holding to the Head, who alone has the right to raise up and to put down, to direct and to guide, and before whom we must all give an account.

Prayer

Our Holy Father, we thank you for the wonder of the church. We thank you that we have become part of this living organism by faith in thy beloved Son, that he it was who cleansed us with his blood, and that blessed Spirit's baptism has united us to this body and made us to share in its united life. Lord, we pray that we may honor thee and ever seek to remember that thou art alive and walking in the midst of thy church and holding its lampstand in thy hand. Help us, therefore, to be aware of our testimony in this area, in this neighborhood, and to faithfully walk in fellowship with our living Lord, for we pray in his name, Amen.

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THE MAN GOD USES

by Ray C. Stedman

In discussing our subject the term, *man*, is used in a generic sense which includes women as well. Man or woman, there is no respect of persons with God. God delights to use anyone, boy or girl, man or woman, who makes himself available to him. I suspect that if we investigated we would find in most hearts here a basic hunger to be used of God. If you have been a Christian for any length of time you have experienced something of this and you know the joy of it, the glory of it, the sheer excitement of it. There is nothing quite like the sense of having been a channel of divine activity, of having been used to do God's work.

I suspect that there is a hunger in your heart to be used of God not merely occasionally, but consistently. And to be used, not despite yourself, as sometimes happens (for the Scripture tells us that God even uses the devil, so if you are resting upon that you are in pretty poor company), but to be used with full acquiescence and acceptance of God's program for you. Doubtless you desire to be used to heal, to make right, to restore, to break down middle walls of participation, to unite that which is shattered and fragmented, to deliver from oppressions, from bondage and enslavement, to enlighten and open eyes, to illuminate reality, to dispel mists, illusions and visions, and to empower, enrich, fulfill, and intensify. All these are descriptions of the work God is here to do, and what he will use you to do if you are available to him. It is exactly what God proposes to do with each one of us, and thus to be used is what gives meaning and purpose to life.

Without this, the best we can do results in a sense of deadness, meaninglessness and pointlessness. We might give a most impressive display of energy, vitality, and activity, but when we get to the end we shall have to ask ourselves, What's been the point of it all? In the day of the judgment of the believer before God he may say to us, "What you did was interesting, and active, but you missed the point." Thus I suspect that with many of us there is a very deep desire to be used of God. I confess, for my own part, that I will be quite content if it could be written on my tombstone what I once saw on another's, "He was used of God."

Spiritual maturity, becoming grown up as a Christian, is nothing more nor less than to be made ready for consistent use by the Spirit of God. When you have reached that place it will be marked by certain signs, which are unconsciously revealed to us by the apostle Paul in a well-known passage from the first chapter of Romans:

"I want you to know, brethren, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish: so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every

one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

It should be quite apparent that the apostle is not drawing a deliberate self-portrait. He does not intend to talk about himself or what kind of a man he is; he is simply breathing out to these Roman Christians, many of whom he has never met, a longstanding desire on his part to come to the capital of the Empire to visit them and to have a ministry among them. But in the process of doing this he unconsciously reveals the qualities of the man or woman that God uses. This we will look at together.

You are familiar with the three common divisions of this text, the three "I am's" of verse 14, 15, and 16. First, "I am under obligation [or as the Old Version puts it, "I am a debtor" both to Greeks and to barbarians." Here the apostle is breathing out his desire to be used to reach others. He is the man for others; he is under compulsion to travel incessantly to reach "both Greeks and barbarians" (or as we would put it in our modern terminology, both the squares and the hippies), "the wise and the foolish " (the eggheads and the hopheads). It does not make any difference what branch of society you are considering, the apostle says, I have a sense of obligation to any of them. I am under compulsion to reach them and to help them and change them. You see the beating of his heart for other people.

What does this all mean? We read these verses quite wrongly at times. We tend to read them as though he had in view the needs of these Greeks, with their culture and their refinement, and also the barbarian world with its primitive conditions, its lack of understanding and education and, seeing the need deep in each heart, he is desiring to meet it out of compassion. We hear much these days of the humanistic appeal, the need to help people who are in trouble. But we read this quite wrongly if we read it thus. This was not what drew the apostle out to people. These words reveal something quite different. They reveal a man in whom the power of self has been broken. The principle by which we normally live our lives, that is, "What's in it for me?" is a question which had lost its meaning for the apostle Paul. He was no longer asking himself, What's in it for me?, he was no longer concerned about what he got out of life, but he was breathing out a hunger to be involved, to be poured out, for the life of someone else. He was essentially and primarily the man for others.

Selfishness grips your heart as it does mine. It is hard to break its grip. We find ourselves inevitably and instinctively relating everything to what it is going to do to us, and what we will get out of it. As one Christian honestly put it,

I lived for myself, for myself alone,
For myself and none beside,
Just as if Jesus had never lived
And as if he had never died.

Unfortunately that is descriptive of much Christian living. There you have it. That is life as we know it in these mid twentieth-century days. We live for ourselves; what we want and hope to get.

But how different is the spirit of the apostle. He longs to risk his life, his health, and his fortune for the sake of others. He was most serious about it. You can see how seriously he took it in the eleventh chapter of 2 Corinthians,

"Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the cities, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches."

That is describing a man in whom the power of self has been broken. He no longer cares what happens to him, he is ready to risk anything, hazard anything, in order that he might discharge his debt to barbarian and to Greek alike.

It was not always so with this man. There was a time, he tells us, when he, too, lived for self-advantage. He counted up his resources to himself and found there were four things going for him. First was his ancestry. In the eyes of God Paul felt that was a great advantage. He was born a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin. He had the right pedigree. Then too, there was his orthodoxy which he felt also gave him the right to claim the favor of God. He belonged to the strictest party of the Jews, the Pharisees, the fundamentalists. He was a member of the group that took the word of God most seriously and interpreted it most literally. Notice that in these things he was not trying to find favor in the eyes of men, but in the eyes of God. Even before his conversion Paul knew that no life is worth a snap of the finger if it is not somehow related to God. So these are the things he felt counted with God: his ancestry, his orthodoxy.

And then, his activity. He says he was a persecutor of the church. When this little cult of the Nazarenes arose around the troublemaker from Galilee, named Jesus, and threatened the Hebrew faith and the teachings of Moses, Paul was not merely content to tut-tut about it and wring his hands. He organized a band of patriots and moved out with soldiers to stamp them out. He was active in the persecution of the church, and he thought in all good conscience that God would be pleased with that kind of activity. Finally, he took pride in his morality. He was blameless, he says, before the Law. Whenever the Law condemned him he faced up to it and brought a sacrifice, and thus cleared up his conscience. He tried to walk upright and just before the Law, and he had a clear conscience in that respect. He thought these things ought to have brought God right over to his side.

But, he tells us, there came a night in the city of Damascus when they let him down over the wall in a basket. For the rest of his life he looked back to that event as the time when God began to teach him the most important lesson in his life. He had marshalled all his resources, all his human abilities, all the brilliance of his mind and the power of his educated intellect, to the task of reaching the Jews in Damascus for Christ, and that night it all came crashing down around his feet. He found himself hunted and hounded like a criminal, driven out of the city, and finally let over the wall in a basket. What a grinding humiliation for a man of proud spirit, as was this man! He went up to Jerusalem, and the disciples there wouldn't have anything to do with him. He went into the temple and the Lord ordered him out of Jerusalem and told him to leave immediately. He then did the hardest thing on earth to do; he went down to his home town and lived there in humility and obscurity for about five years. No one heard anything about the mighty apostle Paul. "Whatever happened to Paul?" people were asking. "He was converted in such a dramatic way on the Damascus road, and we thought something great would come of it, but who's heard of Paul lately?"

But Paul was learning what he expresses in Philippians 3. There he says, "I learned that the four things which I thought would greatly impress God were useless. They were nothing but garbage, pure dung, manure! I learned to count them as refuse, and to realize that in Jesus Christ I had everything I needed. If I would quit trying to live for myself, but give myself to him, to accomplish his goals, all that he is would be made available to me, and I could have everything I needed for whatever he wanted done." That is the secret he learned and that is what finally broke the grip of selfish concern in his life and turned him into "the man for others." He tells us himself how it works. "The love of Christ," he says, "constrains me." It drives me out, it constrains.

Now you see why I say we read these verses wrongly? It was not the need of the Greeks and the barbarians that drew him out. I confess, knowing my own heart, that I could read the most heart-rending stories of need in human lives and remain calloused and unmoved. Such is the selfishness of the human heart, and you well know this is true. You too can be exposed to terrible need, and if it makes too much demand upon you your temptation is to turn and look the other way, to pretend it isn't there, instead of responding. Well then, what is the answer? It is not the presentation of horrible need, the hideous suffering of humanity, that will move us to act, but we must find, as this man did, that the power of self can be broken only as we see the hunger of the heart of Jesus Christ. The love he awakens in us for him creates a desire to satisfy his hunger to have all men brought to him, Greek and barbarian alike. It is what he wants, that makes the difference. But one thing melts the hardness and selfishness of our hearts, and that is love for Jesus Christ.

I agree with John R.W. Stott who, at the Pastors' Conference at Mt. Hermon this past January, pointed out that the primary motive for evangelism is not the need of men, but a spirit of jealousy for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, a hunger that he might have all that is rightfully his. That is what jealousy is, an intolerance of rivals. There is a wrong jealousy based upon a wrong relationship. We have no right to be jealous of those

with whom we do not have a proper relationship. But if a wife and husband give themselves to one another they have established a relationship. If a rival intrudes into that, the wife or husband has a right to be jealous because the other one has already given himself. It is that kind of jealousy Paul is speaking of when he says he is jealous for Christ. He says he desires that Christ might have that which belongs to him, which is his by right of sacrifice. As he sees the face of Jesus Christ and the hunger of his heart to have from every tribe and nation men and women to belong to him, this great apostle says, "I don't care how dirty they are, how filthy they may be, how proud or arrogant they may be in their intellectual conceit, I want to reach them for Christ's sake, that he might be satisfied and have that which belongs to him."

It is not the message of the hymn, Will there be any stars in my crown? I hate that hymn. It is so pettishly selfish. Or that other hymn which I must confess I don't like either, though it is a favorite of many, O That Will Be Glory For Me. Who cares about glory for you or for me? No, there is another hymn I think is much more appropriate.

Must I go, and empty handed
Must I meet my Savior so?
Not one soul with which to greet him,
Must I empty handed go?

Must I appear before him with nothing to show for what he has been to me, what he is through me; no word of witness, no changed lives, no transformed attitudes on the part of others because of what I have been, by his grace? Must I go and empty handed be? That is the primary thrust to evangelism. Will he have the full glory due to his name? That is what ought to constrain Christians. Here is a man who is constrained by the love of Christ. His heart is captured, his emotions are moved. That is an essential quality in the man or woman that God consistently uses, a constrained heart.

Look at the next quality.

"...so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome."

"Not only are my emotions moved by love for the Lord Jesus," says Paul, "but my will is engaged as well. I am not only drawn, I am ready to act." I love this, because it emphasizes a time to stop talking and start doing. I read years ago of D.L. Moody who said to a man on one occasion, "Why don't you try doing so-and-so?" The man replied, "I've been aiming to do that for a long time." In his blunt way, Moody replied, "Well, brother, it's about time you quit aiming and started firing." It is not enough to talk, to think, or to dream. There must come moments of action. That is what Paul says. I'm ready to go, I'm eager to preach to you. It is action that turns belief into faith. You haven't exercised faith if you have simply believed the truth. You have exercised faith only when you have acted on the truth you have believed.

In Hebrews 11 we read, "Noah believed God and built an ark, to the saving of his household by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith." That is faith. Noah believed and acted. Abraham was called and obeyed. It is not enough to have wonderful desires and wonderful dreams of being used of God---act on them. Some of you have been talking a long time about inviting a friend to one of the outreach meetings this summer. Don't wait any longer, act. Some of you young people have been thinking about inviting a friend to the coffee house. Well, don't wait, act! Invite a lonely person to dinner. Move out! Manifest an eagerness, an ardency of spirit to fulfill what God lays upon your heart. That is the quality of faith, and without faith it is impossible to please God.

Faith, mighty faith the promise sees
And looks to God alone:
Laughs at impossibilities
And cries, "It shall be done."

That is the second quality of the man God uses; commitment. Paul here is committed to act. He not only is constrained. but he is committed.

Finally, the third thing, he is not ashamed of the gospel. He has reached the intelligent conclusion that the

gospel has no rivals, that it can do what nothing else can do and therefore there is no need to be ashamed because it is pure, undiluted, undiminished power! And not merely power, but God's power, resurrection power, a unique kind of power which nothing in the world can rival. There is nothing like it anywhere. To me, this is the missing note above all else which we lack in our present life in the world today. Christians have forgotten that the gospel is absolutely unique. It does not borrow anything from any human source: it does not borrow from psychology, from history, from philosophy, from science, or from anything. It is an absolutely unique force. If Christians are not declaring this, there is no other body in the world capable of proclaiming it. That is why Paul says, I am not ashamed of it.

If anything could make him ashamed it would be the city of Rome. Rome sneered at the Christian story. These proud Roman citizens laughed at this fantastic tale of a man named Jesus who lived in an obscure Roman province, and who was supposedly raised from the dead after the procurator Pontius Pilate had put him to death. It was absurd to these practical hard-headed Romans. Rome ruled in haughty power as mistress of the earth. Rome was proud of its roads which ran throughout the whole empire and made trade and commerce possible everywhere. Rome was proud of its culture with its beautiful cities and its wonderful statues and art and music. Rome was proud of its conquests, of the fact that its armies were unbeatable. For over 1,000 years a kind of uneasy peace lay over the world called Pax Romana, the Roman Peace, because of the power and might of Rome's invincible armies.

But with all this display of power there were a lot of things Rome could not do. Rome was powerless when it came to freeing the slaves that abounded in the Empire. Half of the Roman Empire were slaves, and Rome could do nothing about that. Romans were seemingly powerless to curb their own lusts. At the close of this very chapter of Romans there is a terrible description of what their lusts led them to do. The seeds of disintegration were already manifest in Roman society, which would ultimately bring the whole thing crashing down around their ears. Romans were absolutely helpless when it came to vanquishing their fears. They lived in terror; terror of the barbarian hordes that were around the borders of the Empire; terror of death; and of nature. They were constantly engrossed in rank superstition because of their fears. They were powerless to cure or heal the inner agonies of their spirit. You only need to read the literature of that day to know their poignant cry for help against the meaninglessness of life. They were unable to awaken hope, and on tombstone after tombstone you find written in Latin, *No Hope*.

But all these needs the gospel meets. That is the uniqueness of it. Here is our world today, like Rome, powerless amid its display of power. It can do so many things of a technological nature, but one thing it cannot do: it cannot heal a human heart, it cannot awaken hope, and it cannot unite that which is fragmented and divided. It has no power in this realm. But when you have been used as an instrument of that kind of power, beside that the exercise of earthly power is dull and drab indeed.

Dr. Howard Hendricks from Dallas has been with us here for a few days. He was telling me about his visit to Campus Crusades Headquarters. He met there certain Christian young men who were wrestlers. They had joined a special athletic team that Campus Crusades was sending out in witness around the country. These men were top wrestlers and had been engaged in five or six matches in the Los Angeles area, matched against some of the top wrestlers from the colleges and universities around. They had won five out of six matches and had tied the sixth one. Mr. Hendricks was speaking to one of these young men, a champion wrestler. It is a thrill to be a champion in any sport, it is a good feeling, a great feeling. This young man said to Howard Hendricks, "You know, I've come to see that wrestling is just peanuts. Wrestling isn't important. I'm not a wrestler---I'm a witness." By those words he was expressing this fact: there is nothing more exciting than to have the power of the gospel flowing through you to change someone else's life.

Look at what Paul says about this, in closing. It is universal in its appeal. It is for Jews and for Greeks: these were the two divisions of the world from the Jewish point of view. Anyone, anywhere in the world, is a proper subject for this gospel. It is designed for all men. It is not provincial, it is not national; it is designed for men everywhere. Further, it is wholesome in its results. Notice what the result is salvation. Perhaps we do not like that word because it has been so badly abused. We think of salvation as some kind of religious pioussity; a kind of religious formaldehyde in which people are steeped, which has no attraction whatsoever. But that is a wrong use of the term. Salvation is nothing less than wholeness. It is to be a whole person, a person who is restored to what he ought to be, and what God intended him to be. That is what is the glorious thing about this

gospel. It is not creating plaster saints who walk around in separation from the common, mundane things around them; it is creating people who live, who love to live, and to live at the heart of life, yet who live well-adjusted, wholesome lives, at peace with themselves and at peace with God.

Notice also that it is mighty in its nature. It is power, says the apostle, living power, a living force. It is not some kind of a peace tablet dropped into the heart which gives a momentary comfort. No, no. It is a force that goes to work and keeps on working away, driving you out of yourself, thrusting you on. You can't sleep sometimes because it keeps working on you. You can't run away from it, you can't evade it. It is there, and it keeps pushing and pushing relentlessly, driving you on. It is a living force at work in your life. It is the kind of power that nothing else can equal because it is resurrection power. It works in the midst of death. It works best in a cemetery. If you are living in a cemetery you are a fit candidate for the power of God. Resurrection power works when nothing else will work.

Finally, it is simple in its acceptance. It is by faith. By faith! That's all, by believing, by commitment to it. It comes by a man or a woman saying, "I don't understand everything about it, but I've seen enough to know that it's true---I'll follow it anyway." And they do. That commitment of faith to Jesus Christ is the door by which life is opened.

There we have it. Here is the man God uses consistently, continuously: the man who is confident in the power of God, confident that God is at work, confident that he will be at work in his life. Because this is not just for apostles, it is for everyone. Paul said that he was a pattern for everyone of how this Christian life works. The first note of it is that to become confident God is at work, that he can work, does work, and will work, and that he is quite able to do what nothing else can do.

Second, here is a man who is constrained, moved, and is motivated, not by the need around him but by the face before him---by the love of the Lord Jesus and the expectation of that day when he will stand at last in his presence and all of his life will be in review. I think it is a salutary thing to think often of that moment. I do. What is the Lord going to say about my life when I stand before him? What is he going to say about yours? How much of it has been self-centered, and how much has been risked, ventured, hazarded for his dear sake?

Finally, because of these two things, the man God uses is a man who is committed, who is eager, who says, "Lord, whatever you want, whenever you want it, I'm ready to follow you." I remember a friend telling me he followed one of these great fruit trucks down the road and on the back of it was a sign that read, "Any load, any place, any time." That is a wonderful motto for Christians. Any load. Lord, any place, Lord, any time. I don't live up to that, but I tell you, I want to, and may God help me to do so. I trust you will join me in that.

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A PASTOR'S AUTHORITY

by Ray C. Stedman

"Those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them," Jesus said to his disciples, "but it shall not be so among you!" Rather than being lords, he went on to say, disciples are to be servants of one another and the greatest is the one who is servant of all (Mark 10:42-43).

By these words Jesus indicates that an entirely different system of government than that employed by the world should prevail among Christians. Authority among Christians is not derived from the same source as worldly authority, nor is it to be exercised in the same manner. The world's view of authority places men over one another, as in a military command structure, a business executive hierarchy, or a governmental system. This is as it should be. Urged by the competitiveness created by the Fall, and faced with the rebelliousness and ruthlessness of sinful human nature, the world could not function without the use of command structures and executive decision.

But as Jesus carefully stated, "...it shall not be so among you." Disciples are always in a different relationship to one another than worldlings are. Christians are brothers and sisters, children of one Father, and members one of another. Jesus put it clearly in Matthew 23:8, "One is your Master, and all you are brethren."

Throughout twenty centuries the church has virtually ignored these words. Probably with the best of intentions, it has nevertheless repeatedly borrowed in toto the authority structures of the world, changed the names of executives from kings, generals, captains, presidents, governors, secretaries, heads, and chiefs to popes, patriarchs, bishops, stewards, deacons, pastors, and elders, and gone merrily on its way, lording it over the brethren and thus destroying the model of servanthood which our Lord intended. Christians have so totally forgotten Jesus' words that they frequently have set up the world's pattern of government without bothering to change the names, and have operated churches, mission organizations, youth organizations, schools, colleges, and seminaries, all in the name of Jesus Christ, but with presidents, directors, managers, heads and chiefs in no way different from corresponding secular structures.

It is probably too late to do much about altering the many structures that are commonly called "para-church" or "quasichurch" organizations, but certainly Jesus' words must not be ignored in the worship and training functions of the church itself. Somewhere, surely, the words of Jesus, "...it shall not be so among you," must find some effect. Yet in most churches today an unthinking acceptance has been given to the idea that the pastor is the final voice of authority in both doctrine and practice, and that he is the executive officer of the church with respect to administration. But surely, if a pope over the whole church is bad, a pope in every church is no better!

It is clear from the scriptures that the apostles were concerned about the danger of developing ecclesiastical bosses. In 2 Corinthians 1:24 Paul reminds the Corinthians concerning his own apostolic authority, "...not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your joy..." In the same letter he describes, with apparent disapproval, how the Corinthians reacted to certain leaders among themselves: "For you bear it if a man makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face" (2 Corinthians 11:20). Peter, too, is careful to warn the elders (and he includes himself among them) not to govern by being "...domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock." And John speaks strongly against Diotrephes "who likes to put himself first, and takes it on himself to put some out of the church." These first-century examples of church bosses indicate how easily churches then (as in the 20th century) ignored the words of Jesus, "it shall not be so among you."

But if the church is not to imitate the world in this matter, what is it to do? Leadership must certainly be exercised within the church and there must be some form of authority. What is it to be? The question is answered in Jesus' words: "One is your Master." All too long churches have behaved as if Jesus were far away in heaven and he has left it up to church leaders to make their own decisions and run their own affairs. But Jesus himself had assured them in giving the Great Commission, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." And in Matthew 18:20 he reiterated, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Clearly this indicates that he is present not only in the church as a whole but in every local church as well. It is Jesus himself, therefore, who is the ultimate authority within every body of Christians, and he is quite prepared to exercise his authority through the instrument he himself has ordained---the elderhood.

The task of the elders is not to run the church themselves, but to determine how the Lord in their midst wishes to run his church. Much of this he has already made known through the scriptures, which describe the impartation and exercise of spiritual gifts, the availability of resurrection power, and the responsibility of believers to bear one another's burdens, confess sins to one another, teach, admonish, and reprove one another, and witness to and serve the needs of a hurting world.

In the day-to-day decisions which every church faces, elders are to seek and find the mind of the Lord through an uncoerced unanimity, reached after thorough and biblically-related discussion. Thus, ultimate authority, even in practical matters, is vested in the Lord and in no one else. This is what the Book of Acts reveals in its description of the initiative actions of the Holy Spirit, who obviously planned and ordered the evangelizing strategy of the early church (Acts 8,13, etc.). The elders sought the mind of the Spirit and, when it was made

clear to them, they acted with unity of thought and purpose. ("For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden..." Acts 15:28.) The authority, therefore, was not the authority of men but of God, and it was expressed not through men, acting as individuals, but through the collective, united agreement of men whom the Spirit had led to eldership (Acts (20:28).

The point is: no one man is the sole expression of the mind of the Spirit: no individual has authority from God to direct the affairs of the church. A plurality of elders is necessary as a safeguard to the all-too-human tendency to play God over other people. Even then, the authority exercised is not one of domination and arbitrary decree over anyone. The ability of a servant to influence anyone else does not lie in ordering someone around but by obtaining their voluntary consent. This is the nature of all authority among Christians, even that of the Lord himself! He does not force our obedience, but obtains it by love, expressed either in circumstantial discipline or by awakening gratitude through the meeting of our desperate needs.

The true authority of elders and other leaders in the church, then, is that of respect, aroused by their own loving and godly example. This is the force of two verses which are often cited by those who claim a unique authority of pastors over church members. The first is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:12,13, "But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work." The key phrase is "and are over you in the Lord"; the Greek word in question is *prohistamenous*. Though this is translated "over you" in both the Revised Standard and King James versions, the word itself contains no implication of being over another. The New English Bible more properly renders it, "...and in the Lord's fellowship are your leaders and counsellors." The thought in the word is that of "standing before" others, not of "ruling over" them. It is the common word for leadership. Leaders can lead only if they are able to persuade some to follow.

Another verse used to support command authority is Hebrews 13:17, which the Revised Standard Version renders, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account." The imperative translated "obey" is from the word *peitho*, to persuade. In the middle voice, used here, Thayer's lexicon gives its meaning as "to suffer one's self to be persuaded." Again there is no thought of a right to command someone against his will, but the clear thrust is that leaders are persuaders whose ability to persuade arises not from a smooth tongue or a dominant personality, but from a personal walk which evokes respect.

At this point many may be tempted to say, "What difference does it make? After all, the pattern of command authority is too widely established to alter now, and besides, many churches seem to be doing all right as it is; why try to change now?"

In response, consider the following:

1. The Bible indicates that any deviation from the divine plan inevitably produces weakness, division, strife, increasing fruitlessness, and, ultimately, death. The present low state of many churches is testimony to the effects of ignoring, over a long period of time, God's way of working.
2. A command structure of authority in the church deprives the world of any model or demonstration of a different way of life than the one it already lives by. Worldlings see no difference in the church, and can see no reason why they should change and believe.
3. A command authority inevitably produces resentment, repression, exploitation and, finally, rebellion. It is the law, which scripture assures us we can never redeem or restore, but which must, by its very nature, condemn and repress.
4. The desire of the Lord Jesus to show to the world a wholly new form of authority which is consistent with grace, not law, is nullified by a command structure among Christians, and the gospel of dying-to-live is denied even before it is proclaimed. This means that God is robbed of his glory and distorted before the watching world. Nothing could be more serious than this!

Admittedly, a call for a change of this nature is radical, even revolutionary. But since when was the church called to be a conforming society? Is it not high time we took seriously our Lord's words: "it shall NOT be so among you"?

Discovery Paper #3500

THE PRIMACY OF PREACHING

By Ray C. Stedman

I believe in preaching! The fall of 1987 will mark my 37th year in one pulpit, and for all of those years I have considered preaching to be my primary task. I have been greatly encouraged in this commitment by the example of great preachers of the past and of the present. Among the latter have been Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Dr. J. R. W. Stott, and Dr. Stephen Olford. The fact that these are all British preachers speaks well of the quality of British preaching, and, perhaps, of the relative weakness of the American pulpit. To the degree that this is so I would attribute it to the fact that British evangelicals tend more toward expository preaching than their American counterparts. For it is expository preaching that constitutes, in my judgment, the only true form of preaching!

Expository sermons are those which derive their content from Scripture itself. They borrow their structure and thrust from a specific passage. They make the same point that the passage makes, and apply that point with directness and urgency to contemporary life. What other modes of preaching often lack is biblical content. Those in the pews are often drowning in words, but thirsting for knowledge. John Stek, of Calvin Seminary, puts it well: "Preachers who rummage through the Bible to find texts on which to hang topical sermons are often guilty of substituting their word for the biblical Word."* This soon results in an unconscious trivializing of preaching.

Proof of this trivializing is found in the widespread biblical illiteracy that exists today. Many persons in the average congregation do not know the meaning of terms like justification by faith, or sanctification, or the kingdom of God, or the new covenant, or the walk in the Spirit, the flesh, or even faith, love, and peace! Worse yet, because they don't know the biblical meaning of "flesh", for instance, they do not know how to recognize it in themselves, and the flesh therefore rages in unrestrained destructiveness throughout their thinking and living. Because they know nothing of the nature of the new covenant, they live continually in the legal bondages of the old. Because they do not understand the wisdom of God, they succumb constantly to the pompous pretensions of the wisdom of the world. Because they do not know how to use the shield of faith, they are besieged daily by the fiery darts of the wicked one.

What is essential therefore in preaching is, first of all, content! It is what Paul calls "the unsearchable riches of Christ." In a verse that has meant much to me personally, Paul calls himself and other first century preachers: "stewards of the mysteries of God," (I Cor. 4:1). He sees himself as entrusted with a fabulous deposit of truth which he is responsible to dispense to others. It ought to be the supreme business of a preacher to discharge that responsibility with utter faithfulness. Paul adds: "It is required of a steward that one be found faithful." So he says, in another place, he sought always "to declare the whole counsel of God."

In my opinion, much of the present weakness in preaching is due to the failure of preachers to understand the uniqueness of what they are to preach, and its remarkable power to change a congregation, a community, a city, or even a nation. When Paul came to Corinth, as he tells us in I Corinthians 2, he came "in weakness and fear and much trembling." He was, in actual fact, intimidated by Corinth! He knew these Greek cities well, and they frightened and discouraged him. He saw the terrible degradation of Corinth and it looked incurable. Sexual depravity, centered in the temple of Aphrodite perched on the AcroCorinth overlooking the city, was so widespread and so popular it seemed impossible to oppose. Paul knew the superstitious fears of the masses in

Corinth, he was aware of the devious dishonesty of its politicians, and the shameless injustice of the city courts.

He had often himself felt the tyranny of Rome in its iron-fisted control of the whole known world, especially evident in Corinth because of its past history of rebellion. He saw daily the hopeless despair of the citizenry: one half slave to the other half and living in misery and near starvation. Yet, in contrast, he felt the pride of Corinth in its beautiful location; the arrogance of its philosophers as heirs of the great thinkers of Greece; the wealth which the city's commerce brought; the acclaim it enjoyed as one of the chief cities of the Empire. How could he reach it? How could he change it? It looked impenetrable, unassailable!

But then he remembered his message---and his resource! He began to preach, "not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power." That demonstration derived from what, in the subsequent verses, he describes in some detail as "the wisdom of God." It is also that which in chapter 4 he terms, "the mysteries of God." It has several outstanding characteristics, of which I now take but three.

1. The wisdom of God is in sharp contrast to the world's wisdom: "Not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away," (NIV "coming to nothing"). When he speaks of the rulers of this age he means more than government officials. The phrase refers to the leaders of thought in any age, the movers and shakers, the mind-benders--not only statesmen, but philosophers, thinkers, scientists, educators. "Doomed to pass away," describes their transient character. Their plans and ideas are in a constant flux. They swing from one extreme to another, or flow in cycles of acceptance like fads in fashion. Everyone knows that no science textbook more than ten years old is worth owning today. Economic theories change like the tides, ebbing and flowing with the Dow-Jones averages. Educational policies come in cycles, alternating between extremes of permissiveness and heavy control. Political programs, all promising boundless prosperity, appear every election year. (I have now lived through the New Deal, the Fair Deal, the Great Society, Camelot, Peace with honor, the Camp David process, and now Reaganomics, all promising much, but delivering little).

This constant change gives rise to much of the rush and restlessness of modern living. It is all "doomed to pass away" or is "coming to nothing". Perhaps its effect has been best caught by a modern jingle that reads:

This is the Age of the Half-read Page
And the Quick Bash, and the Mad Dash
The Bright Night, with the Nerves Tight
The Plane Hop, with a Brief Stop
The Lamp Tan in a Short Span
The Big Shot in a Good Spot
And the Brain Strain and the Heart Pain
And the Cat-Naps, till the Spring Snaps
And the Fun's Done!

In sharp contrast, the Word of God remains unchanged and unchangeable. Always relevant, always up-to-date, always perceptive and penetrating--eternally accurate!

2. The truth of God's wisdom is unique and unrivalled: "We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification." The paramount glory of the gospel is that there is nothing like it anywhere else. It is without rival, either in the scientific laboratory, in the psychologist's office, or the philosopher's study. It is this factor that constitutes the supreme value of preaching. It simply does what nothing else can do! Here in this chapter, Paul calls this truth, "the deep things of God," "the thoughts of God," "spiritual truth," and "the mind of Christ!" Since it originates in God alone, it stands in sharp contrast with the thinking of men.

When Jesus came he told his disciples that he "would utter things kept secret since the foundation of the world," (Mt. 13:35). He said, "Many prophets and righteous men have longed to hear what you hear, but did not hear it." In I Cor. 2, Paul declares these truths have now been revealed to us through the Spirit, and he sums it all up in the arresting phrase, "the secret and hidden wisdom of God." Since I preach in a university community, this has always meant to me that when I open this Book on a Sunday morning, I am offering to

the physicists, the scientists, the high-tech engineers, the doctors, lawyers, bankers, and captains of industry present, as well as artisans, secretaries, plumbers, and many others, essential knowledge about themselves and about life, which they never learned, nor could learn, in any secular college or graduate school! I am privileged to give them an understanding of reality unattainable from any other source.

It is the business of preaching to change the total worldview of every member of the congregation; to dispel the secular illusions which are widely believed around, and to identify and underscore the concepts and practices that are right, and to do this for each member. Perhaps the most amazing statement of all in this amazing verse is that this hidden truth is "for our glorification!" The Westminster Confession properly states that the chief end of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. But this verse declares that God plans and works "for our (that is, human) glorification."

To glorify anyone or anything is to make openly manifest the hidden values within. God glorifies himself when he reveals himself to us. John says of Jesus, "The Word was made flesh ... and we beheld his glory." What was that glory? John tells us precisely, "... full of grace and truth." That was the glory of Jesus: grace and truth!

What, then, is the glory of man--of ourselves? It is to display outwardly all that God made us to be! To be (to use a modern term) a whole person! The truly fascinating thing is that this is what every person, without exception, wants to be! Listen to people talking and you will hear it expressed everywhere. "I want to be me!" "I'm looking for fulfillment." "I'm trying to get my act together." What we are sent to preach is clearly what everyone everywhere desperately wants to find!

But right here is the tragedy of much modern preaching. Preachers have lost sight of this great fact. They actually have come to believe that the average person no longer has any religious interest. They seek to reach him or her by appealing to their respect for knowledge or science or philosophy. If this lack of religious interest appears to be true, it is because preaching has failed to make clear that what men eagerly want to find--the secret of human fulfillment--is what God is lovingly offering to give! True preaching, the preaching of "the secret and hidden wisdom of God" will result in human glorification, the actual fulfillment of man's deepest desires.

This hidden wisdom, as Paul declares plainly in verse 2, is: "Jesus Christ and him crucified." In chapter one Paul terms it, "the word of the Cross." It is a message so totally different from the thinking of the world that it constitutes, "the offense of the Cross." It declares that until man is changed by a gracious act of God, his highest efforts and most clever schemes for self-improvement will not only prove ineffective--they will actually make things worse! By trying to control his own destiny and run his own world, he will end by not only destroying himself, but his world as well. Do we need anything else but history or the newspaper to confirm that? On a recent visit to Stanford University, Malcolm Muggeridge summed up the approaching end of Western civilization in this remarkable quote from an American critic, Leslie Fiedler.

"The final conclusion would seem to be that whereas other civilizations have been brought down by attacks of barbarians from without, ours had the unique distinction of training its own destroyers at its own educational institutions and providing them with facilities for propagating their destructive ideology far and wide, all at the public expense.

Thus did Western man decide to abolish himself, creating his own boredom out of his own affluence, his own vulnerability out of his own strength, his own impotence out of his own erotomania, himself blowing the trumpet that brought the walls of his own city tumbling down. And, having convinced himself that he is too numerous, labors with pill and scalpel and syringe to make himself fewer, until at last, having educated himself into imbecility and polluted and drugged himself into stupefaction, he keels over, a weary, battered old brontosaurus, and becomes extinct."**

Though brilliantly stated, this is scarcely hyperbole. It is happening all around us, and is an inescapable result of "human wisdom."

3. The wisdom of God exposes the incredible blunders which human wisdom makes: "None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory." Here were keen,

intelligent men, priding themselves on their ability to govern, to make decisions, and to understand men. Yet when Truth himself appeared before them they could not recognize him, totally misunderstood and mishandled him, and ended by nailing him to a Cross. That tendency to commit terrible blunders is characteristic of the wisdom of the world. It is the reason why we live on a polluted planet today, torn by strife and schism, and threatened by violence and meaninglessness on all sides. It is the business of preaching to identify such blunders and to give help to those who fail to see these unrecognized errors in society today.

Listen to any television news broadcast and in the course of it you will be exposed to 15 or 20 commercials, urging you to buy a product, to take a trip, or to spend your money in some other way. Note how many times you hear the word, "deserve." "You deserve this---you've got it coming to you---you're the kind of person who has a right to expect this." "You deserve a break today!" Gradually listeners begin to believe this subtle propaganda. The end result of it is to remove all possibility of gratitude. You don't feel grateful when you finally get what you feel you have long deserved---you are only angry that you didn't get it sooner, or you didn't get as much as the next fellow. And if you don't get it at all, you can only feel resentful and abused.

What the media is unknowingly producing is a nation of angry, resentful people, dissatisfied with all they have. And since gratitude is the chief ingredient of joy, we find ourselves in the midst of a joyless people, seeking fun continually, but unable to know joy. And this includes thousands of Christians! It is the business of the preacher to point out these effects and direct people to the true sources of joy. The truth is, we do not deserve any good thing! We belong to a race that deserves to be eliminated from the earth. Because we live in continual enmity against God, and in rebellion to his laws, we deserve death. But that is not what we are given! By the grace and mercy of a loving God, we are given life, often long lives,--and we are given beauty, and family love, and food and shelter and many, many other blessings. Even more, we are given opportunities to learn the truth, and if we follow them, we are given forgiveness, and acceptance, and love and peace---and joy!

Because of these undeserved gifts, everyone's normal attitude should be one of intense gratitude. This is why Scripture exhorts us continually to thanksgiving. Every good gift, and every perfect gift, for which men are properly thankful, comes, as James tell us, "from above, from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, even the shadow of turning." Even those gifts we call trials, are from the same source, sent to make us do what we don't want to do, in order to be what we've always wanted to be!

When Paul began to preach this message in Corinth, in dependence on the power of the Spirit, Corinth began to change. Acts 18 says, "Many of the Corinthians, hearing Paul, believed and were baptized." There sprang up in that pagan city a group of changed people. They lost their fears and their despair. Under the impact of new life from within, they were gradually changed into loving, caring, wholesome people. Some still struggled with the residues of their past, but the city was never the same again. And because of that, the history of the world has been changed as well.

There is much more I could say, but perhaps this is enough to help us see the enormous consequences of true preaching, and the terrible blight that falls upon a congregation or community which is deprived of these "unsearchable riches of Christ." My plea is, let preachers stop feeding people with moral platitudes and psychological pablum. Let us say once more, with Jeremiah,

"Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart."

* From an article published in Christianity Today, 1986

** Quoted in The Trousered Ape by Duncan Williams.

Scriptural quotations are from the Revised Standard Version *

THE SCARS OF SIN

by Ray C. Stedman

Some time ago one of our youth leaders and I were discussing problems that were present in our young people's groups. Among other things, this man said, "You know, our youth are very responsive in many ways; certainly they know right and wrong. But one thing baffles me. Many of them have the attitude (they openly admitted this) that if there is something they know to be wrong, but they very much want to do it, they will say to themselves: 'I'm going to go ahead and do it, and afterward I'll ask God to forgive me.' What can you do about an attitude like that?" he asked.

Let me bluntly reply that anyone who says something like that betrays a vast ignorance of what sin is, and the results that inevitably follow it. I do not want to leave the impression that this is a problem for young people only. I am sure that without exception every one of us has had this reaction to temptation. Very probably most of us have succumbed to it at one time or other, for this is a widespread attitude among young and old alike. Perhaps it is to the credit of young people that they are honest enough to admit it upon occasion, whereas we older ones cover it over with an excuse, or hide it deep in our hearts and never admit that this is the attitude we often reflect. But if we take the attitude, "I'll go ahead and do it and trust God to forgive me, cleanse me, and wash my guilt away so it will have no evil effects," it does betray that we are in the grip of satanic delusion. We have already succumbed to the wiles of the devil and have no real understanding of what sin is or what it does.

This is what we shall examine together today, what sin is and how it acts, especially in respect to this common reaction. I want to begin by saying that I do this sympathetically. I am not sitting in judgment or condemnation upon any individual, for I sit with you under the judgment of the word of God, where all Christians must sit if our lives are to be pleasing to God at all. One of the Beatitudes says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The word pure does not mean someone who has never been exposed to evil. It means literally "the purged" in heart. Blessed are those who have been cleansed, those who know the grace of forgiveness. As David put it so beautifully in the 32nd Psalm. "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute iniquity." It is in this attitude that I examine this subject now as one who has felt, with you, the full force of temptation, the seductive allure of some desirable thing (sin always has its pleasures---that is what makes it so attractive) and heard the whisper of the hidden voice within that says, "Oh, go ahead, you can be forgiven afterward."

What is sin like, and what happens when we give way to temptation? According to the scripture, what happens when we decide to cast our lot on the side of evil, to entertain a wrong desire that has risen within us, and translate it into an action? It is clear that several things occur. First, we always go farther than we intended to go. This is invariably true when we choose to sin. It does not make any difference what kind of sin is involved. I am not speaking specifically of any one kind of sin for you can apply these principles I am going to be giving you to any kind of sin, whether it be to tell a lie, to rob a bank, to be false to a friend, to betray someone's confidence, to give way to gossip, to become wrongly involved sexually; it makes no difference whatever it may be, any sin will do. Always the first thing that happens is that we go farther than we intended to go.

We all know how this is. Which of us has not told a lie, intending to tell only one lie, but before the day was over we found that that one lie forced us to tell another to support it, and then another, and yet another. Before the thing was over, where we had intended to tell but one lie, we ended up telling twenty-five, each one worse than the one before. We have all felt, as one little boy once put it, that a lie is an abomination to the Lord, but it is a very present help in time of trouble. But as we look back on our lies, we discover that they are not a help at all; they have taken us much farther than we wanted to go.

This is true with other types of sin as well. It is easy for a young couple, a boy and a girl, to go riding together in a car. They meant only to hold hands or exchange a kiss or so, but before they knew it they were in the grip of a force that carried them further than they wanted to go and sometimes as far as you can go. When that happens there is guilt, remorse, and shame, and other evil things that follow, and there is the realization that they have fallen into the trap of the devil. This is exactly what Paul had in mind in the 6th chapter of Romans when he said, "Do you not know that when you yield yourself as a servant to something, you become the of

that which you obey." Sin has a gripping effect. We give way to it and we think we can keep it under control, that it will only take us so far and then we will draw the line and stop. But we discover that the word of God is true. We cannot draw that line. We go further than we intended to go. That is the first result of sin.

The second is, we invariably expose someone else to danger or to hurt. Remember that story in the Old Testament of Abraham, the man of God, called of God out of the land of Ur into the land of Canaan to walk in fellowship with God and to live with him in the land? The first thing that is related about Abraham after he came into the land is that a famine arose, and Abraham's faith in God as the provider of all his needs was put to the test. Abraham failed the test, and we read that he forsook the land and went down to Egypt. The first thing he did in Egypt was to tell a lie about his wife. As we have the story, Sarah was a beautiful woman. The amazing thing is that at this point of the story she is sixty-five years of age, yet she was still a beautiful woman. Abraham said to himself, "I know these Egyptians, these licentious rascals. If they see my beautiful wife the king will want her for himself." So he told Sarah to tell a lie and say that she was his sister and not his wife. It was only a half-truth but a half-truth is always a half-lie. She actually was his half-sister.

What was the result of that lie Abraham told? Immediately it got Sarah into trouble. Pharaoh, seeing her, said, "Here's a beautiful woman. I'd like to add her to my harem. And isn't this nice? She just happens to be the man's sister and not his wife, so I'm free to take her for myself." Abraham's lie was the very thing that opened the door to expose Sarah to the shame and ignominy through which she was dragged. Fortunately, God intervened and stopped the process before it went too far, but Abraham was called before Pharaoh and publicly rebuked for his folly.

Because we are tied up in one bundle of life with all of our friends and relatives, even, in fact, with the whole human race, what we do always affects someone else. If you had watched, as I have watched, the agony in parents' eyes and seen the tears they have shed over the folly into which their children have fallen, you would know what I mean when I say that when we sin we always hurt someone else. Sin is not a private affair, it always touches someone else. No one can sin in private, for God who sees the hearts always works to uncover that which is hidden. Eventually it all comes out, to the hurt, damage, sorrow, and despair of others whom we didn't mean to hurt at all.

One of our Sunday school teachers told me not long ago that she was on the verge of quitting her class because the children would not behave, and would not pay attention. She was a good teacher, and they liked her very much. They didn't mean to do any harm, but were simply expressing their good spirits. She had told them how hurtful this was to the class, but they loved the feeling of talking and disturbing and they wanted to satisfy themselves. They didn't know what they were doing, but they drove the poor teacher to distraction until she was almost ready to quit. They almost made it impossible for her to continue and were thoughtlessly wrecking a wonderful learning experience that would have meant much to them later. This is but another example of how thoughtlessly and carelessly we can spread danger and hurt on every side.

There is also a third thing that happens when we sin. Notice that these things are not optionals, they invariably happen whenever we choose to sin. The third effect is that we find that repentance becomes increasingly difficult. The longer we go on, the more we give way and choose the evil, the harder it is to turn around or stop, the harder it is to cast ourselves upon the forgiving, redeeming grace of God, and to stop the evil thing. In fact, if we go on too far this way we may find it impossible to turn around. This is the thrust of the warnings that are found on page after page of the Bible. Five times in the book of Hebrews alone you will find this kind of a warning note, "Be careful! If you go too far you will find that you cannot come back."

This is pictured for us in the story of the Old Testament prophet, Balaam, who was attracted by the money that was offered him to curse Israel. He knew it was wrong to curse Israel, he did not have to seek the mind of the Lord about that. He did not need to pray about it, as some of us glibly say when we know a thing is wrong. You do not need to pray about things that are revealed. Balaam knew it was wrong to curse Israel, but he wanted the money. So he came to the Lord and asked him for permission to go. God said no, but Balaam decided to go anyway, and he went. On the way he found God's angel blocking his road. So stubborn was he that God had to give sound to a dumb animal and speak to him through his donkey before he would stop and turn around. Sometimes God must treat us rather roughly because we will not listen. We have turned a deaf ear to his word and we find that it is easy to keep on doing so. So one of the disturbing things about the nature of

sin is that once we get started on a wrong path we find it hard to turn around.

But now, supposing you do turn around. Suppose, at this point, you do see the folly you are engaged in, and you do not want to go any further but are genuinely repentant about it and come to God and confess it to him and forsake it. Even here we can kid ourselves. We may say to God, "Please, forgive me. I did this thing," yet, down in our hearts, we have every intention of doing it again at the next opportunity. Let us remember that we are dealing with One who reads the hearts. He knows what is going on down there and he pays no attention at all to the words that come from our lips. All the evil, guilt, and shame will still be present in our lives, even though we have asked for forgiveness with our lips. God reads the hearts.

But suppose we find genuine forgiveness? Suppose we do repent (which means to turn around) and we stop the evil thing, what happens then? Immediately all the estrangement that was between us and God is gone and we are restored to a sense of fellowship with him. Our guilt is removed, we are cleansed and we do not need to beat ourselves over the head any more. We are washed and set free and, in God's sight, treated as though the thing never happened. That is the amazing wonder of forgiveness, that we can find genuine relief from the inner torment of our hearts and are set free. But does that mean the thing is all ended and that nothing more will happen to us as a result of that sin? No! There are still certain inevitable results which must occur. God's forgiveness does not affect these because they are part of another aspect of God's character: his function as moral governor of the universe.

What are these things? First, or rather fourth in our overall list, despite the fact that we have been forgiven and restored to God's favor our sin has left a permanent area of weakness at one point in our life. Once we have given way to temptation it will forevermore remain an area of weakness where we can easily give way again. It does not matter how long we live: it will remain an area of weakness. We can fall again and more easily than we did the first time. That explains why Abraham, some thirty-odd years after his lie in Egypt, finds himself in a similar predicament with the king of the Philistines and does the same thing all over again; he lies about his wife. The time in between when he walked with God did not make any difference. We are capable of being again whatever we once were, whenever we fall back into the flesh. Sin leaves a permanently weak place in the wall, and we will forevermore have to fight a particularly difficult battle at that point. It does not mean that we have to fail or give way again. By God's grace, we need not. But we will always find ourselves peculiarly subject to temptation at that point.

That is why young people, who give themselves to a dissolute, rebellious life where they try everything once, will find that when they come back to living with Christ and walking with him, they will be engaged in severe and difficult battles that seem unending, and which they would never have had to fight had they not fallen into those sins. Those who have come out of a life of blatant and open wickedness and come to Christ and been forgiven sometimes talk about those former sins as though one had to experience all this in order to realize full forgiveness and the wonder of God's grace and riches in Christ. Nothing could be further from the truth. God can show us what he has kept us from, as well as to take us out of it. As we mature in the Christian life and see how God's protecting hand and our obedient heart have kept us from things that would defile us, we can have as great an appreciation of the wonder of God's grace, the fullness of his love, and the richness of his Person as we could ever have had if we had sunk to the depths of sin. Besides, we will not have to fight the severe battles with temptation that are otherwise involved.

The fifth effect that sin has is that when we fall into evil deeds there are certain temporal blessings from which we are forevermore permanently excluded. Now notice, I said temporal blessings, i.e., certain advantages or blessings which we could have had in this life but from which we are excluded permanently because of our fall. The preeminent Biblical example of this is Moses. In leading the people through the wilderness he found them in need of water. God said to him, "Strike the rock and the water will come forth." He did this, and the water came gushing forth to meet the needs of the people. Sometime later in the wilderness wanderings they came again to a place of great thirst. But God said to him this time, "Go and speak to the rock and the water will come out." Moses was angry at the murmuring of the people and, in his anger, instead of speaking to the rock he took his rod and struck it again. God immediately rebuked him. He said, "Because you have not seen fit to glorify me in the eyes of this people, you are unfit to lead them into the promised land." When they came at last to the edge of that land and Moses saw it lying before him, he asked God to release him from his restriction. But God said no, he would not. It was to be a permanent restriction. As long as Moses lived he

could not do that which his heart was set upon doing, because of his sin. The grace of God is evident on the Mount of Transfiguration for when our Lord Jesus was there with his disciples, there appeared also on the mount, Moses and Elijah. In his resurrected body Moses was permitted to enter that which he could not enter in his physical body, for that remained as a permanent restriction to Moses because of his sin.

This is what Paul means, also, at the close of the 9th chapter of I Corinthians, in which he has been speaking about his own life and ministry. He says, in effect. "I'm running a race to win. I don't want to lose it. I'm not fighting as one who shadow boxes. as one who beats the air in vain. but I pummel my body, and bring it under subjection. I insist that it obey my will lest, having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified, disapproved." Most of us read that as though Paul means that he is afraid God will lay him aside, out of the ministry. Surely this is a possibility and it could have happened to him, for it has happened to other servants of God who fall into gross sin. God sets them aside and they are no longer permitted to minister. But I do not think that is all it means. Paul is recognizing that in whatever degree he gives way to the indulgence of the flesh he is to the same degree disqualified in some form of ministry. I know what this means. I have felt myself disqualified at times. I cannot help people with a certain kind of problem because of things I have done in the past. I have disqualified myself in that area. This is the danger which lies before us all when we give way to evil.

Then a final thing, number six, is the effects of sin in human life. The long-range fruit of evil must be reaped. Remember how Paul wrote to the Galatians? "Do not be deceived," that is, don't kid yourself about this and don't let anyone else kid you about it. "God is not mocked," i.e., God is utterly faithful to himself, he is utterly dependable in what he says he will do. "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. If he sows to the flesh, he will of the flesh reap corruption" (death, emptiness, frustration, boredom, evil). "But if he sows to the Spirit," he shall likewise reap a crop, the quality of life that is eternal---"eternal life." That is what is called the law of inevitable consequences. When we sin, even though our relationship to God is restored in forgiveness, and God promises to go with us through all the results that will follow, nevertheless these results will still follow. This was very vividly dramatized when a father once took his son out to the garage and drove a nail into the wall. Then he said to his son, "Son, pull the nail out with this hammer." The boy took the hammer and pulled the nail out. His father then said to him, "Now, pull out the nail hole." Yes, certain aspects of sin can be changed, but not all. Because God is a moral governor as well as a loving Father, certain results must be allowed to continue to establish and vindicate God's righteousness.

We find this occurring in certain places of Scripture. When David lusted after Bathsheba and, as king of Israel, did that terrible thing that led first to adultery and then to murder, though it was confessed and we have in the wonderful words of the 51st Psalm the expression of David's wholehearted confession of his evil before God, yet God said to him, "The sword shall never depart from your house." It proved to be true. The next thing David knew, his own son rose in rebellion against him and David had to flee before Absalom. Then warfare broke out among David's generals. For the rest of David's life there is unceasing warfare, bitterness and battle from which he cannot escape.

By the way, is it not interesting that the greatest and godliest king that Israel ever had did exactly the same thing as the most wicked king they ever had? King Ahab saw something he coveted, just as David did. He plotted for Naboth's vineyard and committed murder to get it. David did the same essential thing. What a revelation of the nature of the flesh! In this good man, David, and this evil man, Ahab, you find exactly the same reaction when confronted with temptation.

There is another experience out of David's life that reveals this same principle to us. In the last chapter of 2 Samuel, almost the last event in David's life, he was tempted to number Israel. That does not look very serious to us, but it represented a departure from trusting in the arm of the Lord to a trust in the arms of men. The king was tempted to number his men so he could see how big an army he had with which to confront the enemy, and he was thereby expressing a doubt in his own heart of the faithfulness of God to give Israel deliverance regardless of how many men they had. That is why this was so important. David succumbed to the temptation and numbered the people. When the census was finished and the account was in, he was smitten in heart because of his guilt and confessed it to God. God sent the prophet Gad to David to say to him, "Because you have done this thing, I'll give you a choice among three punishments. You may choose three years of famine; or be pursued by your enemies for three months; or you may choose three days of pestilence among the

people." David did a very wise thing. He said, "I can't make a choice like that, I don't know enough. I'll commit myself to the hands of God. God is merciful and gracious. Let him choose the one that is least dangerous and the least painful." Do you know which one God chose? He chose pestilence among the people for three days. A plague broke out that night in Israel and before it was over 70,000 people had perished for David's sin.

I am sure the severity of that sentence was due to the prominence of the king. When a king sins it is much more dangerous than when someone else does. The higher our position, and the more publicly exposed it is, the greater will be the results, the harvest, of sin. This is why the Bible says that elders must be publicly rebuked if they sin, whereas other Christians' sins can be dealt with in private. If a pastor, an elder, or a leader sins, he is to be rebuked openly that others also may fear. God never treats sin lightly. It is that evil thing in the heart which has required the sacrifice of the Son of God to remove. Therefore it is a deadly, dangerous thing. It comes upon us, as we are so often warned in Scripture, as a snare, as a wile, looking to be innocent and attractive but really filled with viciousness, vileness, foulness, filth, hurt, pain, darkness, and death. That is why the exportation of Scripture is to put our trust in God as would a little child. We do not need to understand the nature of sin in order to avoid its evil effects; all we need do is to trust in the Lord and, like a little child, obey him whether we understand what the results will be or not. Just obey him, that is all. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths."

I must add one other thing. The Scripture reveals to us that sin also affects the generations to come. God declared in Deuteronomy that he "visits the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." Again, this is but a recognition that we are all one big bundle of life together. Just as the blessings of the fathers are passed along to the children unto the third and fourth generations, so are the sins. What we do may show up in our children, or our children's children, as weaknesses or as areas of temptation to which they need not have been exposed had we chosen to walk in fidelity to God. I say this to show us all, my own heart included, what a terrible thing sin is. We cannot glibly pass it off by saying, "Oh, well, it really doesn't make much difference. I'll go ahead and do it; God will forgive me." He will, he will! If there is genuineness of repentance there is not a sin that cannot be forgiven, nothing evil that cannot be washed, nothing that cannot be cleansed in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. But with it will come these inevitable consequences that will darken the heart, shorten the opportunity, and remove from us possibilities we once could have had. The restoring grace of God may open new doors of opportunity in other ways. God may give us occasions to grow and ways of maturing that we would not have had otherwise, but we can never remove the nail hole; it always remains. What do you think about it? Is the game worth it? Isn't it best to trust a loving Father who warns us faithfully. Let us obey him! That's the name of the game, isn't it? Obedience! Trust and obey.

PRAYER

Our Father, our hearts have been made solemn as we have looked together with you at this matter of evil. It is not a light thing; it is a serious thing so serious that it took the mystery of the darkness of the cross to even make a dent in it. But that was enough. If we walk in the light of that cross and in the judgment that comes upon the evil in us, we can be kept from much heartache and much sorrow. We thank you, Father, that your restrictions upon us are not prompted by a desire to limit us but rather, to give us freedom; not prompted by a desire to hurt us but to help us and to keep us from harm. So we trust thee anew, Our Father, and commit ourselves anew, men and women, boys and girls together, that we might walk in obedience to you, loving you and trusting you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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WHO'S MINDING THE STORE?

by Ray C. Stedman

World events today seem to crowd in upon us. Tragedy, catastrophe and crisis follow hard on the heels of one another. Just when we had got the hostages back from Iran, the Russians threatened to invade Poland; and while that was still a possibility, the President was attacked. Crises seem to descend upon us without any let-up. Crime is turning our cities into ghettos of fear and anger. Pornography and obscenity are flung at us by the media. We are shocked by the stories of the murder and the sexual abuse of children. Here in the Bay Area, divorces now outnumber marriages. Inflation robs us all. Life seems to be growing increasingly complex and frightening. No wonder many people are asking, Is anyone in charge? Who's minding the store? Is there any power beyond our own feeble efforts that can control the events of today?

It may comfort you to know that we are not the first generation to ask that question. In fact, the apostle John himself may very well have asked it in the first century. John was the last of the apostles. By the time he had reached eighty years of age, all the other apostles had been martyred for the cause of Christ. When the Emperor Domitian came to the throne of Rome, John was exiled to Patmos, a little barren island in the middle of the Aegean Sea. He thought he was doomed to live out his days there, without ever again being allowed to preach or travel or minister.

Those were the days when Christians were being persecuted all throughout the Empire. They were being thrown to the lions; they were being bound up in animal skins and thrown into the sea; they were being ground up in millstones; they were being used as torches to light public gatherings. Domitian had ordered that Christians had to make a public stand as to whether they would say, "Jesus is Lord," or, "Caesar is Lord."

Now in the midst of that outbreak of persecution, John was walking in loneliness on his little island, when suddenly, as he tells us in the Book of Revelation, he saw a vision of Jesus. Although it had been sixty years since he had seen Jesus in the flesh, John knew who he was. Yet Jesus was strangely different. John describes him as "clothed with a long robe and a golden girdle, his head and his hair as white as snow, his voice like the sound of many waters, his face shining with all the strength of the sun in its glory." John says in chapter 1, verse 17:

"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.'"

Those are wonderful words of reassurance to us who have to live in a frightening time in our own lives. Let us consider them this Easter morning as being spoken to us by the risen Lord, as they were spoken to John on that day of world trouble in the first century.

Jesus said, first, "Fear not. Don't be afraid." I think this is what we need to hear in these days when many Christians are very much afraid. Surely nothing is less glorifying to God than a fearful Christian. Jesus was always saying, "Fear not," to his frightened disciples. The gospels record that every time they were in trouble they expressed themselves in manifestations of fear, anxiety, worry and panic, but the Lord always came along at the right moment and said, "Fear not," as he says here to John.

Now what Jesus meant was, first, "Don't be afraid of me," because John was afraid. Seeing the Lord Jesus risen and glorified was a frightening sight. All the prophets and apostles and saints who have seen God in glory have always fallen down in fear and trembling before him. But Jesus reassures John, saying, "Don't be afraid." By this he means that God is our friend, not our enemy; he is for us, not against us. In Romans 8 the apostle Paul says, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" The writer of Hebrews puts it, "If God be for us, what can man do unto us for he has said, 'I will never ever, never ever leave thee nor forsake thee'." Now that is the great promise which Jesus makes here to John.

Jesus says there are two reasons why we are not to be afraid. First, he says, "I am the first and the last, and the living one." That means that he is at the beginning and at the end of everything in everybody's life, and the "living one" all the way in between. He is always with us. That is the import of that verse I just quoted from Hebrews. There the writer puts it as strongly as it is possible to put it in the Greek language. He repeats the

negative four different times so that we might be reassured that we are never left alone; that all the circumstances in the life of each one who believes in Jesus come from him and end with him and that he accompanies us all the way through. "I am the first and the last. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the A and the Z of life. I am the beginning and the ending and the living one." The present tense is used all the way through. Jesus is the One who goes with us through everything.

How many of the saints have been helped from time to time by remembering that in the midst of their troubles the Lord was with them! I have always been a lover of the life of Hudson Taylor, that doughty young Englishman who went out to China as a missionary. There he discovered that all the work of gospel preaching was going on in the coastal cities, while nobody was touching the vast interior of that country. So all alone, Hudson Taylor went into the interior of China. He dressed as a Chinese, let his hair grow and braided it into a queue (as the Chinese did at that time). He learned the language, and began to preach the gospel, founding the great mission called The China Inland Mission (now known as Overseas Missionary Fellowship). The church in China, which has still flourished during the time of persecution under the Communists, is largely the church which was formed under the ministry of Hudson Taylor.

In the early years of this century, when Hudson Taylor was an old man, the Boxer Rebellion broke out in China. It was a terrible time of persecution of Christians. The local warlords tried to stamp out everything foreign, and, as they viewed Christianity as a foreign faith, hundreds of native Christians were put to death. (Some of the missionaries were martyred too. John and Betty Stamm were two who were martyred at that time.) When the news came to Hudson Taylor that attacks were being made upon his beloved churches, it was a very painful time for him. One day there came a particularly disturbing account of a slaughter among the Christians. When his fellow workers learned that he had heard about this, they wondered how he was taking it, so one of them went up to his house to see how he was doing. As he came up the walk, he heard the old man singing to himself that well-known hymn,

Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart.
Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee, and Thy beauty fills my soul,
For by Thy transforming power, Thou hast made me whole.

It has been the comfort of saints all through the centuries to know that Jesus is with us. That is what he promised us. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," he said, "and, lo, I am with you even unto the end of the age." He tells us that, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

During the sixteenth century, when the Scottish Covenantors were being scattered by the persecution of the church, one congregation was told by its pastor that they had to flee and hide. But he said these words to them, "If there be one of you, He will be the second; and if there be two of you, He will be the third, and you will never lack for company." That promise has undergirded and sustained the faith of millions of people who, in sorrow or disappointment or heartache or problem or pressure, felt that everyone had left them. Then they realized they were not alone; the Lord was with them.

That is why Paul can say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" In the closing words of Romans 8, Paul asks the question,

**"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine,
or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"**

**As it is written,
'For thy sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.'**

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Rom. 8:35-37)

Those reassuring words are intended to comfort those who feel alone, and who want somebody to stand with them through a time of trouble. We look to each other for that, but oftentimes human beings fail. But Jesus will not fail. This is his word to us, "Fear not for I am the first and the last and the living one."

That is not all, however. These words are expanded with this statement:

"I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

This is the message of Easter. Jesus himself said, "Because I live you shall live also." That removes the sting of death, and takes care of the future as well. One of these days you and I are going to lose everything we have, but we will lose nothing that we have become in Christ. The only thing we can take with us is what we are in him. No enemy remains that he has not already conquered. That is why he says. "I hold the keys of Death and Hades."

Death, of course, is the end of life. What Jesus is saying in that statement is, "There can come no end to those who trust in me unless I allow it." One Christian put it this way, "I am immortal until my work is done." I believe that, but I do not think it gives me any warrant to go jumping off buildings or running out into traffic. Jesus himself refused to jump off the pinnacle of the temple when tempted of the devil. He said, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord your God." Jesus holds the keys of death, and death cannot strike until he allows it.

And Jesus holds the keys of Hades. (That is the life to come. In the Scripture it is the equivalent of the Old Testament Sheol, life beyond the grave.) Jesus said that he holds those keys also. "No man can come to the Father but by me," he said. There is no hope of eternal life apart from him.

I have always loved those words in John 5:24:

"Verily, verily I say to you, he that hears my word and believes on him that sent me, has eternal life and shall not come into judgment but is passed from death to life."

Many a dying Christian has pillowed his head on that promise.

This past week a dear friend of mine, the wife of one of my closest friends, went to be with the Lord. She had a difficult death, but when I received the news that she was gone, I confess I envied her, because Jesus has so removed the fear of death that those who trust in him can only look forward to the future, and glory in that which is to come.

I have the privilege oftentimes of speaking to groups of young people. I love to speak to them and to teach the Word to them, because they are so eager and receptive, usually. As I look out upon their alert faces, their vigorous bodies and their handsome good looks, I know that they are looking back at me, seeing this old white-haired man. They think I envy them, but I don't. They think I want to be young again because this world worships youth, but I don't. I have no desire to go back to the perturbations, the troubles, the trials and the acne of youth!

No. I am looking forward to what is coming. "The best is yet to be, the last of life for which the first was made." There are a dozen passages in Scripture that try to describe in general terms what is waiting beyond. They so excite my imagination at times as I read them that I can hardly wait--"To depart and to be with Christ is far better."

With these words to John, then, Jesus has put a sun in our sky that will never set. a light on our face that can handle the ravages of death, so that we can look past it to the glory that lies beyond. No wonder, therefore, that these words come to us across the centuries, across the grave, beyond life, to tell us, "Don't be afraid of what you have to go through in life, of the trials and troubles that come. They are not designed to hurt you, but to help you." The Word of God everywhere says that. These trials are under the control of One who is keeping them from being too much to bear. He has promised us that. There is Someone in charge---Someone is minding the store---so we do not need to be afraid. "Fear not for I am with you."

Spiritual Survival

by Ray C. Stedman

My home is on the Rogue River in southwestern Oregon. As the river flows by my door it is a quiet, happily murmuring stream. But ten miles downstream it turns into a raging torrent, sweeping through the walls of Hellgate Canyon with unbelievable power and white-capped display. The varied assortment of rafters, kayakers, and boatsmen who challenge its course through the Coast Range have but one thought in mind--survival! A few hardy, experienced souls dare it on their own, but most rely on river-wise guides who thoroughly know the dangers, can instruct in the techniques of survival, and are able to build implicit trust in their knowledge and leadership.

By now you have doubtless discovered that life is very much like that powerful and treacherous river. Who hasn't felt at times that you are being carried along into unknown dangers quite beyond your control? Who hasn't breathed a sigh of relief during quiet seasons, only to have sudden intrusions of tragic circumstances press faith to the breaking point? We've all known (and perhaps succumbed to) the allure of powerful temptations to wrong-doing that can leave us shattered and disillusioned when they are past. Or thought we were doing okay only to discover that we had badly misjudged our state and woke up too late to recover.

All these perils and more are charted for us in the seven letters to the churches of Asia, found in Revelation 2-3. The encouraging factor is that they come from the great River-Guide himself, Jesus our Lord, who thoroughly knows the dangers which confront us, can advise knowledgeably and accurately of the correctives needed to survive, and, in addition, offers incredible rewards to those who make the trip successfully to the end.

Each of the seven letters confronts a different situation and teaches a different lesson. The first, to the church at Ephesus, describes the one absolutely essential motivation to survival. It is to preserve continuously the warm and intimate love for Jesus that we first felt when we learned of that agony of self-sacrifice on our behalf which made salvation possible and brought us out of darkness into his marvelous light. If we lose that love by being drawn into side currents of man-pleasing or self-gratification or personal ambition we are in deadly danger of finding ourselves washed up on the shoals of life with little to show for having lived at all. "Watch your motivation," says Jesus, "there is only one that can see you safely through the perils of life--a genuine and often-renewed love for Me."

The letter to Smyrna faces a quite different danger. Here it is the terrible pressure to give up faith because it will mean ridicule, ostracism, affliction and outright persecution even to the point of death. We hate the thought that difficulties and hard trials are to be part of our lot, but Jesus tells us that only these can build the moral strength and trust that is needed to get us through. Modern examples include Alexandr Solzhenitsyn who suffered for years in Russian prisons and detention camps but who was sustained by a deepening devotion to Christ. His sturdy declaration of unpalatable truth has become a model to many of how one man can influence a whole generation. We believe that strong military forces are needed to preserve Christian civilization but Smyrna teaches us that Jesus can keep his church alive and vigorous in the midst of social and political upheaval. "Don't be intimidated by opposition," cries Jesus, "just as I died and came to life again, so can you, for the cross always leads to a crown!"

Pergamum stresses the need for integrity. The perils are subtle. One of them is sexual seduction. A young business man once told me of being with associates in a city away from home. His two friends planned to go out and find girls for a sexual party, but being a Christian he demurred and stayed in the room to write letters. After going to bed he was awakened by his two friends returning, accompanied by three girls. One of them promptly climbed in bed with him, awakening strong physical response. But he reminded himself of all he had to lose, and what his Lord would think, and wisely dressed without a word of reproach and went down to get another room. The other peril at Pergamum was to seek for personal power at the price of integrity. This was

the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. It is found in many offices today in the lure of The Inner Circle, entrance to which demands some surrender of moral principle.

"But," says Jesus, "don't forget that integrity maintained means greater intimacy with Me. Guard your morality with care!"

The letter to Thyatira develops the other side of the same problem. It teaches us that compromise destroys. Under the figure of the Old Testament queen, Jezebel, who introduced idolatry into Israel, a contemporary Jezebel teaches Christians that having another god is necessary to do business in the modern world. It pictures adopting the world's value system in place of the personal honesty which Christ requires. To lie, to shade principle, to promise what can't be delivered, is to begin a downward slide into moral disaster. The recent spate of indictments for inside trading on Wall Street is a case in point. Those indicted have testified to the way their moral perceptions were blunted by the lust for easy money--but now prison awaits! So a false god leads to certain destruction. "But remember," Jesus urges, "faithfulness leads to greater authority. He who overcomes will reign with Me."

Sardis is the church in deepest trouble. It started well but soon began to lean on a good reputation and that led to inner-coasting till before they knew it they were all but dead. The Lord's staccato command to them is, "Wake up, strengthen what remains." The lesson to each of us is clear: words are never enough. A reputation for past success will soon disappear if the deeds that built it are missing. It is a call for consistency. Begin again where you once were. Apathy and lethargy are deadly enemies so recognize them as such and come alive. "Those who do," says Jesus, "will find security and honor. Limited success is far better than phony achievement."

Alone among the churches, the church of Philadelphia merits the full approval of its Lord, without reproach of any kind. It is because its members are alert to their opportunities, compassionate to their enemies, and patiently aware that nothing will ever be fully set right till Jesus comes. Read the lives of the heroes and heroines of the Church and see how that pattern is repeated in each life. With the love of Jesus as a continuing motive, and a determination to faithfully reflect his character till he returns, men and women like Mother Theresa, Chuck Colson, Jim Elliott, Amy Carmichael, and thousands unnamed have earned the title, "of whom the world was not worthy." "I will acknowledge them as my own," Jesus declares, "in new ways they cannot now imagine!"

Laodicea is the church filled with self-sufficient members. They had two problems. One, there was a lack of full commitment; they were neither hot nor cold. And, two, there was an inaccurate self-image; they thought they were rich when they were really poor. They were both comfortable and complacent. But in the eyes of Jesus they were far from what he wanted his people to be. The church is not a country club, operated for the benefit of its members. It is not a performing arts center, offering high-quality entertainment. It is not a political action group, choosing up sides in the public arena. It is not a protest movement, radically seeking the overthrow of law and order. What it is intended to be is salt, and salty salt at that, flavoring life and arresting its corruption. And light, widely visible light, illuminating a dark and confused world. To be this, Jesus offers himself, in intimate and personal relationship, to be the source of all that's needed for ministry in this present age. "Nothing else will suffice," he says, "only my life lived through your life will do the trick. It will bring you through the shoals and rapids of life to share with me in the Final Triumph!"

So, can you make it through the dangers, toils and snares of this dangerous world? Of course you can---if you love your Leader, heed his warnings, and lay hold of his resources. Without him you cannot succeed; with him you cannot fail!

TEN PROPOSITIONS CONCERNING WAR

by Ray C. Stedman

I propose to present to you ten propositions that I feel are involved in the facing of the issues we are discussing here. We will particularly explore a proper Christian reaction to the nuclear arms race. I want to specify a bit more narrowly what we're going to be talking about. My plan is not so much to discuss the possibilities of a nuclear clash or even the terrible results that would follow, but to look at the nuclear issue from a Christian point of view. Almost every issue that is discussed openly has a presupposition with which it begins, and our presupposition tonight is that the Bible is the Word of God and that Scripture presents the divine viewpoint of life. We will take that as our basic starting point as we seek to examine this issue and to arrive at a conclusion as to what a Christian ought to do, or could do, about the nuclear arms race.

Let me, then, present these ten propositions to you. I'm going to be referring to several passages of scripture, not in an attempt to exhaustively set forth all the Bible teaches in this regard, for that would be far too exhausting. There's much in the Bible on the subject of nations, international conflicts, wars, God's relationship to them and man's participation in them. There is much more than we have time to explore, but I do offer these, not as proof texts but as examples to show that the Bible does say what I'm seeking to set forth to you. I deplore the practice of proof-texting. It is very easy to fall into a setting forth of a statement or belief and then quoting a few verses to leave the impression that this is what the whole Bible teaches. It may be that the Bible does say what is claimed, but it may not be all the Bible says about the subject. Especially in this area of international conflict it is very important to understand this point.

I've had several friendly clashes with very devout and godly Christians who adopt a pacifist position with regard to war and have pages to texts from Scripture to justify their position. My quarrel with them is that they leave out the very passages which would balance their view. That's the trap that proof-texting allows you to fall into, so I'm trying to avoid that, and yet recognize that I can't cover all that the Bible says about this subject, so please don't read these passages as being efforts to prove anything other than that a certain truth is taught in the Bible. If you can think of other passages that you feel contradict the ones I have chosen, I'll be glad to have them brought up and examined.

Here is my first proposition: War is an inevitable human event in a fallen world. That's really saying that it is naive and ingenuous to think that any efforts of human beings will eliminate war from the earth. Bumper sticker theology often presents simplistic ideas like that. I saw a bumper sticker the other day that said, "Eliminate Hate." Well I'm for that, but how do you do it? True, if we could, it would solve tremendous problems in the world. There is no question about that. But that's the kind of simplistic answer that appeals to a lot of people who don't think very deeply about anything. Some will buy such simplistic statements, and respond by forming a movement and even seek to turn their belief into legislation or other rigid approaches to the problem. Yet, on the face of it, anyone who understands human life at all knows that it is naive to try to eliminate hate---men cannot and will not do such things. I think we have to take that position from the very start with regard to war.

In the Bible (James 4, verses 1 and 2), James says, "From whence come wars and conflicts among you? Do they not arise out of your own passions?" That's a tremendously helpful verse because it bridges an individual's world of his own personal life and the social world, extending even to communities, and beyond, to states and nations in the world. The claim of that verse is simply that conflict and strife with neighbors, friends, relatives or nations arises out of human passions---anger and feelings of attack or injustice. The same forces produce world conflicts as well. Wars and strife between individuals or nations spring from the same source. It always appears to be naive for various groups to suggest that we eliminate strife on the social level when the very people who seek to do so haven't succeeded in eliminating conflicts in their own lives. People who mount protests and demonstrations to eliminate war oftentimes have terrible conflicts in their own homes! They haven't solved the problem there, even. We must recognize the Bible teaches us that war is inevitable because of the presence of a fallen nature within us.

Matthew 24, verse 6 is another verse along this line. Here is Jesus' own prediction. In that great twenty-fourth chapter, uttered while he sat on the Mount of Olives, looking out over the City of Jerusalem on the very night in which he was betrayed, he revealed the course of history until the day when he would return again. It is an amazing passage, one of the most startling predictive passages in the Bible. There Jesus said that in the intervening time (which he saw, I'm sure, to be centuries), there would be wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom. Jesus thus recognized the inevitability of war.

In II Chronicles, the sixteenth chapter, the ninth verse, the prophet Hananiah speaking to King Asa of Israel, tells him that because of his unbelief he would have wars in his kingdom. This verse and other passages link the reactions of individuals to social events and especially social strife.

My second proposition which grows out of the first and relates to it is this: Since war is an inevitable event in a fallen world, in the scriptures it is peace that is regarded as unusual among men and a special gift of God. The Christian view of life is (following the teachings of our Lord, himself) that the world is under satanic control. Jesus called the devil the "prince of this world" and the "god of this world." The apostles reflect that same view. Jesus said the devil was a strong man who guards his house and its goods are helpless to do anything to deliver themselves. This indicates that if it were not for the intervening grace of God, all of life, every moment of it, would be filled with war, struggle, strife, anger and hostility. We'd be at one another's throats all the time. It's God's intervention in a godless world---a wicked world (if you want to use the biblical term) that allows any peace at all. Therefore, peace must always be regarded as a gift of the Spirit of God. We find that directly stated in Psalms 46, verse 9: "He makes wars to cease unto the ends of the earth." It is God who brings wars to an end. Isaiah, chapter 2, verse 4, is that famous passage which states that God will cause men to beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and that man shall learn war no more. Peace is a result of the direct activity of the Spirit of God. See also Jeremiah 21:4.

The third point is: In his government of earth, God takes responsibility for the outbreak and conduct of war. Here's where many of you may differ, but the scriptures frequently declare that God himself assumes responsibility for what happens on earth. Not that he directly causes it all but permits what he does not cause. If you want a picture of this the opening chapter of the book of Job is an excellent example of how a personal attack upon a godly man was permitted only after Satan appeared before God and obtained authority to afflict Job.

I think many Christians have the idea that God and Satan are rival gods of equal power. They believe God has a slight edge and that God will ultimately win, but it's not very much of an edge. As someone has put it,

"Our race had a wonderful beginning, but man spoiled his chances by sinning.

We hope that the story will end to God's glory, but at present the other side's winning."

But that is never the Biblical view. Satan is a created being who must obtain the power by which he operates from God---that is the Biblical view of evil. Satan cannot operate beyond the limits which God sets up.

You find this also in the New Testament. Jesus said to Peter on one occasion, "Satan has desired to have you." Desired from whom? Evidently, either the Father or Jesus. Jesus said, "Satan has desired to have you that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not." The clear implication is that God is going to let Satan have his way with Peter, and all he guarantees is that Satan will not be able to overthrow his faith. We also have a direct statement of this in other places, for example, Exodus 15:3, "The Lord is-a Man of War," from the great song of Moses. In Exodus 17:16, in the clash between Amalek and Israel in the desert as they're moving out of Egypt towards the promised land, Moses is told that the Lord will have war with Amalek forever, i.e., never make peace with him. Deuteronomy 4:33 and 34 is from Moses' great message to the people as they're about to enter into the promised land. He declares to them, "Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it and survived? Or has a god tried to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by sign and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?" Now everyone agrees that the signs and wonders and the miracles which occurred in Egypt were from the hand of the Lord, but Moses said so was the war! There are hundreds of verses actually that could be used to show this. I'm quoting but a few representative ones.

Let me give you one more. Ezekiel, chapter 33, verse 2, "Son of man, speak to the sons of your people and say to them, this is the word of the Lord---if I bring a sword upon a land [there is God taking responsibility for bringing war to a people] and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their

watchman and he sees the sword coming upon the land and he blows on the trumpet and warns the people, then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his own head."

Thus God, himself, assumes responsibility for war. One fantastic passage in this regard (which I never have heard any pacifist ever quote, ever), is found in the prophecy of Joel, declaring the exact opposite of the famous passage quoted from either Micah or Isaiah about beating the swords into ploughshares. Joel, chapter 3, verse 9, "Proclaim this among the nations, prepare war, rouse the mighty men, let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up, beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears." Now it's not fair to quote only the Isaiah verse and never quote the Joel verse. They both come from the mouth of the Lord, through an accredited prophet! A balanced treatment of scripture must mean that you deal with both of these.

I think that that clearly establishes my point, that God himself, throughout the scriptures, takes responsibility for the outbreak of war. I haven't particularly dealt with the other side of that point---the conduct of war---but there are passages that indicate that God will allow certain things to happen which he will then judge the nation for as a violation of the revealed standard of conduct of man, one with another, brother against brother, citizen against citizen. God not only permits war, he judges the conduct of men in war.

Proposition four: There is no such thing as a just war, for all wars represent a judgment of God upon all participants therein. That's a very important point. There's no such thing as a just war, for all wars represent a judgment of God upon the participants. In all the literature that I've read along these lines, a great deal of argument is expended on defending just wars. Certain standards are presented (these vary from writer to writer) as to what constitutes a just war. An attempt is made to justify certain types of wars as self-defensive, designed to repel an aggressor, or coming to the aid of a small nation being bullied and assaulted by a large powerful nation. These arguments have certain value to them, I'm not discrediting such arguments. What I've not seen stated is that there is a sense in which any war, even defensive wars, represent a judgment of the nations involved, a judgment in fact upon both sides.

This was certainly true, I believe, in the Vietnamese war. That conflict ought to warn us not to naively choose up sides in a war and defend one side against another. Wars would not break out were there not some weakness and failure on the part of the nation defending itself, for various passages of scriptures indicate that God protects a nation from war, and brings about peace on the basis that its people walk in righteousness. In this regard, Israel is unique among the nations. You often hear today, especially at this time when the Middle East is in such turmoil and ablaze, reminders that Israel claims to be a chosen nation, a special people. Now it is that, I don't deny that at all. The scriptures clearly indicate that, but we have to be careful how we understand that truth. It doesn't mean that God likes Israel better than other nations. He says as much in the scriptures. In the very passage where it announces that they are a chosen people, he warns them not to get the wrong idea. "I'm not choosing you because you're smarter than anybody else, nor am I choosing you because you're bigger than anybody else"---and he lists several other things that are not the basis of his choice; he simply announces he has set his name upon them and has chosen them for his own. As you read several of these passages you'll see what it is that he proposes, that they are not a special nation with unusual privileges which no other nation could have, but that they are a sample nation. That is, they are to be a model nation. Israel is an example to the world, that if they (who are no more than any other nation, in themselves, with no greater abilities and no greater possibilities than any other nation) are given the opportunity to serve God with a whole heart, they would be blessed by God and protected---guarded and kept in such a way that it would become evident to all the world that this is what God will do with any nation that will serve him. That's what Israel's calling means. They failed in that regard, as any other nation would have failed had they been chosen to such a calling. The scriptures make clear that Israel does not occupy a unique place in any other sense than that it is a special nation chosen to show what other nations could be like. That means that all the possibilities of Divine protection---guarding, guiding and delivering---are open to any nation if they will walk in righteousness before God. Part of that divine oversight includes freedom from conflict and from wars.

2 Chronicles 16:9 is an interesting passage addressed to Asa, the king: "For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth, that he may strongly support those whose heart is completely his." (Note, that encompasses the whole earth.) The prophet says to the king, "You have acted foolishly in this, indeed from

now on you will surely have war." Thus when the king---the representative of the nation---acts foolishly, it brings upon that nation the possibility of war.

I don't think there is any document in the world that more beautifully and explicitly states this idea in national terms than the magnificent Second Inaugural Address of President Abraham Lincoln. The next time you go to Washington, go into the Lincoln Memorial. On your left you will find the Gettysburg Address inscribed on the wall. But on the right is the Second Inaugural Address. It is somewhat longer than the Gettysburg Address and it will take a little time to read, but read it by all means. If you can't go to Washington, get a copy and read it. It's one of the most amazing political statements ever made on earth. Lincoln delivered that address just a few months before his assassination. When the London Spectator---a newspaper in England---received a copy of it, they printed it in the British papers and made the statement that they had never read a more amazing statement from any political leader in the history of the world! It includes two direct quotations from the Bible, refers to God six different times in the message, and is altogether a marvelous theological statement of God's control of national life. It's a statement born out of the anguish in Lincoln's heart over the clash of the Civil War.

In it he points out what I want to make my fifth proposition: that there are just and unjust elements in every nation's conduct of war and Christians must oppose the unjust and support the just. Lincoln, for instance, recognizes that the Civil War was a judgment upon the north as well as the south. He infers that the sin of the South in supporting slavery was equaled by the sin of the North in its materialism and its godlessness, and that the hand of God had come upon the nation to punish both sides. That is an amazing statement for the leader of one side to make in a time of conflict, but it was born of his theological convictions.

There are always both just and unjust elements in a nation's conduct of war. For example, self defense is a justifying element. The protection of a small nation from a bullying and ravishment of a large one is a justifiable element, and there can be other such elements in a war. But there are also unjust motives. Here's where we must raise the first question about nuclear arms. Are these nuclear weapons so terrible, so awful in their power to damage, that they constitute an unjustifiable action of self defense? Can their use be justified by individuals involved? If it is true that the use of nuclear arms is justified then Christians must oppose that unjust element as well as support the just reasons involved. We can reduce all these issues to the individual level. What should an individual citizen or soldier do? Putting a uniform on a man and giving him a rifle does not give him a license to go out and kill anybody he wants. Soldiers can commit murder in time of war just as civilians can. The My Lai massacre during the Vietnamese War raised a cry of outrage across this country because it was an alleged act of outrageous murder on the part of American soldiers against Vietnamese civilians. It was right that the participants be brought to trial so that those guilty could be punished. But let us look further at the matter of nuclear warfare.

My sixth proposition is this: Terrible as it is, nuclear war does not represent an exception to any of the above statements. Nuclear war is simply the ultimate extension of all that we've said, perhaps to a degree that cannot be exceeded. That is, if it is right to use block-buster bombs, such as those used in World War II, or fire-bombs to such a degree that whole cities are eliminated (as in Dresden and Coventry, where the destruction was as terrible and as widespread as in Hiroshima)---if those things can be justified to any degree in a war, nuclear bombing does not change the problem any. In no sense does nuclear war represent a different kind of war, that is, one beyond the categories that we're used to dealing with in the affairs of nations. I believe my next proposition will strengthen that argument.

The seventh proposition is a further development of point six: Even the element of genocide does not put nuclear war in a different category. It is true that with these frightful nuclear weapons whole cities can be eliminated in one blow. With a rain of such weapons a whole country can be decimated, whole populations wiped out. Awful as that is (without a doubt it is a terrible thing to contemplate---a whole population: women, children, everybody, burned in terrible ways) but facing nuclear war at its worst, nevertheless, it does not introduce a different element to the discussion of war and the relationship of Christians to it. The reason I say this is because the Bible itself discusses those kinds of wars. As you know, the armies of Israel were sent against cities with an explicit instruction from God that they were to wipe out the entire population. They were to kill all women and children as well as all the males, and even the cattle and the

sheep. Admittedly these are hard passages to deal with, they are difficult to square with our concepts of justice, of mercy and compassion, which we are also taught come from the same God. But here we must deal with facts as they are, and these facts are there. They are in the scriptures and they appear more than once. One king of Israel was punished because he failed to obey that command of God. King Saul, you remember, failed to wipe out the Amalekites and so God punished him, and took his kingdom away from him because he disobeyed a specific command to completely exterminate that people.

There are elements of this story that we must take into consideration in dealing with nuclear war. I don't want to spend a lot of time with this because we could get off on a side issue. I simply point out that we need to understand the whole picture as the scriptures give it to us. Part of the picture is that these nations, so designated to be exterminated, were terribly immoral nations. They were people given over to terribly degrading and hurtful practices. Such genocidal wars have been likened to the surgical removal of a cancer from a human body. To save the life of a patient, a good surgeon has to cut, hurt, and remove. God, as the Great Surgeon of history may have to do the same. I'll leave it at that right now. But even genocide, therefore, does not change the nature of war, for it has been present in history since the beginning.

Now the eighth proposition: The possibility of universal holocaust (by that I mean the elimination of the human race from the face of the earth) is not outside the Bible's purview. The Bible deals with that very issue. I say this because I've read articles that claim that when we're dealing with nuclear war, it is such a completely different war than anything we've ever had before that nothing from the Bible that we previously used to limit war, can any longer be used. Nuclear war is terrible, but it is not unthinkable. The Bible considers the possibility of that very thing happening. Among other passages 11 Peter 3 clearly states this. The chapter declares that not only is universal death a possibility for our day or some future day; it is a disaster that has in fact already happened!

The flood, which wiped out the entire human population except for eight people, was just such a catastrophe. Exactly how large the world population was before the flood no one knows, but it must have been at least several million persons. God did allow a watery holocaust to eliminate the entire population of the earth.

Peter clearly refers to the flood. He says, "There are coming scoffers who ask "where is the promise of his coming: ever since the fathers fell asleep all things have continued as they were from the beginning." (That is the theory of uniformitarianism). "Now," says Peter, "they deliberately ignore this fact, that an uninterrupted history is not true. All things have not continued as they were from the beginning of creation. They ignore the fact that, by the Word of God, heavens existed long ago and a earth formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished." So a universal perishing has already occurred. Then he goes on to say, "But by the same word, the heavens and the earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept till the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men."

So, clearly the Bible teaches another world holocaust is going to occur. Peter goes on to describe this destruction. He speaks about the timing involved and then he says in v. 10, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise and the elements will be dissolved with fire and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up."

How God accomplishes all that is difficult to determine. It could be done by natural forces, such as the outbreak of volcanic eruptions and great earthquakes, tornadoes, or various forces of nature that would release fire upon the earth. It could be done by sun spots or solar flares that suddenly enlarge, increasing the brilliance of the sun to such a degree that the earth would shrivel under the heat and everything on it be burned up. Natural forces could accomplish this. But it also! could be accomplished by God using a nuclear war as a means of bringing about at least part of such destruction. Certainly, as we read this account of loud noises, fire, and burning-up of the very elements of the earth, it is remarkably similar to what happens in a nuclear explosion. Further detail of this is given in verse 12. Peter says, "the heavens will be kindled and dissolved and the elements will melt with fire." These happenings lie yet in the future. Clearly the Bible does take that very thing into consideration and faces it as a possibility.

That brings us to the ninth proposition: Ultimately, man can only do what Cod permits and must live within the limits of divine sovereignty. To me this is a very encouraging statement because

it indicates that no nation is powerful and voracious enough, no national leaders are insane enough to launch a nuclear war without divine permission. It isn't only the nations that we fear, we must take God into consideration.

We tremble at the possibility of some nuclear accident and many people these days are literally terrified by the fact that someone, somewhere, in a very human way might make a mistake that would trigger a nuclear attack resulting in immediate retaliation, and we would be plunged into a nuclear holocaust. Knowing human nature, from that single point of view, it is possible, and as I've just said, it may be that that is the moment which the Bible has long seen, when God will allow that kind of thing. None of us know. But we do know that nothing can occur beyond the control of God. Such destruction will occur only when the Judge of all the earth sees that it is the right thing to happen. That may not be of much comfort to us, whose homes are destroyed and whole families eliminated, but it still fits within the Christian view of the sovereignty of God. We must remember again Jesus's words, "Fear not those who can kill the body only, and afterward there is nothing more that they can do; but rather fear him who is able to cast both body and soul into hell." This is where the Christian view has to rest.

We come to the tenth proposition which is a conclusion to all of these. I state it this way: Proclaiming and demonstrating both the truth of the Word of God and the love of God is the most effective action any Christian can take to avoid nuclear holocaust! If you want to do something about nuclear war---and it is perfectly understandable that you should---then my advice would be: don't waste a lot of time joining demonstrations! The same amount of effort put into bearing witness of the peace and joy that knowledge of the Savior brings, offering comfort and strength in the midst of trials, and demonstrating Christian love to those who are hurting and suffering around us, as well as defending the righteous actions of legislators and Christian leaders in politics, is far more effective than negative protest, especially when protests often involve naive viewpoints, as we have seen. So here are the ten propositions that I feel we ought to keep in mind as we discuss this issue.

(from **A Christian Reaction to the Nuclear Arms Race** a discussion paper by Ray C. Stedman, 1982)

Warts And All: People Of God Who Were Human Too

by Ray C. Stedman

The place was England, during the years of the Protectorate under Oliver Cromwell. The Protector himself addressed the famous French painter, Mr. Peter Lely, saying: "I desire you would use all your skill to paint my picture truly like me, and not flatter me at all; but remark all these roughnesses, pimples, warts and all; otherwise I never will pay a farthing for it."

Cromwell's blunt words have since served as a forceful way to express a desire for honest description. "Warts and all---that's the way I want it!" There is a hunger in us all for realism, until, of course, we see the picture which was drawn or painted of us, and then we think it doesn't do us justice!

And that, too, reflects a common attitude. Biographers (especially biographers of Christian heroes or heroines) often show a pronounced tendency to present their subjects in brighter-than-life colors. As a young Christian I read stories of martyrs and missionaries that left me feeling hopelessly inadequate of ever measuring up to such shining examples. At the time I didn't realize it was all done with literary mirrors that reflected the factual highlights of a career, but left out most of the dark valleys of failure or despair that ought to have been part of the picture.

Fortunately, the Bible doesn't do that. Since it is God's Book it reflects one of the great attributes of God---he is a total Realist! He sees people and things the way they actually are, "warts and all." He does not kid himself or anyone else, but assesses everything with stark realism, for he is the Author of all. And even more, he uses people who are not perfect---in fact, he seems to prefer that kind! Paul reminds the Corinthians that there were

few among them of noble or high social standing, but God deliberately chose to use many whom the world regarded as foolish or weak in order to show (as he says in another place) that the power "is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

That remarkably used Bible teacher of World War 1, Oswald Chambers, states the truth well. He says, "God can achieve his purpose either through the absence of human power and resources, or the abandonment of reliance on them. All through history God has chosen and used nobodies, because their unusual dependence on him made possible the unique display of his power and grace. He chose and used somebodies only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources."

Think of the marred men and women whom the Bible holds up as models for our emulation. At the dawn of time there was Enoch, who was said to walk with God for 300 of his 365 years, and then "was not, for God took him," not in death, as the N.T. makes clear, but alive into heaven. Yet for 65 years he did not walk with God! It seems clear that for those years he lived like most of us, going along with the self-serving, thoughtless lifestyle that was all around. But God could and did change him and use him till he left an impress upon the entire generation before the Flood.

Then, after the flood, Noah messed up his witness by getting drunk and becoming indecently exposed before one of his sons. Was he stamped "Reject" by God for this? No, instead he became an example of God's forgiving grace, and was trusted with a revelation from God that defined the limits of human government and has ruled the natural world ever since. There was Rahab, a street woman of Jericho, who for faith's sake forsook her ancient profession, married a godly Israelite, and became an ancestress of Jesus.

Even Moses lost his temper and murdered an Egyptian, but was chosen by God to lead his people out of Egypt and into a new relationship with him that has powerfully affected the world to this day. Joseph, Jacob's favorite son, has often been held up as one who had no sins on his record. But the Bible traces in all honesty his self-righteous spirit before his brothers, and his youthful pride which required tempering in prison before he was ready for his great role as the second ruler of Egypt.

Our next six studies will turn a spotlight on others in the Bible who struggled with habits of lying, tendencies to manipulate others, lustful urges, passionate liaisons that destroyed faith, stubborn unbelief, and sulking self-centeredness---and yet whom God picked up and used "warts and all!" The centuries since have provided numerous examples of the same phenomenon, for it is clearly a divine methodology. Despite a widespread conviction to the contrary it can be stoutly asserted that *no physical or social handicap, no dysfunctional family background, or personal record of past failure, can prevent anyone from becoming a useful instrument of God's working, if he or she will accept God's cleansing, learn God's methods from his Word, and move into the opportunities which God's Spirit will open!*

The primary essential in achieving this usefulness is to become aware of the resources God provides which non-Christians know nothing about. For instance, Christians are given the Holy Spirit to live in them continually. He is not a spirit of fear, we are told, but rather a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline (2 Tim. 1:7). Acting on that assumption means the Christian will refuse to be afraid since God is with him or her, will take for granted the ability to obey God or to love others, and will set the mind resolutely to keep moving on that pathway. An example of this comes from the life of Fanny Crosby. She was blinded while still an infant and lived into her nineties totally blind. Yet she was greatly used in the nineteenth century to write many of the hymns we sing today. When she was only eight years old she put her philosophy into verse, writing:

Oh, what a happy child I am
Although I cannot see.
I am resolved that in this world,
Contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't,
To weep and sigh because I'm blind
I cannot and I won't!

Such remarkable resolve discloses a character taught by the Spirit to renounce fear, rely on God's strength, and reach out in love to those in need around.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this truth is that God often uses the very handicap or failure we thought unfitted us, to be the open door he employs to make us a blessing. Many years ago I was privileged to travel with Dr. H.A. Ironside, famous pastor for years of the great Moody Church of Chicago. Once, in Lynchburg, Virginia, we met an elderly Episcopalian rector who told us the fascinating story of his conversion. He was a student at Cambridge University when D. L. Moody was invited to speak at the University during his first evangelistic crusade in England.

Many of the students were angry and upset by this invitation to one they regarded as a backwoods American preacher who butchered the English language. To have him speak at what they regarded as the center of culture in the world was to them outrageous. Moody had no more than a fifth grade education and was noted for his ungrammatical lapses. It is said he was the only man of his generation who could pronounce Jerusalem in one syllable! This young man, with several others, determined to sit in the front row and upset the meeting by making cat calls and creating as much disturbance as possible.

Before Moody spoke he asked his musical associate, Ira D. Sankey, to sing. Sankey's song quieted the meeting and when he finished Mr. Moody, without introduction, stepped to the front of the platform, pointed his finger at the young men on the front row and said directly to them, "Young gentlemen, don't ever think that God don't love you, for he do!" The earnest passion with which he spoke and his ungrammatical beginning caught the young men by surprise and they listened to his entire talk in silence. Recalling the event the old rector said, "When Moody gave an invitation at the end of his message I was the first one in the inquiry room. I became a Christian then and have followed the footsteps of D. L. Moody ever since."

Such a story is not meant to suggest that great fame will result for every one whom God uses "warts and all." Probably the greatest of God's saints are unknown to the world at large. But it is not necessary to be famous to be greatly used by God. It is in the kitchen, the office, the backyard, the supermarket that God chooses to use most of us. Someone has captured that truth well in this verse by an unknown writer:

'Tis in the daily toil and stress we best can preach
his loveliness,
It's Mrs. Johnston's shining face proclaims that she
is saved by grace,
While Mrs. Smith by kindly deeds shows how from sin
her soul is freed,
And in the busy common round reveals the Saviour
she has found.
And Ann by polishing the floors, tells forth the
Master she adores.
"Oh, Lord," I pray on bended knee, "make me like these,
your children, please."

This is the level at which the true impact of the Church is made. Again, contrary to widespread conviction, it is not the great meetings which change the world, it is not the Councils of the Church which really alter history. It is the accumulated impact of thousands of people who once were angry, cynical rebels against society; or were bound by drug abuse, alcoholism or sexual perversion; or were proud, snooty intellectuals, who are now changed by grace, are becoming loving, caring individuals, living in sexual purity, and reaching out to others without thought of self. These are today's heroes of faith who are winning God's battles in an evil world.

Oh, yes, another thing. Age doesn't make any difference. The Bible list of God's servants range from teenagers to octogenarians, and some didn't even start till they were in their eighties. But all discovered the truth that God wanted them to think of themselves as available bodies, allowing him to transform their thinking by exposure to his word, and thus to discover there is no more exciting lifestyle than to be an instrument of God at work.

Memories of Winifred

by Ray C. Stedman

I first saw it in the summer of 1931, riding over the hill on a blistering hot day in my uncle's 1929 Chevrolet. Along with my aunt and their two small boys, Lowell and Wendell, we were coming to live there where my Uncle Fred would be superintendent of schools for the coming years.

We had driven the 42 miles north from Lewistown on a gravel road, skirting the edge of the Moccasin mountains where the old mining camp of Maiden lay, and heading steadily north through the Dog Creek valley. Far on the northern horizon and across the Missouri the Bearpaws marked the site of Chief Joseph's last stand, and east of them the sharp edges of the Little Rockies broke the skyline.

I was just about to turn 14 and already Montana and the west was an exciting place to me. Though I missed my grade school friends back in the Red River valley of North Dakota, I now looked forward eagerly to my first year of high school, and what life in Winifred would be like.

In those days the frontier seemed close at hand. The town was the center of a large, still sparsely settled area, stretching from the Missouri River, 25 miles to the north, to the liling waters of the Judith River, 20 miles west, and to the east the small ranches and open range that reached to the mouth of the Musselshell, some 70 miles away, with the nearest city of any size, Lewistown, just beyond the Moccasins.

At that time Winifred served as a center for the whole vast area. It was still primitive in many ways, having no electricity, no phones except one line from Turner's haberdashery to Lewistown. There was no modern plumbing and every house had its outside privy, even the high school which sat at the top of the hill at the west end of main street. The nearest doctor was in Lewistown and though there once had been a drugstore, it had closed its doors during the Depression.

Nevertheless it was an exciting place in which to live. Ranchers, cowboys, dryland farmers, all came to town to buy groceries, ship cattle or grain on the little Milwaukee train that came up on a spur line twice a week, or oftener when needed. Though Prohibition was the law, everyone knew where liquid refreshment was available. As Will Rogers remarked, "Prohibition was certainly a lot better than not having any liquor at all!"

Winters were often bitterly cold with great blizzards shutting down the little town's social life for days on end. Yet when the chinooks would blow the snow could all disappear over night. School was the center of the town's activity for all the surrounding ranch and farm families would send their children into town to rent a house and live, often by themselves without adult supervision, for weeks on end. But these ranch children were for the most part well disciplined, eager students, who stayed away from immoral activities, and did well in their studies. There were some exceptions, of course, but they were all my acquaintances and friends and it was not difficult to sort out the few bad ones and avoid them.

There were two families, however, that usually provided some excitement. They had adjoining ranches north of town, and owned adjoining houses in town which they occupied for the school season. For some reason which I never discovered, there was bad blood between them, and this would erupt from time to time in clashes between the family members. I recall walking home from school one spring day and passing the two houses in time to see one boy from one family lying prone on the ground, with one of the older girls of the other family standing over him with a raised axe, about to split his skull in two. Perhaps she was only threatening, but my arrival led her to lower the axe and let the boy up. Unfortunately that wasn't the end, for occasionally they would take pot shots at one another with rifles at their ranches, though I never knew anyone to be hit.

Though lawmen were few and far between (there being a sheriff in Lewiston, but only an Irish constable named Nels in Winifred) there were surprisingly few major crimes. One notorious murder was that of a part-Mexican farmer named Turkey Joe, who lived by himself a few miles out of town. One day his body was

found in his one-room cabin, and an attempt had been made to burn the cabin but the fire had gone out. Two brothers from a Hungarian immigrant family nearby were suspected of trying to rob Turkey Joe of the store of gold he had reputed to have hidden in the cabin, but to my knowledge no one was ever arrested for the crime.

Summers were the most fun for me. Two families who had children my own age had ranches, one on the edge of a deep canyon in the Breaks, and the other a wheat ranch northwest of town. One family had horses and cattle and ran a typical western cattle ranch where we would often ride in parties of ten or more, down the deep canyons to the Creek and practice calf-roping, etc. The other family grew wheat and hay but had a large house where families would often gather for a full night of dancing, to the tunes of a fiddler, a piano, and whatever other instruments anyone cared to bring and play. Memories of those colorful evenings still rise fresh in my mind. The dancing would not stop till the sky began to lighten in the east.

Another ranch couple, just a mile out of town, had no children of their own, and virtually adopted me as a son. I got my first job with them, making hay during the summer, at 50 cents a day! They too had horses and cattle, and I learned much of the cowboy life with them, sometimes riding east to the open range, to brand calves that had been born during the spring months.

The main sport played at high school was basketball and the whole town would turn out in support of the local team. We played teams from Denton and Roy and sometimes as far away as Grassrange and Winnett. Though I played on the varsity my last two years I have not followed basketball much since then. My attraction was not to the game itself but to the excitement that accompanied it and to the intense rivalry that would build up between towns.

My second job was driving a truck up from the isolated Stafford ranch on the Missouri, up through the steep Breaks to bring produce grown on the ranch to the Stafford grocery store in town. My days at the ranch were often lonely ones, as the only other person around was a part-French ex-shepherd who served as manager of the ranch. I spent my hours after work resurrecting a leaky rowboat which I found and rowing across the rapid-flowing Missouri to fish. I caught several catfish around two to three feet long and they were a welcome change to our diet. I also had to be on constant watch for rattlesnakes, as I killed several large ones that summer.

Many years later (in 1989) I drove back to that ranch and found it abandoned. But my cousin and I took the free ferry across the river and, parking the car on the dirt road out of sight, we climbed a nearby hill and looked out over the river and surrounding hills. For 360 degrees we could not see anything that was manmade or changed since Lewis and Clark had camped at that spot in 1805. There are few places left in the United States of which a claim like that could be made.

Though the school I attended was in an isolated town far from the fine amenities of civilization, yet the education I received was first class. The knowledge I was given of classical literature was far beyond anything now taught in the high schools of California. Though we only had a primitive chemistry laboratory I went on from there to become so proficient in chemistry that my professor in college asked me to take over the class if he could not show up some day. The typing and shorthand which I learned at Winifred High School kept me employed through most of the Depression, and led to my serving as a Court Reporter in the Navy, taking shorthand records of the Navy court martials at Pearl Harbor during World War II.

When I graduated in the spring of 1935 I was only 17, but though I soon left Winifred for college and then on into various parts of the world, I have never ceased to value the things I learned and the people I knew in that strategic little central Montana town. In 1989 I was honored to be invited to launch the Montana Centennial celebration as speaker at the Billings Civic Arena in November. It was a great delight to me to do so as it brought flooding back the happy memories I had of those days on the Great Plains when Montana was still young and its skies were always blue!

THE CHRISTIAN AND WORLDLINESS

by Ray C. Stedman

What does Christian separation mean? Your effectiveness as a Christian hangs on your concept of what separation means. Perhaps most of our personal and church problems would be solved if we had a biblical concept of what it really is.

This question of separation has been a bone of contention among Christians for many, many years. Though I believe that the Scriptures are very clear on the matter, still I am sure that we will not solve all the problems in this article. But we do want to take a good look at the subject.

You won't read very far in the New Testament without becoming aware of some very pointed warnings to Christians concerning their danger from the world around them. Second Corinthians 6:14 is a very well known passage. "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers...and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

These words, "come out from among them, and be ye separate" have been nailed to the masthead of many denominations and church groups as the supremely important idea that Christians should heed in these days.

Then we have that very strong passage in I John 2:15-17, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world...For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

James comes out with probably the strongest word of all along this line for he says very flatly and plainly, "...know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is an enemy of God."

Christians have rightly taken these passages very seriously. They have recognized that the Lord would not speak so plainly if there was not something serious involved. They've remembered the sad words of Paul concerning one of the young men who traveled with him: "...Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." Christians have often had reason to see that a worldly Christian is a useless Christian. He is of no value to the world and no good to God. No man can serve two masters!

So Christians, as a result of these warnings, have through the centuries drawn up lists of things they considered worldly. Naturally, their ideas have differed widely on these matters. Whenever people had difficulty with some temptation or some particular type of recreation or some activity which gave them trouble, they learned a lesson from it, or thought they did, and marked that particular thing down as worldly.

So there came into being a great many different lists of worldly things, varying widely because of the different places of origin. As a result of this, we have today certain folks in the South called "hook-and-eye Baptists." They were given that name because they believe that buttons are worldly and that the proper biblical way to fasten your clothing is not with a button but with a hook and eye. So the button-wearing folks are worldly in their estimation, and the hook-and-eye people are spiritual.

And they mean it! They're quite serious about it. It's as much a worldly thing to them as some of the things on your list are to you. And they feel quite as upset over violations as you do when your standards are transgressed.

Standards differ widely in Christian circles about many things. Drinking beer by Christians is very normal in places such as Germany. They think nothing of having a glass of beer with their meals. Nobody thinks they are unspiritual because of it.

But in this country, it's quite a different matter. Here, beer drinking is almost always considered a worldly thing for Christians. I have been in parts of this country where people regarded mixed bathing with horror, that is, boys and girls going swimming together, even though they were all clad in quite acceptable bathing suits. It

was the mixing of the sexes that was reprehensible. They thought it was terrible. Yet, in most places in the West, mixed bathing is not frowned upon at all. We consider it quite a normal, natural thing, and few would regard it as wrong.

There are places in this world today where lipstick is called "devil's grease" because some Christians are sure the devil is behind the lipstick business.

Now, I have mentioned things that most of us would laugh at as being considered worldly. I have touched upon a few of the things that are on our particular lists. The point I want you to see is that others may be just as disturbed about these things, as you are about the things on your list. And they, as we, pass along our taboos from generation to generation.

We all have a tendency to think that the things that we have been taught while we were growing up are inspired truth. Few of us have ever taken time to check these with biblical principles as to whether they are really true or not. I am afraid that many of us often mistake our prejudices for convictions. It is a very easy thing to do.

But we must remember that it is not what we have been taught, or what our fathers believed, or the way we were raised that is the standard of Christian behavior, but what the Word of God says. Always!

And if what we are taught is not in accordance with the principles declared in the Bible, then we had better review our standards and our thinking in accordance with those principles.

This is a very simple thing to say, and we all agree with it, but it is hard to carry out. If we follow it through, we will discover that it will make some great changes in our lives.

One result of his habit of categorizing things as worldly, and making an index of that which is right and wrong in the Christian life, has been that today nine out of ten Christians have mental lists of do's and don'ts. They call these lists their "Christian standards." And solely on the basis of such a list they blithely determine whether they are worldly or spiritual.

Now I don't wish to suggest that there are no Christian standards. There are necessities along that line, and those standards once arrived at in each individual life must be carefully adhered to. What I am saying is that the method by which we determine those standards must be in accordance with the Word of God and not simply our upbringing.

Now then, since most of the things that are on your particular list (and on mine) are being done by the unsaved, worldly-minded people around us, there comes a tendency for us, consciously or unconsciously, to avoid temptation by avoiding worldly people.

There comes a marked tendency to withdraw, to seek our own crowd, to create our own little separate world---a world that is as complete as we can make it with recreation and education and all that we need from the cradle to the grave. We create our own smug, airtight circle in which we live and which we have set up to run competition to the "worldly" world outside.

Now ultimately, that kind of thinking produced the monasteries that appeared in the Middle Ages. Men decided that the way to avoid the temptations of the world was to completely seclude themselves from it, so they built high-walled monasteries and lived their lives inside and thus sought to avoid the world.

Today we do not build walls of brick and mortar in order to avoid these things, but we still have walls of thought and seclusion that are almost equally effective. In this way, we become twentieth-century monks, doing this very same thing.

And the worst tragedy of all, in my estimation, is that we are passing all this on to our young people. We are handing along these conceptions, as they pick up our way of life and our way of thinking. Instead of teaching them to overcome evil, we are teaching them to avoid it. They are not learning how to fight the good fight of faith. We do not know how to fight it ourselves, many of us, so how can we tell them? How can we show

them?

Now what are the results of this type of separation? I do not speak from hearsay or from mere observation on this matter. I speak from very sad experience. An experience born of at least ten years of my Christian life that I now consider almost utterly wasted, because I was thinking and acting along these very lines.

Here were the results in my own life. I am confident, from observation, they are the results in other Christians' lives who think like this.

The first result is a terrible sense of boredom and frustration. Life becomes pale and uninteresting, especially Christian things. You just go through a routine. You go to church and go through a set formula of things you are supposed to do, but there is nothing very gripping, very fascinating, very challenging about it. Life becomes very boring. The challenge is gone.

Why? Because there is no sense of danger! There is nothing which demands a response from a young Christian faced with that kind of thinking. He is protected. He is sheltered. His life is arranged in such a way that the temptations are reduced to a minimum and consequently, he becomes bored and frustrated and feels no challenge. Life becomes very lackluster.

When we sense this in our lives, we often try to correct it by creating false challenges. "Come on, let's win the attendance contest," and we get all excited about the attendance contest. Or, "Let's gain a reputation in our church for having a tremendous missionary program, and let's parade the figures in front of us all through the years as to how much we are giving for missions," and so we create false challenges and false goals. Not that these things are wrong in themselves. The trouble is, it is done as a group, and the personal challenge in the individual life is gone.

You remember what Peter Marshall said so graphically, "Today's Christians are like deep-sea divers, incased in suits designed for many fathoms deep, marching bravely forth to pull plugs out of bathtubs." That is putting it rather incisively, isn't it? But it is true! We are taught all the resources of the Christian life. For what? To win attendance contests with! To build buildings with! The challenge is artificial, the goal is sub-Christian.

Perhaps this is the major reason why our Christian young people today (and I say it sadly, because I see it in my own church) are so lethargic, so lackadaisical, so utterly pepleless about their Christian lives. We find difficulty in getting them to avoid the things on our lists any longer. They would rather feel some of the stimulation and challenge and temptation of the world than to live such colorless, lackluster lives. God made youth with a desire to dare. It is no less so with Christian youth.

The second result of this isolationist separation is a tremendously increased amount of worldliness in Christian living! Does that seem strange? It is a paradox. Christians isolate themselves from the world to avoid worldliness, and it inevitably results in more worldliness.

You see, if you really believe that the only worldly things are those on your mental list, and you are careful to avoid them, then the result is you let down your guard at other points, and the world begins to seep in in a thousand places, unrecognized by you. Instead of being worldly in the ways that are on your list, you are worldly in a thousand other ways, all of them equally bad.

The truth is that worldliness is not a matter of things, of doing this, or not doing that. But worldliness is a matter of the attitude of the heart, the attitude of life in thinking and dealing with things. If we would just learn that, what a difference it would make.

Let me see if I can illustrate that. If you ladies wear a new dress in church in order to attract attention, that is worldliness! You are trying to attract attention to yourself, just as the world continually seeks to do. The fact that you do it in church makes no difference whatsoever. If anything, it makes it more reprehensible. If the opinions of others mean much to you in this matter of dress or conduct, then you are worldly. You may never drink, dance, smoke, or go to a nightclub; but you are just as worldly as if you did.

On the other hand, if you wear a dowdy, out-of-style dress to church in order to be thought spiritual, that is worldliness, too. The dress, you see, has nothing to do with it. It is the attitude of the heart, the motive behind the act, that constitutes worldliness.

If you must have a new car every year in order to keep up with the style, that is worldliness, pure and simple. If you need the car in your business for some reason, and you are quite honest with yourself about it, that is another matter entirely. For this reason, no one else can sit in judgment on you in such a matter. But the Lord knows the heart, and if you trade your car each year just to be in style, you are worldly.

If you are hurt because people do not notice you, that is worldliness. If a TV program conflicts with something that you know the Lord wants you to do---your attendance at church or prayer meeting, or to help your neighbor---that is worldliness. You have chosen that in place of the Lord's will.

Now I am not trying to make up new lists for you. If I kept on, you would soon stop me and say, "Why the way you talk, everything is worldly." And you would be quite near the truth. For everything is worldly, if the heart is concerned with the approval or disapproval of those around you, just as everything is spiritual when the eye is single unto the Lord. This is a tremendously important point.

Read what John says again, "All that is in the world: the lust of the flesh (that includes eating and drinking and sleeping and wearing clothes or whatever your body desires to do), the lust of the eyes (that includes the desire of anything you want to buy or possess, good, bad, or indifferent), the pride of life (the vainglory of life, the fighting for station, for promotion, for advancement), is not of your Father, but is of the world."

What does he mean by that? He means that everything is worldly if your attitude is worldly, but if your attitude is "of the Father", nothing is worldly. You see what he is getting at? This is why Paul said: "All things are lawful to me, but there are three limitations: I will not be brought under the power of any, all things are not profitable for me, and all things do not help others." Those are the only restrictions. Everything else is fine.

This is ~why we must not make up lists of "things" which we regard s inherently worldly and evil in themselves. Each of us may have our own personal areas into which, under God, we cannot enter. There are certain things you cannot do or do not want to do, not because someone else does not want you to, or because you think the church will frown on it, but because you feel the Lord does not want you to do this. But that must be decided individually.

What makes a thing worldly? Listen to John again, "All that is in the world...is not of the Father." That is the thing! You exclude the Father from your thinking, and when you do that you are worldly, no matter what you do. You do some act or take some step or make some plans without the Father, without taking Him into consideration, or concerning yourself with His will. That is worldliness! It may be a perfectly innocent thing in itself, but when you exclude the Father, it is of the world.

So the making of lists only increases worldliness. We then let down our guard about the things that are not on the list, and as a result, we become saturated with the world, steeped in worldly thinking, worldly acts, and worldly deeds. And he that is a friend of the world is an enemy of God!

Now the third great result of this type of thinking is a noticeable lessening of the spirit of sacrifice in our lives. When we avoid worldly people because we are trying to avoid worldliness, we also lose most of our opportunities to give of ourselves, for Christ's sake. This process of withdrawing into our own watertight Christiancircle of affairs results in people becoming insensitive and unsympathetic and eventually smug and complacent in their views toward others.

We can get all worked up over missionaries ten or twelve thousand miles away, but people can live right next door to us and be perishing in their spiritual agony, and we do nothing.

That is worldliness. It results from this business of thinking we can live our own lives; that we can withdraw from the world and create our own Christian world and live within it.

Consequently, we have changed the Lord's words, "Go ye", into "Send ye", and we think if we are sending out people to the mission field, this is the adequate answer to our own responsibility. But the Lord did not say, "Send ye". He said, "Go ye into all the world". And I don't think He meant that only geographically. I am sure it is meant psychologically, as well. Go into all the ways of the world, into its thinking, into its attitudes, in order that you might understand and have some sympathy with the poor dying wretches who live next door to you that are in the world and lost in the world.

This is one of the most tragic things about our Christian lives. We become disobedient Christians. We forget our own personal responsibilities in witnessing. We talk about witnessing, but we seldom ever do it. We are embarrassed about it. We confess in moments of honesty that we are very ill at ease in this process of trying to witness about Christ. We really feel little enthusiasm for it, yet this is what He asks us to do.

We are supposed to be imitating our Master who gave up all things, who pleased not Himself, who laid down His life in order that He might win the lost worldlings to Himself.

But when it comes to us, we don't want to give up an afternoon of golf, or a night of bowling, or open our homes, or even give up some time on Sunday to do something to win these lost ones. And we justify it all by the excuse, "They are so worldly that we have nothing in common with them."

Isn't this the truth? Doesn't this describe us? When I think sometimes of our comfortable, easeful, luxurious lives, and then read in the Scriptures about those early Christians who loved not their lives unto death, I tell you I grow sick with the very shame of it.

Why have we lost the spirit of glad sacrifice? I think it is due greatly to our view of separation which has built a shell about us, so that we no longer see the need for our help. This is the terrible tragedy of it. We are living in the midst of people who are dying for what we have, who are hungry of soul and are putting bullets through their heads, jumping off bridges, turning on the gas, and living in utter misery year after year after year. And they don't live 10,000 miles away. They live two blocks down the street, two houses away, right next door to us, behind us, all around us, and we don't see the need for sacrifice!

We have become deaf in the cries that surround us. We have become indifferent to all hands that reach out from every side. We have taken the place of the Pharisee and the Levite in that parable of the Good Samaritan, who each passed by on the other side of the road when they saw the wounded traveler, lest they become defiled themselves by helping him. That is not the modernist or the liberal. That is the fundamentalist Christian, who is so concerned about being defiled with worldliness that he has lost touch with the world. He is no longer interested in helping worldly people, in meeting their problems, in becoming friends with them and meeting their needs.

Now there are many people who sense the hypocrisy of this kind of living, and they try to remedy it by going to the other extreme. They rush out and begin to mix with the world in every way. They drink cocktails and take up card playing and small gambling and learn how to dance, and thus try to live in with the world.

Now again I am not trying to make lists of taboos, please don't misunderstand me. I am simply trying to characterize the thinking of many who react to Christian isolationism. They adopt the world's standards and the world's values in the hope of being some influence to the world for Christ.

The result of that is always tragic. When we become like the world, we lose all our power to influence the world. I remember reading of a boy who had a cage full of sparrows, and he thought it would be nice to teach the sparrows to sing like canaries. So he bought a canary and put it in the cage with the sparrows. After a couple of weeks, he came running to his mother and said, "Mother! The sparrows are not singing like the canary. The canary is now chirping like the sparrows!" That is the inevitable outcome of becoming like the world in order to reach the world.

If you want to see the folly of a life like that, go out and stand by the shores of the Dead Sea and look at the cheerless, dreary, lifeless waste. Then go read the story of Lot who moved into Sodom in order to win it and influence it by his life, and see what he lost as a result. That dreary desolation stands as a mark of the folly of

moving in to be like the world.

Well, then, what is the answer? How do we reach the world and still not be like it? The answer is, we must learn to live on a frontier between these two extremes. We must learn to be in the world, but not of it.

We must be in the world, we must seek out worldly friends and deliberately cultivate their friendship. We must invite them into our homes, and go into theirs.

We will have to ignore some things that are irritating to us, their habits, their ways of thinking and talking. But we must make friends with them. We dare not shut ourselves away from the perils and dangers and dilemmas of the world around us. Our Lord forbids us to! We must be in the world, seek worldly friends, but we must not be like the world.

The word that we need to emphasize is not separateness, that is, if you think of it as withdrawing. But the real word, and perhaps the best translation here is distinctiveness. We are to be distinct, different. Dare to be different. We must be in the world like our Lord was-in it up to the hilt. But, like Him, we must never live under false colors.

We must not think like the world. Our attitude is to be different our values must be different. Yet we are to be with them.

We are to be out-and-out Christians. Distinct, but not distasteful. We are to be sheep among wolves, as our Lord said. That is, we are not to stay in the sheepfold. If we do, we are disobedient, for He sent us out of the sheepfold. He wants us out among the wolves!

"But", you say, "isn't that dangerous for sheep to go out in the midst of wolves?" Yes, it is. Of course, it is. But that is what makes it gripping and vital. That is exactly what makes the Christian life so revolutionary, so interesting, challenging, stimulating. It is the danger!

The Lord wants us to live on a frontier where we are constantly under subtle attack, yet He knows we will be safe among the wolves and we become the instruments by which some of the wolves become sheep like ourselves.

"But", you say, "isn't this difficult? Doesn't it present a lot of problems? Aren't you constantly having to make adjustments and make decisions, and wouldn't it be so much simpler just to avoid the whole matter?"

Of course it would. But where did we get the idea that we are here to avoid difficulty. Jesus said, "I am come to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!" Whoever said the Christian life was to be easy? That is the whole trouble with it. We have made it so easy that we have few problems any longer, and so we have no power.

Our Lord wants us to have problems. He wants us to be constantly wondering what to do about a particular situation and to think it through, and test solutions according to the Word, and pray our way to an answer that satisfies and works. He likes us to live that way. That is what makes life challenging and interesting. Any other approach becomes boring and meaningless.

Let me share with you a brief paragraph from a letter that came recently from a woman in Southern California. She says:

My husband is getting rather fed up with church. He is from a very strong Christian family, and was a strong Christian himself. But now he says to get ahead in the world, and make the kind of money he wants to make, you can't be a full-time Christian, because you either give up all you've got to follow Christ's claims, or you're not worthy. Since he's not worthy, why go half-way? I can't make him see otherwise.

This is a common tragedy. Here is a modern prodigal son who has chosen to go out from the father's house, seeking the things he wants, and he doesn't realize that what he really wants is to be found only in the Father's

house. And he's going to have to learn by going down into the pig-pen, or by drinking of the empty, unsatisfying cisterns of this world, how barren and meager such living is.

This man is choosing a dead-end street, and when he gets to the end of it, there will be nothing to do but to turn around and come back. But though we pity his choice, let me say I admire his honesty. This young man has seen that the Christian life is insipid and tasteless if it is only lived half way.

Let me bring you another quote from another source, that says it much better than I. The author writes very penetratingly about the problem of the Christian and the world. He says:

To sum up, the Christian's vocation is to be in the world, but not of it; to represent Christ in it and to intercede on its behalf because it is under judgment (this is the Christian's priesthood), to identify himself with its sufferings but not with its attitudes, to bring his influence to bear upon the world's life without being corrupted by the world's ways; to stand on the frontier, holding forth the Word of Life, and so to love and obey that Word that he has been delivered from the evil one and sanctified in the truth. Such a calling involves a cross. The man who separates himself from the world and seeks to escape it does not know the cross. The man who submits to the world's pressures and loses his distinctiveness as a Christian does not know that cross. The man who seeks to be in the world, as our Lord was in it, but shows that he is not of it because he is a Christian and in Christ; that man will find his cross. It's only the disciple who follows Christ in both these respects who has a cross to take up.

Now, let me say, if this sounds hard and harsh and unappealing, it is because you do not have your own values straight. Let's be honest now. Is God right, and is the Bible right when it says this world is passing away and is really very unimportant? Is it really peanuts to us, this world in which we live? If so, than it's the easiest thing in the world to live a Christian life. But if this world's things mean much to us, it's a hard and grueling thing to be a Christian.

Perhaps you have heard the story of the woman who went to the psychiatrist and said to him, "My friends have asked me to come to see you. They think I've blown a fuse or something, and I don't know why." "Well," he said, "what's your trouble?" She said, "The only thing is that I like pancakes, that's all." "Well," he said, "there's nothing wrong with that. I like pancakes myself." "Oh," she said, "you do! Well, you must come over sometime. I've got six trunks full of them up in my attic." Now that sounds silly to us. But do you know that is exactly what most American Christians are doing today? Storing up pancakes in the attic!

These passing temporal things, these transient baubles that we are so everlastingly concerned with, are nothing but pancakes compared with the eternal values of Christian life and truth. But the world is concerned with saving up pancakes. We live in a world so confused, that has its values so twisted, that people think you're crazy if you don't store up pancakes in the attic like they do. Isn't that right?

But Christians have seen the Truth. They have the Light. They're not to be interested in pancakes primarily any more. "...we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Then let's be done with nursery stuff. Let's be done with kindergarten, with playing children's games. We've a man's job to do in this world. We're co-laborers with God.

Do you know what that means? We're to supply the hands and feet and the voices that He needs today. Every day should see us at the task of binding up the broken-hearted; of bringing sight to the poor, sightless, blinded creatures that live next door to us; of leading thirsty men and women to the waters of Life; of bringing beauty for ashes and the oil of joy for mourning and bringing happiness and harmony into the desolate homes that are all about us today.

Years ago Robert Moffat, after 30 years in Africa, was asked by a slip of a girl to sign her autograph album. He wrote these words:

My album is a savage breast,
Where sorrow reigns and darkness rests,

Without one ray of light.
To write the name of Jesus there,
To speak of worlds both bright and fair,
And see that savage bow in prayer
Is all my soul's delight.

There are savage breasts like that all around us today. They're not naked. They're dressed in gabardine and nylon, but they're just as savage as these in Africa.

Are you willing to be expendable for Christ? Are you willing to count not your life dear unto yourself, but put yourself out to make friends with these wonderful people? To put up with all their irritating ways and for Christ's sake go after them no matter how little they encourage you? To learn to talk about storing up pancakes until you can find an opening to talk about more wonderful things? And to pray and invite them over, and pray again and invite them over again, and pray again until you see the darkness lift and God's Spirit write the name of Jesus on that savage breast?

Are you willing to do that? I'll tell you what will happen when you try it. You'll learn first of all the wonderful thrill of a Christian life! How challenging it can be. How wonderful it can be. And then you'll discover how utterly inadequate you are for the job.

Then you'll come to your pastor or to some other Christian leader, and you'll say, "I tried to say something to so and so and I made an awful botch of it. Could you show me how to study my Bible so I'll know the answers?"

You'll be at prayer meetings because you'll realize the power there to reach behind the mask of this world and open up doors that can't be opened any other way. You'll become an effective Christian when you begin to live this way in dependence on Christ. And do you know what else? You'll discover what Christian separation really means!

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, we thank Thee now for the promises of Thy Word and for the revelation of it. Here is truth. This is the way things really are in this universe. The things we read and see outside are not always true. Many of them are but perversions of the Truth. Here is truth. Help us to live by it. Help us to believe it and obey it and walk in this light, and dare to be different for Christ's sake. Amen.

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